

“The functioning of a machine has no sense, and cannot give rise to true information signals for another machine; a living being is required as mediator in order to interpret a given functioning in terms of information, and in order to convert it into the forms for another machine.”<sup>1</sup>

“Perception is not the seizure of a form but the solution of a conflict, the discovery of a compatibility, the invention of a form.”<sup>2</sup>

Ramon Amaro and Murad Khan  
**Towards Black Individuation and a Calculus of Variations**

### Introduction

The following reflections concern what we call Black psychic individual and collective individuation. We reflect on what it might mean to address what Frantz Fanon describes as the problem of “The Negro [*sic*] and Language,”<sup>3</sup> and its impact on one’s comprehension of existence and the dimensions of the other. We take a radically interdisciplinary perspective, as we seek to rearticulate the foundation of Black existence through the problem of individuation. In “L’individuation psychique et collective” (“Psychic and Collective Individuation”) – the final part of his main thesis *L’individuation à la lumière des notions de formes et d’information* – Gilbert Simondon challenges substantialist metaphysics, or the primary units of reality whereby existence is grasped from the perspective of substance, as opposed to the unfolding of becoming of an individual. In other words, substantialist metaphysics operates within assumptions of fixed and stable terms under which autonomous structures are constituted.

Here, Simondon contests dominant notions of individuation as a problematic that begins with the individual as a point of departure. Simondon challenges us to instead think about the individual starting with the process of individuation itself, thereby forcing a reformulation of perceived categories of knowledge. For Simondon, the energetic potential that arises in this reformulation is a liberating act of becoming. If we consider the problem of Blackness as a problem of Black individuation, then we are confronted with a misdiagnosis of Black alienation, whereby the principles of racial stereotype are posited as anterior to “knowing” the Black individual, and therefore Black life. The perspective challenges notions of Black existence as a racial “form” primarily in relation to what Sylvia Wynter describes as the “substance of race.”<sup>4</sup> According to Wynter, the substance of race is the grasping of Black existence as that which already unifies

racial perception with the staging of white European power over the other. The substance of race constitutes an ordering of the world through the image of white supremacy as a precondition for the structuring of society. Here, the white European male (what we might call the ideal state or “good form”) is ascended to the apex of human value.

It is here that Fanon argues the Black being is devoid of any sense of humanity – where the events of life are crafted by the singular event of whiteness. Black individuation, as such, is an overdetermined pause in the process of self-actualization. For Fanon, this ontological erasure of Black existence conceals the exposure of colonial metaphysics as the source through which Black individuals internalize inequitable relations with whiteness. What he means is that within the ontological architecture of being is a comprehension of the “dimension of the other” where one takes cognizance of colonial systems of knowledge that result in self-division.<sup>5</sup> Self-division for the colonized has two dimensions. One has the awareness of the languages by which one is confronted with race; the other is a possession of an evidence that expresses reality, as such. When one understands this self-division, one often considers the process of individuation complete, whereby the mastery of language affords remarkable power to know the world and change it – if one takes pains to speak against a mode of existence for and through another.

At both the ontic level and the exhaustive organization of race as a hierarchical knowledge domain, is the study of existence and the nature of being Black within a larger relational system. More so, the relation between the Black self and environment must be elaborated on if, as Paul Gilroy suggests, the structures of race are to be overthrown and Black being is to be disalienated. It is here, through the rearticulation of calculus as a language along with the act of invention, that we argue an integral existence might constitute what Félix Guattari posits are “the seeds of the production of subjectivity,” which disallow “the presence of a passively representative [Black] image, but a vector of subjectivation.”<sup>6</sup> Our aim is to consider what problematics might arise – in terms of individual psychic and collective individuation – when the actualization of the self (or the process of individuation) is entwined with the alienating logics of racial calculation. By logics of racial calculation, as an expression of the calculus of variations, we posit that the operative logics of racial organization are held within two domains of the absolute maxima and minima values of racial perception. We elaborate on a specific conceptualization of a calculus of variations in

what follows. For now, we want to think through this vector not as a variable quantity or quality that can be resolved into components, but one that instead finds a solution to the problem or question of race from within the act of existence itself.

Speaking on existence, Fanon emphasizes the structural and subjective dimensions of the so-called colonial arrangement, and the extent to which the colonial order sought to naturalize the act of racial hierarchy in the world through scientific enquiry. There is an operational logics of scientific observation that naturalizes racial perception as actuality, having verified racial sorting as the absolute value of a fictive natural order. Here, the Black body becomes the primary object of racial organization, and ontology becomes, as Gilroy writes, “a historical phenomenon and thus, despite its external, fixed appearance, the unstable equilibrium [through which] the racial corporeal schema can be overthrown.”<sup>7</sup> One goal is to understand the characteristics of race as a dynamic relation within a system of racial equivalence, which also illuminates how a calculus of variations, or the concretion of the Black individual, might operate between the extrema of race relations.

The opportunity presents itself at the moment of racial interpellation, and is enacted – as we will argue – through a dual mode of invention: one that brings forth a pre-individuated historicity with the problem of race, and another that makes more affirmative use of a particular imaging of racial stereotype to catalyze new modes of individual and collective psychic generation. We hold in full view that the extent of the problem entails an immediate recognition of the social, political, and economic realities of being Black in the world, in one sense conforming to Fanon’s view. On the other hand, we take at face value Fanon’s insistence that “the black man’s alienation is not an individual question.”<sup>8</sup> While interpellation is grounded in racial subjugation and the proliferation of political and economic ideology within existing power structures, we advocate for an expanded notion of interpellation, as that which drives opportunity for internal transformation. If this is so, then the notion of the Black “individual,” as well as its ontological orientation, must first be dismantled and reengineered.

The foremost goal of this essay is to break with the stated supposition that Black existence is a logical extension of the substance of race. While remaining fully aware of the restrictions of race, we want to think through this study as an act of making oneself contemporaneous with the existence of being. By this we mean the placing of the question of Black existence as one of individuation to better understand the

limitations of a priori assumption in Black thought. Secondly, we seek to uncover the potential for concepts of Black thought that might bring forth new ideas of what it means to be Black in a world regulated by the substance of race.

We ascribe to the basic importance of reengineering one's self as a necessary step towards grasping a new process that broadens the field of description. This type of reengineering makes reference to a process of the reinvention of self-image, where one might create new modes of internal and external cohesion. We argue that this is achieved by means of a purposeful misrecognition of the dominant ontogenetic perspective of racial individuation. A dual mode of invention, as such, indicates what we call a maxima and minima of human existence in reference to the preexisting image of Blackness within a domain of race equivalence, as set forth by a break in the calculation of self-variation.

While this concept might appear to reduce the dynamics of this race equivalency within this domain to the mediation of a multivalent set of relational distinctions, it is – as we posit following Simondon – passage through the domains of language that is necessary to reveal the operative function of race and racialization. It is here, as Aimé Césaire might argue, that the search for a humanism “made to the measure of the world” as an expressed reality might instead work towards a new horizon of self-determinacy.<sup>9</sup>

What if we sought to comprehend this new horizon as a grasping of Black individuation from within the cultural weight of colonialism, where one finds the measure of their validity in the problems we confront? What if the individual in relation to whiteness was not given as a fact preexisting the operation of being and becoming Black? What if the image of Blackness, and thereby the Black individual produced by colonialism, was merely one element of individuation constituting a false assumption of the exhaustion of Black existence? Finally, what if Black existence was grasped not as a final outcome in recourse of the presumption of racial logics, but as a process of individuation that reformulates the categories of knowledge, thereby shifting ontological assumption from one that exists in relation to whiteness to one who's principle of genesis becomes internally generated and invented from within?

We argue that the importance of this work stems from its direct engagement with certain incompatibilities or tensions that constitute the problem of Black being. We argue for a new relation between the internal and the colonial relation with a type of metaphysics that does not assume Black existence as already individuated

by the “substances” of racial equivalency. We loosely follow Simondon's position that what is perceived as Black individuation is not a matter of representation or emanation. Instead, racial duress becomes the secondary manifestation of a primary operation of Black individuation that is only a partial and relative resolution of a pre-individual reality attained in the “form” one assumes. It is here where we begin to explore the implications of invention, and the challenges facing the study of Black individuation. In doing so, we clarify the concepts, terms, and operations at work in the crucial dialogue between – what we argue below is – a “knowing” of the self as a preexistent racialized individual, and the invention of the self as the motivating impetus of Black existence.

We, nonetheless, ask readers to explore the aforementioned challenges by passing through the coppice of theoretical and speculative engagements below. Each prompt is a brief encounter that exploits certain pathways to understanding the problem of Black individuation. The prompts are not meant to be read in any particular order. To the contrary – through self-selection – they are meant to violate the auspices of categorical operation at work in the engendering of racial thinking. The essay as a whole is designed to be a recursive dialogue between the authors, the reader, the interface, and iterations of thought that inform the cycles of understanding. We believe this method is useful for reengineering thought as a practice of what David Scott describes as an “inventive strangeness,” to think through the notion of assumption and the calculation of Black existence.

### **Blackness is best understood as...**

#### **Option A: Maxima Incompatibility**

“At its extreme, the myth of the Negro, the idea of the Negro, can become the decisive factor of an authentic alienation.”<sup>10</sup>

Settle down ... and stay where you belong. “What else can this stereotype, this central theme of dreams,” as Fanon posits, “represent except putting the individual back in line?”<sup>11</sup> To speak of society's dream is to wander along the path of racial subjection, a path whereby the supposed character of the racialized individual arouses a desire for dependency on the white colonizer and a feeling of inferiority. “Dirty n\*\*\*er!” Or simply, “Look, a Negro.”<sup>12</sup> While the Black individual came into the world to find meaning in things, they instead find themselves as an object in the midst of other objects. They are abraded, according to Fanon, into nonbeing; and endowed

with the movements, attitudes, and glances that thrust the Black individual into a fragmentation “put together again by another self.”<sup>13</sup> Desires to capture and sort these forms of self are forecasted onto alternative grids of relation that themselves form new socio-techno-politico hierarchies while simultaneously flattening the lived experience of Blackness, or what we describe as life in excess of the absolute values of race.

We conceive of this excess value as a method of invention that exceeds the upper limits of a system of race equivalency. A system of race equivalency places the psychic individual and collective individuation into question as a condition of collective value, which in this sense is that which emerges as a normalized system whereby the racialized individual finds themselves resolved by means of a “constructive amplification.”<sup>14</sup>

For in the real world, the white world, the Black individual encounters difficulties in the process of self-actualization. The Black individual is furthermore surrounded by an atmosphere of a certain uncertainty of their own individual psychic and collective individuation. Fanon defines colonialism as a structural ensemble that can only be modified by degrading or augmenting entropy, whereas the measure of uncertainty of an alienating outcome represents the amount of energy in the system that is no longer available for self-actualization. Racial alienation is thereby intensified in the internal socio-diagnostic relation – a process in which prognosis resides “in the hands of those who are willing to get rid of the worm-eaten roots of the structure.”<sup>15</sup> Fanon moves towards systematic racial tendencies to view the systemic as a dialectic of objective and subjective points of view that seal the white individual into whiteness and the Black individual into Blackness. These views are juxtaposed into a modulation between the molding of oneself in relation to whiteness at the uppermost limit of the white racial imaginary, and the prohibition of any Black individual variability that is incompatible with the disparate dimensions of a metastable racial system.

### Option B: Metastability

A metastable system is defined by the type of information that it possesses, according to Simondon.<sup>16</sup> In “L’individuation psychique et collective,” Simondon outlines the notion of information as perception that does not preestablish form. On the contrary, information takes temporary possession of its orientation in an ensemble of engagements with the world. Perception is where one retrieves the information necessary to make sense of its orientation, allowing one to orient oneself in the surrounding

milieu. On the basis of this perception, the potential for new individuations are brought into conjunction with the collective, if only temporarily.

By the study of metastability one might understand the conditions of existence founded on the axiomatic of racial equivalence. A metastable system would thereby designate a flow of energy that circulates within what might appear to be the stable organization of race, or what we have termed “race equivalency.” A system of race equivalency appears as a definitive structuring of the self and the world, a dialectic between the body and the world, a maxima or absolute value that reconstructs the fragments of Black existence at the uppermost limit of the myth of racial stereotype within the white imaginary. A normative system of race equivalency further delimits a set of white prototypical values that, in the process of individuation, brings coherence to a collective system.

Equivalency weighs elements of comparison as if each characteristic is comprised of a commensurate capacity for value, significance, or equal standard of measure given the relative importance of the relation within the racial system. A stable system of race equivalency, in other words, amounts to a state of being that assigns qualities with comparability (in this case to whiteness and the colonial imaginary), as well as an individual’s usefulness within a set of imaginary ideals. The white imaginary is closely aligned with a colonial epistemic that seeks to estimate and determine individual importance and thereby the likelihood of regard within the system as a whole.

Within a system of race equivalency, the act of racism justifies the setting of the white individual over and against the collective. While Fanon asserts that this type of system needs to be overturned, the incompatible Black individual is nonetheless assumed to be an inactive and completely passive form, as defined by the colonial model of racial equivalence: “Many Negroes will not find themselves in what follows. This is equally true of many whites.”<sup>17</sup> It must be asked how the Black individual can be excised from this order if, as Fanon asserts, “in the absolute, the black is no more to be loved.”<sup>18</sup> What if the metastable racial system contained a higher magnitude of energy wherein the Black pre-individual instead possesses a latent potential for a self-love that is manifested from within systemic incompatibility? What are we to make of those who find themselves within the myth of race – at a stage where, given their race, they are no longer understood?

Answers to these provocations require a shift in the assumption of equilibrium, or more so

the necessity for an equal distribution of energies within a metastable racial system. The substance of race relies on a false assumption of equilibrium as that which produces stability within a simple racial structure. If we consider a simple racial structure as instead a metastable racial system, then what emerges is – following Simondon – a system that is transient and in a temporary state of stability even as it contains pre-individual, as opposed to stable individual, states. Even though the stable racial system may, *in actu* as an organizing principle of the system, designate flows of racialized information, metastable racial systems contain a higher magnitude of energy that harbors latent potentials and incompatibilities with the system itself. In other words, a metastable racial system is a fragile milieu in which local information exists as conditions of the overall state of the actual. It is always already in a state of transition and transformation through which the tensions of its incompatibility in the actual can seize upon opportunities found within the pre-individual milieu. A metastable racial system is open to augmentation and expansion by way of new technical inventions, often serving the purposes of maintaining an inequitable racial equilibrium, thereby placing its own set of demands and pressures upon the social system. As a result, the system finds itself already in need of transition, whereby its next phase is actualized through a new set of heterogeneous conditions.

### Option C: Value

The outcome of colonialism is assumed to predetermine the psychic condition of the Black individual as that which is constituted by the fictive substances of race. We seek to reflect on the implications of what David Scott calls “constituted individuality,” a principle that holds the properties of the individual to be the starting point from which certain transcendental truths are derived.<sup>19</sup> The very notion of the constituted individual absorbs metaphysical Black existence into logical dependencies on a fictive hierarchal assumption. A return to the constituted individual, as well as its ontological origin, sets a foundation for an epistemological guide on the inequitable equivalency of Black and non-Black peoples.

While Fanon’s schema, in particular, promotes the idea that Black individuals only ever exist as already individuated beings within the substance of race, we might instead consider breaking from the metaphysical myth of racial solidification that requires a reciprocal codependency – where certain “incompatibilities and tensions” are remade to account for a new relationship between the Black individual and the racial milieu. What if the Black individual

emerged only as a certain phase of being in the midst of bringing into reality the conditions of the actual, or a transduction that describes an operation by which the activity of being is conceived from the movement between one tension and another, each amplifying the other to produce transformation and a new phase of reality?

Just as reflexive thought “risks its own coherency,” so too can it uncover that which unifies its values.<sup>20</sup> If we consider race equivalency as a type of communicative calculation, then (racial) language, as Simondon argues, “disclose[s] the nature of its action” in order to reveal that which drives the transformation of race as an absolute value of self-transformation. What transpires is a new ethics of relation, or relational activities in the act of becoming incoherent.

Simondon proposes an alternative by altering the ontological terms of individuation itself. In describing the metastable, Muriel Combes elaborates on one of the core components of Simondon’s “L’individuation psychique et collective”:

A physical system is said to be in metastable equilibrium (or false equilibrium) when the least modification to the parameters of the system ... is sufficient to break the equilibrium of the system. Before all individuation, being can be understood as a system containing potential energy. Although this energy becomes active within the system, it is called potential because it requires a transformation of the system in order to be structured, that is, to be actualized in accordance with structures. Preindividual being, and in a general way, any system in a metastable state, harbors potentials that are incompatible because they belong to heterogeneous dimensions of being.<sup>21</sup>

As opposed to the concretization of a system comprised of an ensemble of parts in relation to the whole, a system can instead be defined by the type of information it receives. According to Simondon,

it is through individuation that a partial and relative resolution of a pre-individual reality is attained in the “form” an individual assumes where certain incompatibilities and tensions constitute the problem internal to being and the potential for new individuation to be brought into conjunction and become compatible – if only for a time.<sup>22</sup>

Andrea Bardin reads Simondon's notion of "absolute" value here as that which, in following value as an organic or technical condition, institutes a relation between individuals and acts as a trigger for collective relation. Most importantly, the absolute represents the penetration of certain values into social systems, as a transductive force that organically operate under technical normativities (such as "instinctual" patterns of behavior). Indeed, Bardin cites Simondon's *Note Complémentaire* in which he states: "Norms are lines of internal consistence in each of these equilibriums, and values are the lines along which the structures of a system are translated into structures of the system substituting them."<sup>23</sup>

In this sense, values are constitutive of an individuated reality, enabling the conversion from one normative system to another. Yet, values simultaneously exist at the pre-individual stage as they enable the translation of norms in and between various stages of the process. The absolute is thus best understood as the stabilization of organic and technical normativity existing in disequilibrium, giving rise to an individuated reality that "integrates the normativities exceeding the functioning of the social system by 'enveloping them' ... with significations."<sup>24</sup>

#### **Option D: "How does it feel to be a problem?"**

"In the Weltanschauung of a colonised people there is an impurity, a flaw that outlaws any ontological explanation. Someone may object that this is the case with every individual, but such an objection merely conceals a basic problem. Ontology – once it is finally admitted as leaving existence by the wayside – does not permit us to understand the being of the black man [sic]. For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man."<sup>25</sup>

The relative importance of an assigned racial quality and the relation between the essential properties of race, at the limits of the upper and lower boundaries, is measured by sensitivity to change – or a responsiveness to self-reference as well as external stimuli (such as anti-Black racism).<sup>26</sup> Simondon presents this openness to change as a "margin of indeterminacy" that provides the conditions of possibility for advanced (technical) objects to adapt to changes in their milieu – arresting the tendency towards determinate forms, and instead embracing incompleteness in the process of individuation. Consequently, Black genesis becomes a point of

departure for ontology and the theory of knowledge first, prior to a preexisting theory of systemic hierarchy.

A sensitivity to the process of Black individuation, as such, lends a certain quality to the registration of affective changes, small changes in function, and the mappings of difference in each quality within the pre-individual state. Sensitivity provides an unelaborated awareness of stimulation apprehended through experience from within the field of race relation, and of knowledge transferred from one moment of racialization to the next – each transferring knowledge of the operation of structures as a procedure or catalyst for subsequent iterations of becoming.

The constitution of the Black individual qua Blackness-as-a-problem allows for the White individual to be constituted at the level of resolution. The ontogenic problem designates an ontological property, driving becoming through the resolution of tensions and overcoming disparity through new functional structures. For Simondon, ontogenesis designates the development or becoming of being, framing the individual as an outcome of the process of individuation, and not the inverse. The individual therefore operates within a psychic excess that is unsolvable by inter-individual relations, as they are presented with an affective and perceptive disparity. Such a being can only resolve a disparity in the internal problematic through participation in collective individuation. For this reason, Simondon necessitates participation in social life as a precondition for a form of individuation which is best understood as a psychosocial process.

#### **Option E: The Languages of Alineation**

"What if there were a real language operational only ever in conflict with its originating structure and, thus, fully expressive of those pre-individual tensions giving rise to it? How is it possible for such a language, seemingly at odds with itself, to be the effect of a community and unify a group?"<sup>27</sup>

"The threshold of non-decentering, and thus of non-alienation, will only be crossed if man intervenes in technical activity in the dual role of operator and object of the operation."<sup>28</sup>

The totalizing perception of the racialized being links the problem of race with the problem of language, which is furthermore distributed or communicated through the technical object or

apparatus.

For Simondon, language is preceded by signification, displaced as a mere mode of expression and communication into a secondary consequence of information, and thereby individuation more broadly. Language is not itself information, but instead is best understood as a signal made comprehensible in the receiver under the constraints of a specific structure. As a vehicle of information and thus a mediation between the subject and its milieu, language impels “whatever discourse it structures to confront those pre-individual forces that have led to its genesis.”<sup>29</sup> Thus, the ways in which calculation (as language) is made operative reflects what David Scott describes as a mediation between the subject and its milieu (the milieu being the convergence of a particular set of [racial] forces that materialize into a single expression). “Equally communicated,” as Scott posits, “with every word is what murmurs within it and is borne by it – those tensions it subsumes, rehearses, and forms through the transformation of information into signification” (in this case, the signification of race and the interpellation of the racialized individual).<sup>30</sup>

We resist the dismissal of language as an innate instrument disconnected from its operative reality (whether that language be computational code, symbolic mathematics, social custom, or colonial rhetoric). As Sylvia Wynter has argued, even as race restructures itself in the everyday by ignoring what Simondon describes as the “voices of silence,” race remains operative as a foundational part of collective perspective, as well as the collective understanding of self. Instead, we seek to prioritize language as “action, as offense and as seduction,” in quoting Simondon; while language may rest in the domain of the seemingly absolute or outright totalitarian view of the world, it might also bring into visibility the potential for an affirmative view of the self and environment.

### Option F: Unlocking the Body

“There are times when the black man is locked into his body.”<sup>31</sup>

If the universalist construction of humanism is founded upon the abstraction of the Black individual (as an object defined by a system of race equivalency), then the epistemic schism it produces is concealed within the body itself. The racialized world is condensed into the Black pre-individual state as a “corporeal malediction” – an epidermal myth under the aegis of which the world can be ordered via the image of whiteness.<sup>32</sup> The Black individual, by way of the body, is formed around a set of typologies, or

values, marked by the isomorphisms between white desire and technical practice. The Black individual risks concretion by the continued persistence of an epistemic system presumed as a unified system of racial value.

Such value emerges within a system of race equivalence as a codeterminative quality that coheres to a collective perspective by way of a transductive operation. Transduction, according to Simondon, is that which mediates different organizations of energy.<sup>33</sup> The process of transduction unfolds where a disparity or difference is temporally and topologically restructured across an interface. The cohesion ensures the persistence of a system of equivalence through differing permutations. It is furthermore the mode of unity, in Simondon’s words, that

effects the reversal of the negative into the positive: meaning, that which makes the terms fails to be identical with each other, and that which makes them disparate (in the sense in which this expression is understood in the theory of vision), is integrated with the system that resolves things and becomes a condition of meaning.<sup>34</sup>

Values as such are an emergent expression of meaning within a system, existing in a relation of operation that allows one structure to be translated into the structures of the system that replaces it. Value thereby encapsulates a process by which dissonance and difference are rearticulated in the process of transformation and amplification. We might think of the process as the crystallization of information that becomes both difference and the possibility of difference whereby the conditions of the process of individuation are triggered.<sup>35</sup> Individuation, in this instance, is not that which has been totally resolved. It is a process whereby the reality of living beings is neither social or individually orientated, but instead accumulated within the individual who carries this reality as belonging to the system, as opposed to being made part of a system of being as individuated. David Scott writes:

“To know” individuation starting from the individual reduces individuation to no more than a re-presentation of the posited individual, whose principle of becoming pre-exists what it supposedly determines, while “to know” the individual through individuation forces a fundamental reformation of categories of knowledge raising their ontological status to that of a problem, thereby shifting the ontological

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presumption from being to becoming, from substance to individuation. It means the principle of genesis becomes internally generated from within the process of individuation itself.<sup>36</sup>

In the process of translating racial value, a transductive sequence folds the value of each iterative resolution into its successor, even if the disparities present in the pre-individual field are not fully resolved. In this way, the individual can be seen as a self-constituted “topology of being that resolves an anterior incompatibility through the apparition of a new systematic.”<sup>37</sup> A model of self-constitution as such, in full augmentation of existing topologies of being, is one of interiority in resonance with the external milieu. The affective world of the Black individual is thereby conditioned in consonance with the exterior milieu, as well as a perceptual world arranged in accordance with a calculus of variations. We might therefore problematize the internal and external conditions of Blackness as a chronotopic integer, or a spatiotemporal language that organizes the Black individual around a continual process of resolution in racialized environments.

### Option G: Shared Qualia and Internal Circles

A system of race equivalence is constructed on the basis of shared qualia, bringing coherence to a collective perception and maintaining compatible interindividual relationships in a metastable environment. Such qualia are defined in tandem with a structure of value open to augmentation via the introduction of potentials and new technical inventions. Equivalence thus acts as a regulative component of a system, keeping it in a state of homeostasis whilst values ensure that this consistency persists across new individuations. With each new individuation a process of translation occurs, in which norms crystallize, defining interindividual relations through the support of the values that emerge in concert with them. As a result, interindividual relationships in any such process of individuation are defined by the transience of signals rather than signification, with subject relations functionally bound by the representations given by the established normative system. Thus, the moment of translation carries a neutralizing function which is simultaneously one of mis-recognition, foreclosing upon the “tendency of the subject to put itself into question” and precluding the reflexivity necessary to institute a properly transindividual mode of relation.<sup>38</sup>

If we think of reality as a continual process of transformation only ever comprised of

indeterminable modulations, then any process of coherence or incoherence of the order might appear to be a rudimentary field of perception enacted by the epistemic. It is, to the contrary, a reorientation of desire that assists in the reestablishment of a new, more equitable racial relation. Still, there is a consistency of Black psychic alienation that resides within each stage of individuation, mobilized in consonance with new schemas of racial information. Recognition of Blackness thus acknowledges the racial information that regulates the Black individual’s conception of self. Such an image is continually called forth when the task of recognition arises, forcing the Black being into a perpetual negotiation with its racial milieu. As a result, Black subjectivity is (re)produced in a coterminous relation with what Fanon terms “history,” or the construction of “thousands of details, anecdotes, stories” that stage the image of Blackness as that which can only be comprehended as a dimension of the other.<sup>39</sup> A pre-individual state, as such, lacks the stability of the Kantian transcendental whereby “being as subject and being as object result from the same primitive reality.”<sup>40</sup> Instead, the imago (perception) of the black individual at once provokes, as Simondon argues, individual action that synchronizes collective behavior while – as Scott describes – “excluding and identifying in order to distance oneself from the ‘stranger,’ the deviant, the other.”<sup>41</sup>

This other, as transindividual image, is the bearer of a reality that is both psychic and collective. Blackness provides the fulcrum upon which difference is transformed into integral opposition, organizing and securing the metastable field. However, if, as Simon Mills suggests, the transcendental as individuation guarantees a shared epistemic surfeit, then the subject’s experiences are conditioned as a confrontation with the transcendental problematic, and must resolve the existing tensions through a new schema of understanding, occurring from within a process of invention.

### Option H: The Imago of Blackness

For Fanon, the emergence of French structuralism in the late 1940s and early 1950s provided an opening to problematize the psychic individual and collective negation of colonized peoples. While a return to structuralism might prioritize an anthropocentric point of view, it is an important point of entry into a theory of Black lived experience. As Fanon has shown, the lived experience of the Black man [*sic*] is crucial to the fundamental realization that the Black individual holds a position outside of the discursive concept of the Human. Fanon points towards the



genesis of the psyche as a reciprocal organization of formal human properties, which is evidenced by the undeniable reality of racial subjugation.

Fanon situates this problem through psychosocial analysis, drawing upon Jacques Lacan, and early Lévi-Strauss to think through the effectiveness of racial symbolism. His aim is to discuss the gravity of the specular image of Blackness as the minimum threshold of human value.<sup>42</sup> The resultant psychosocial experience locks the Black individual into a permanent cycle of fragmentation, whereby the perception of the self (as part) and colonial society (as whole) become central elements to understanding any internal conflicts imposed by the perceived disparity between the external perception of Blackness and self-determination. The image of Blackness is thus a psychic problematic that occurs at this dissonance or absolute extrema, where a problem designates, as Daniela Voss puts it, “a structural moment in the dynamic process of individuation: a moment of metastability, of disparity between different orders of magnitude ... and eventually the resolution of the tension by amplification, that is, the leap to a higher, functional ensemble.”<sup>43</sup>

Simondon also sees a theoretical clearing in structuralism to address the problem of coming into being, and to reformulate the individual in terms of ontogenesis. However, Simondon distances himself from structuralism by suggesting an “allagmatic” point of view, or a theory of operations that oversees “a conversion of a structure into another structure.”<sup>44</sup> This point of view allows Simondon to disrupt any ontological or epistemological privileging of structures – in this case, race – in favor of a view towards the relationship between racial structures and operations that are instead brought into view for modification and subsequent transformation.

Understanding the centrality of the Lacanian imago to both Fanon and Simondon’s thinking is crucial to recognizing the image of Blackness as an affective modality externalized in the production of white subjectivity. It is upon this shared ground that both Simondon (who describes a cycle of images undergone in the genesis of an organism, most notably in his 1965–66 course “Imagination et Invention”) and Fanon (who grounds the white sublation of the Other as a determinative imprint upon Black subjectivity) can be thought together to analyze the role of the collective, pre-individual image in the production of the self.

Simondon’s cycle of the image is properly differentiated as an operation of three stages. The first of these can be taken as biological,

concerning those anticipatory motor-images developed as the organism grows. These endogenous images are more readily understood as instinctual patterns of action which are given primacy and autonomy in the formation of the pre-individual. Patterns of action are functionally independent from the individual, and occur at the embryonic stage. They furthermore act as a priori images ontogenically developed across the lifetime of the organism.

In the second stage, perception is conceived as that which aids the organism in extending itself beyond its instinctual gestures, primarily in response to information in the external milieu. It is here that the development of a schemata begins, which itself facilitates any perceptual relation between the internal and external environments. The development of a schemata is a mode of operation that is, according to Simondon, of a technical mentality, which develops in concert with new sciences of systemization. Any subsequent properties or categories that develop as part of the system are, therefore, always already conditioned by disequilibrium. That is to say: “The image is used here as an instrument of adaptation to the object, it assumes that there is an object and not merely a situation.”<sup>45</sup>

Finally, the third stage in the image cycle outlines the process by which the individual develops an *Innenwelt* (“mental world”) of affective-emotive content within which they possess “an analogue of the external milieu, having also its constraints, its topology, its complex modes of access.”<sup>46</sup> Together, these three stages comprise a dynamic process contributing to the genesis of the image within an individual under a more universal backdrop of collective development.

Simondon deploys the Lacanian imago to outline the transition that allies the second and third stages, between which the mental image is translated into an object-symbol. This is achieved by way of the imaginary’s contortion of an “organized world” in transindividual (Black) objects. Dispensing with Lacan’s opposition between image and symbol, Simondon favors the image-as-organizer, an image that is “already an elementary symbol.”<sup>47</sup> Andrea Bardin’s account of Simondon’s thoughts highlight the imago’s position within a metastable field. As result of disparity, or tension, between the memory-images of the individual, the imago is stuck between two orders of magnitude. The product is a set of “socially instituted symbolic relations that provide the subject with access to reality.”<sup>48</sup> The discrepancy in structure here means that Simondon can define the phase-shift of the social “between two regimes of relational activity or communication which simultaneously

take place at different scales, individual and collective.”<sup>49</sup> The imago, as a structure of conversion, is thus a transductive explanation for the collective system of relations that exists between the individual (and the imaginary) and their (symbolic) milieu, creating the metastable “organized world” of the transindividual as one rife with possibilities for invention.

The locked body, as an epidermal surface, is fixed in objecthood. For Fanon this fixation occurs in language, operative in the word “*négre*.” Race-specific language is no more than a racist shroud, enveloping the body as determinative displacements of the possibilities of Black individuality. At work in both schemas is a logic that mediates individuation within a transcendental frame. Stripped of depth and sutured to the body, the image of Blackness is granted fictive stability by way of an anterior act which announces and guarantees the presence of a particular type of human. As this transcendental condition becomes an institution of habit, transduced across individuations, it is restated by varying forms of technical rationality. The Black individual is reproduced as an imago, necessarily alienated and viable to the abstraction of variational analysis. As Sylvia Wynter notes: “While it is we humans who ourselves produce our social orders, and are in reality its authors and its agents, we also produce, at the same time, the mechanisms of occultation which serve to keep this fact opaque to ourselves.”<sup>50</sup>

Wynter reminds us that found within the novel invention of European humanism is the creation of both an order and the stability of racial hierarchy. The Black individual, as an exteriorization of the white desire for epistemic certainty, grounds the structuration of the transindividual relation of racialization as a pre-individual process, imprinted prior to any self-representation. The Black individual therefore recognizes Blackness as a “symbol of that which is always already given to be seen” – a projective facet of the colonial perceptive arrangement that preforms the Black individual around the naturalized fantasy of the white subject.<sup>51</sup>

### Option I: An Untimely Invention

“I am not a prisoner of history. I should not seek there for the meaning of my destiny. I should constantly remind myself that the real leap consists in introducing invention into existence. In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself. I am a part of Being to the degree that I go beyond it.”<sup>52</sup>

Thinking with both Fanon and Simondon, we

propose that invention is the most adequate model for the resolution of the tension between the Black individual and the collective, apprehended as a modulation at the extrema into the absolute. To think as such is to think of individuation as an event or, as Alberto Toscano suggests, the “invention of a relation.”<sup>53</sup> In this mode, invention represents the dual relationship of interiority and exteriority that properly characterizes Simondonian thought. Transduction becomes a process axiomatically applied to being at all scales.

Invention comprises the fourth and final stage of Simondon’s cycle of the image, taking place at the point at which a systematization of images (the third stage in the cycle) finds itself oversaturated at the local level. The invention overflows into the collective, which must then reorganize and restructure in response. Invention thus operates transductively, with a shift in relational modalities occurring at the point of saturation to push and guide collective culture into new structurations. Invention is therefore not an adaptation-in-relation to the individual’s milieu (an environment structured by the substance of race), but rather an axiomatic application of transduction across all levels of being in a metastable field. Here, the individual modifies their own internal states in response to an exceptional event.

For Simondon, the exceptional event that triggers invention is an untimely phenomenon. This is especially prominent in his reading of the tightrope walker’s death in Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and his account of the technician in *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*. In both instances, as Simon Mills notes, “the actions of an untimely individual act as a singularity for the invention of a future, rather than as a mere adaptation to a pathological present.”<sup>54</sup>

In the case of the tightrope walker, the exceptional event serves to reveal to Zarathustra the interindividual relation for its true role as a social function forced upon the subject, opening upon the transindividual, as the tension between the individual and the collective is both revealed and dissolved. As the tightrope walker lies prostrate upon the earth, fallen from his rope, Simondon designates him as a pure relation caught between two individuated modalities: corpse and fool. The distance between these two modes of relation opens upon a new “vector of subjectivation” – the possibility of a relation beyond the interindividual. This moment ruptures the established system of norms and opens upon the questions that constitute a complex psychic life. Indeed, Scott notes that Zarathustra’s experience with the dying tightrope walker reveals that he requires something in

excess of himself, forcing a reflection upon the need for companions, “living ones – not dead companions and corpses that I carry with me wherever I want,” says Zarathustra.<sup>55</sup> He decides to seek out those who will break with social convention, and will “write new values on new tablets.”<sup>56</sup> Zarathustra’s untimely encounter with the tightrope walker reveals the interindividual relation as a function of mis-recognition, obfuscating the subject by cloaking it in its social function. The exceptional and untimely event is thus a moment of disindividuation, putting the subject into question by forcibly distancing them from the perceptions of the community in order to open upon a transindividuality.

Therefore, to exceed the interindividual domain, and to ensure the passage to the transindividual, the subject must realize the antecedent potentialities that constitute it, at the level of the pre-individual, in order to overcome them. The Fanonian theory of invention is best understood in relation to this reading. Taken as an interruptive measure, invention is mobilized at the psychosocial limits of racialization (the absolute extrema) emerging as a moment of a radical untimeliness that is neither anticipated nor awaited. Much like Simondon, Fanon’s leap bears a margin of indeterminacy, eschewing schemas of perfection to continuously force an uncertain scission into the weave of History, and making a radical break with the predetermination of the myth of the Negro that characterizes the integral function of Blackness. Unlike Césaire, who finds solace in a “bitter brotherhood” that maintains the rigid history of ontic relations, Fanon’s leap seeks a crossing, beyond which the object is no longer a guarantor of subjective security, but a radical dislocation that unsettles the fictive stability forged by the transindividual image of Blackness coerced and compressed into a definite integral. Invention seeks to unsettle those boundary conditions locking the Black individual inside the body as a product of history by restlessly animating the “untimeliness of blackness.”<sup>57</sup> This untimeliness is, for Fanon, the origin of the subject – a system of formative symbolizations by which the subject is presently bound, but must overcome through invention.

### Option J: The Technician

“Philosophy is made synonymous with the leap, once it is made to be one and the same reflexive operation.”<sup>58</sup>

Together with invention, the second untimely figure is the technician who, in distancing themselves from the collective, is able to mediate between the community and the

“hidden, inaccessible object.”<sup>59</sup> Technical activity is the domain of a “pure individual,” capable of taking current modes of functioning and transforming them in excess of existing community relationships. While technical invention renders a technical object that resolves problematics at the level of human reality, through that which Bardin determines is a “maximum of implementation of the system with the values conveyed by technicality,” technical life exists at a level of immanence with the relation between epistemes, integrating them into society during their operation and guiding their homeostatic functioning in relation to each other.<sup>60</sup> The technician’s invention thus occurs as an event in which culture becomes an open machine rather than a closed system made functional by setting stable bounds. Furthermore, technicity at the scale of the collective occurs in a functional domain between the individual and the social system, as the technical object augments and invents potentialities present in the environment, producing new schemas of values and norms as well as social possibilities. The technician thus overcomes the alienation of the human–technics dyad, guiding the object in an application that resolves the problems present prior to its invention.

If the invention of a new technics is to truly result in the invention of new values that are in excess of verisimilitude, then the Black individual must be ontologically destabilized, encouraging them to modulate within the problem domain. We argue for an application of language as that which contains the potential for a breach in racial perception from within the variable tensions of the pre-individual milieu. This new language structures and reveals the logics of individuation and individual formation, presenting a potent possibility for the production, or invention, of new images or groundings of Black perception. In doing so, language uncovers the imago of Blackness as the product of a perceptual system necessitated by the incoherency of white identity, in which the Black being emerges not only as a condensation of the epistemological shadow of European *humanitas*, but as a boundary condition for the production of subjectivity within an economy of being that continually abrogates the possibility of Black being.

While the process of invention materializes as a model of disparation within the individual, which, in interaction with the milieu, provides an allagmatic explanation for the restructuring of the subject–milieu relationship, what is sought is no less than a psychic poesis: a production of new internal structures in a psychic individuation which Simondon terms a “dilation,” whereby the

affective and perceptual problematics of Black individuation are resolved through a reflexive act that is at once an internal renegotiation and expansion. The ontogenetic leap is prefigured by a topology of the Black individual as temporally constituted between the historical as an “interior past” that must come into confrontation with an exterior milieu, ultimately reinventing its conditions – or what David Marriott outlines as “foundational claims of both history and politics in so far as both rely on the racial invention of the human and of humanism as such.”<sup>61</sup>

Simondon’s demand upon a genetic account of the development of perception distinguishes him from the Kantian transcendental aesthetic while simultaneously opening up the role of affectivity in conjunction with the individual’s exterior, allowing invention to emerge as an adaptive intervention into technical activity both as “operator and object of the operation,” modulating “internal structures.” Simondon describes the process as a play of limits, the overcoming of which, he suggests, “can occur only as a leap, as a modification of the internal distribution of functions, a rearrangement of their system; what was once an obstacle must become the means of realization.”<sup>62</sup>

### Option K: A Calculus of Variations

How might we then engage with the act of invention towards a rearticulation of Black individuation within a metastable racial system? To challenge the problem of race we must embark on a fundamental reevaluation of the values that form individual and collective perception. We must bring to light a notion of political subjectivity that does not organize at the threshold of existing perceptions of difference, but instead releases the energy from this interaction to form a potentially new individual and collective being.

Here we argue for an understanding of this problem as a calculus of variations. The calculus of variations is a subfield of mathematical analysis that uses variations, or small changes in functions, to map a set of real numbers by finding the maxima and minima values of functional or definitive integrals. The primary concern of a calculus is the behavior of a given class of functions, whereby the global behavior of the curve (the absolute) is defined by maxima and minima boundary conditions modulated by the interval created between them. In mathematics, an integral, as such, assigns numbers to functions in a way that describes displacement. A function, on the other hand, is an action or activity that is assigned to, required, or expected of a person or group.

While mathematically, calculus is concerned with limits, and with the

differentiation and integration of functions, or the activities either assigned to or required or expected of an individual or collective object, a calculus of variations denotes the relationship between the calculus of extrema: the uppermost limit (maxima) and smallest possible quantity (minima) of definite integrals. The distinction is important, as the calculus of variations is a tool used to solve a specific set of problems. A calculus of variations seeks to resolve those problems involved in finding stationary values of a functional domain, or a domain whereby a series of actions unfolds to establish a relation such that one thing is dependent on another. In other words, a calculus of variations is a process by which small changes in function (discrete actions) can be mapped across a topology (“mental world”) to find the maxima (uppermost limit of potential) and minima (boundaries of racial perception) of definite integrals (image of Blackness). A definite integral (commonly known as the Riemann integral) is itself comprised of upper and lower bounds, giving form to an interval within which change at the level of the function can be calculated. Such integrals are representative of essential or “built-in” properties of extrema within larger calculable systems of dependence, and are key to understanding the global dynamics of system formation, here defined as the metastable racial system.

An exposition of the production of the image of Blackness as an integral value has bought to light underlying logics orienting the development of interindividual relations that produce the transindividual load borne by the Black individual. The process allows for modulation between the maximum values of Black perception (as defined by the substance of race) and the minimum structures of negation within the problem domain (or the domain of the minima). This is achieved through successive individuations of incompatibility towards a recognition of the potential for self-determination.

Just as “the technician loves the matter upon which he acts,” the Black individual must thereby openly enter into negotiations with an inherent calculus of variations in order to map the topology of racialized domains.<sup>63</sup> Although the calculus of variations might appear to be a stable system, it is preconditioned by the potential for change, even if small in scale. Change, in this sense, is a signal or alert that indicates the maximum and minimum values of the system – which itself is in contradiction. By this we mean that the system is strained by its precondition for variability, given any small alteration of the conditions that reside within the metastable system. This cannot be achieved

without a sensitivity or awareness of the “mental state” or maxima and minima values that define the boundaries of the system in question. A sensitivity, as a topology of Black individuation, catalyzes an extension of the maxima boundaries towards a rearticulation of the internal system relations. Sensitivity, signaled by the individual’s modulation between the maxima and minima boundaries of the system, reveals the quality and fragility of the system’s present form. The amplification of the tension between present conditions and potential conditions brings forth a threshold through which change can be initiated, as already made possible by the system’s existing reliance on small changes as the defining characteristic of the system.

While the system might appear to be unmalleable, it is what Bernard Stiegler describes as “performative,” that is to say, it is what it enacts or the actions that it carries out.<sup>64</sup> The system is therefore operative, and accounts for both the convertibility of structure and the invention of new structures. To formulate this process as a process towards Black individuation dramatizes invention as the direct grasping of the problems of race in its own assumptions, thereby decentering any preexisting image of Blackness and permitting alternative versions of reality. It is here that we are able to appreciate the latent potential of Black existence as that which is in excess of any externally composed image of truth. It is here that, we posit, Black being emerges as that which characterizes a proficiency of this technique or practical skill – a mode of invention that brings forth an absolute value of self-love and actualization. A subject in flux, and making compatible in practice any prior incompatibilities. What remains is that which escapes, if only for a flashing moment, in its relation to the negative images of Blackness and the overtly symbolic *négre*. This excess is a conversion of small to large actions towards the invention of a new form and the coordination of new stages of individuation.

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e-flux journal #109 — may 2020 Ramon Amaro and Murad Khan  
Towards Black Individuation and a Calculus of Variations

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