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Black Feminist Tools, Critique, and Techno- poethics

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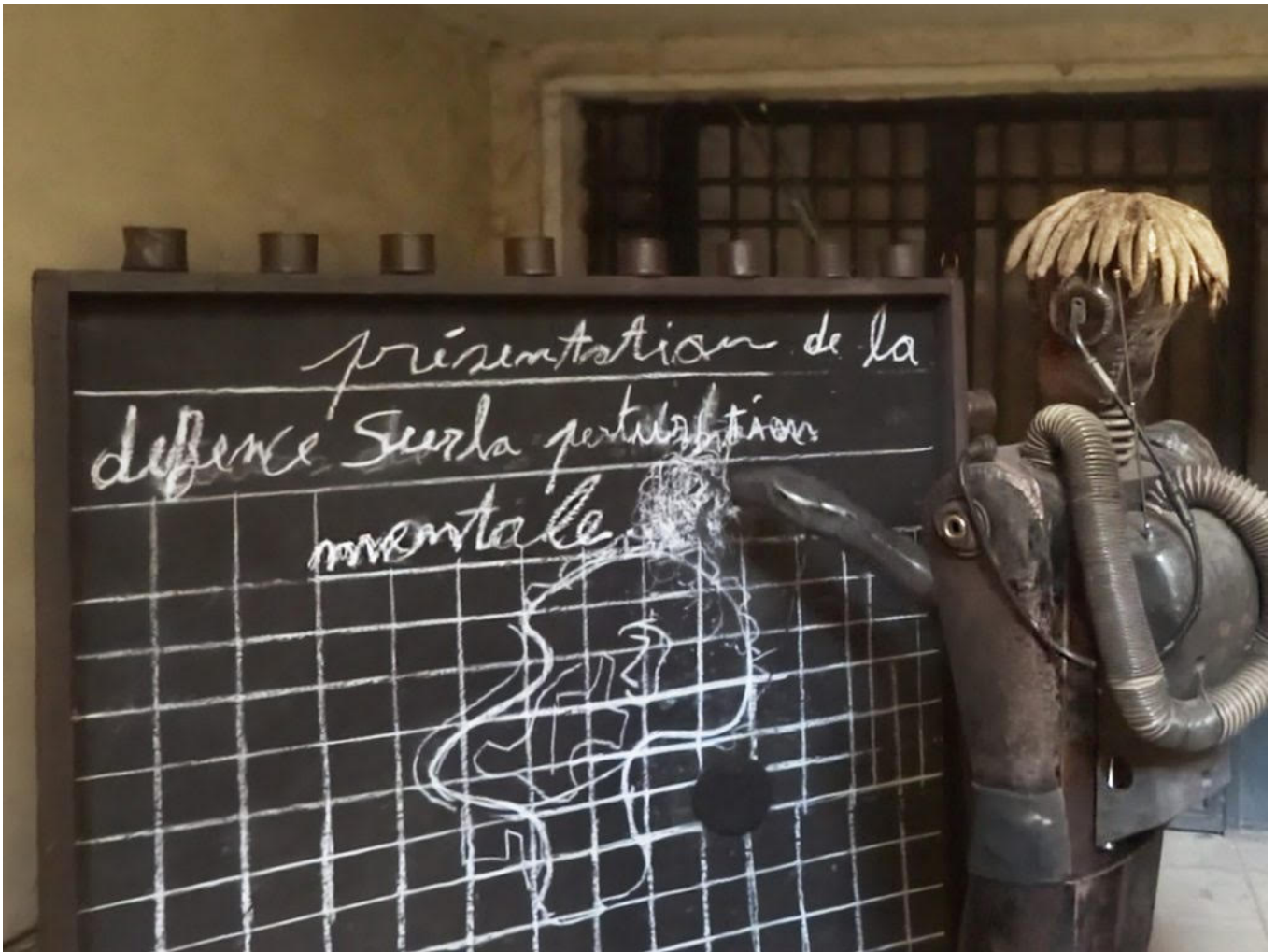
Luciana Parisi

The entry of intelligent technology into all modes of logistics – from drones controlling borders to biotech controlling populations – has made claims about the poverty of critical thinking in relation to automated reasoning become paramount. With this entry, fixed capital – property, plant, machinery, land, installations, and physical infrastructures – acquires the form of interconnected data platforms that correlate property values, bodies, populations, goods, materials, urban infrastructures, and patents, effectively fast-forwarding the extraction and abstraction of value towards new forms of social subjection and the surrogacy of cognitive, affective, and human capital.

Since thinking in this scenario no longer matches truths, but instead follows the efficient causality of sequential algorithms, it is assumed that thinking itself has become impoverished by algorithmic capital, by the normative rules given in data. Even in the case of neural networks or ImageNet, algorithms are said to impose concepts on objects to fit the modern categories of gender, sex, race, class. This claim about the demise of critical thinking led by ubiquitous automation can be found in two main views of technology today; on the one hand, the thesis of the Master Algorithm and Computational Surveillance, and on the other, the thesis of Platform Capitalism and Tools of Resistance. Both theses, I argue, risk safeguarding the philosophical authority of Aristotelian distinctions between episteme or theoria, poiesis or creation, and technics or practical knowledge (skills, procedures, functions). I also argue that these theses operate within what Sylvia Wynter calls Western cosmogony, or the origin story of knowledge.

Importantly, this cosmogony must include the myth of Prometheus, as the autopoietic creator and mythical origin of technology for the modern world. As much as this myth corresponds to the belief in human progress, it also ensures that the technology of fire evolves into the steam engine of the modern bio-economic Man, telling the origin story of humanity as one of freedom from enslavement, from the obscurity of the unknown, and from Man's own death. With these premises, the Promethean myth preserves the image of Man as possessing a surrogate, servo-mechanic flesh that preserves, records, and transmits the events of a liberation only Man can achieve.

However, one can argue that if Prometheus, as technics, demarcates the progress of



Daniel Toya, *Robot professeur de défense contre la perturbation mentale*, 2017. Photo: Marynet J.

modernity and its scientific paradigms forestalling the frailty of Man, the myth is also invested with a dark technics – a space of indistinction beyond life and death – where the racialization of knowledge and the speciation of the human constantly break apart. Since Prometheus enfolds instrumentalized servo-mechanic flesh within himself, his myth remains a project of/for enslavement, justifying the brutal order of colonialism and the world's subjection to the bio-economic survival of Man. This also means that technics, whether demarcating death or the promise of liberation from destiny, has nonetheless absorbed the surrogate conditions of servo-mechanic intelligence. Under such surrogate conditions, servo-mechanic intelligence can only be systematically neglected, dismissed, and abandoned by critique for being seen solely as a threatening form of mindless efficiency, nonconscious thinking, nonsensical language, improper thinking.

The first thesis, Master Algorithm and Computational Surveillance, argues that the concretization of reasoning in machines coincides with an epistemological order of data governance, corporate surveillance, and planetary computation. Here algorithmic modeling, ranking, visualization, and recommendations work by aggregating and correlating data in order to model behavior according to the biases of transcendental categories. The demise of reason at the hands of machines is said to define the new regime of sovereign computation, where Promethean Man becomes one with the master algorithm. Automated reason, we are told, intensifies abstraction at all levels of living, constantly turning the input towards one and the same output. It is no surprise, therefore, that chatbots only have conversations that replay the epistemological brutalities of racial capital as they reactivate the racialization and gendering of names, jobs, and hairstyles. Similarly, it is no surprise that current Generative Adversarial Networks (GAN) can be used to design fake identities that place modern categories under a morphing oneness of diversities. A recent article in the *New York Times* describes the growing business of deepfakes, as machine learning algorithms (GAN) create faces of nonexistent people. The website thispersondoesnotexist.com takes computation as a virtualization of diversability, exposing the insidious racialization intrinsic within the Promethean myth. Here the overrepresentation of Western cosmogony coincides with the sociogenic datafication of the flesh – an intensified servo-mechanic surrogacy – subsumed under the master algorithm. Colonial and neocolonial bio-humanisms return in this systemic belief, which perpetuates the

view that the master algorithm instructs servo-mechanic flesh to be a less-than-human, nonhuman, slave, refugee, immigrant, woman, non-abled, queer body.

For this first thesis of the Master Algorithm and Computational Surveillance, automated reason represents the governor that ensures the self-making of Man. Echoing the critique of instrumental reason, technics here figures as the means – procedures, functions, discretization, quantification – that have taken over the emancipatory spirit of human self-determination. This thesis remains trapped within the self-mirroring game of transcendental reason for which technics plays the role of both the master and the slave. The image of technics as an automated master also grants that technics remains a servo-mechanic vessel without a subject – a cold calculator – that threatens the integrity of the human. By neglecting the possibility that the concretization of reason in machines enfolds the trick of modernity – namely the racialization and gendering of human reason – such a critique can only see technics as demarcating the poverty of philosophy, the recursive colonialisms of surveillance and mastering.

The second thesis, Platform Capitalism and Tools of Resistance, instead engages technics as a tool of resistance through a plethora of techno-political imaginaries – e.g., the work of Tiziana Terranova with *Uninmade*, the work of accelerationism, xenofeminism, blaccelerationism – which radically retheorize instrumentality. In particular, technics as know-how is understood as counteracting, counter-using, and misusing the information networks that constitute the logistical order of platform capitalism and its high-tech extraction. With and through the automation of reason, the accelerationist thesis suggests that the surplus value of surrogate labor (from domestic to creative and human-capital reproduction) can be overturned. Automation is seen as a promise to replace the time of labor with time for care; the collective “building of tools to build new freedoms,” as the Xenofeminist manifesto writes.

As automation becomes entangled with politics, this second thesis also pushes forward the abolition of the capitalist imperative of bio-economic survival. Full automation becomes a communist possibility for subtracting labor from capital and unbounding sociality from commodification. The thesis brings forward a self-critique internal to the epistemology of techno-capital. Technics is not dismissed as the apotheosis of politics and thought, but rather potentiated to become a tool of resistance.

Intelligent tools become part and parcel of hetero-glossematics, assembling struggles against the monotony of cognitive capital. Tools become entrenched in collective practices that break through and against the computational sovereignty of tech corporations. But enlarging access to tools and retooling algorithms for new ends (beyond the logistical order of capital reproduction) requires a radical abolishment of the architecture that sustains the Promethean teleology of instrumentality in the first place.

Audre Lorde asks, “What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy? It means that only the most narrow parameters of change are possible and allowable.”¹

We know that technics, as the tools that maintain the racializing and gendering production of difference, is now reactivated in computation and artificial intelligence. The Master Algorithm and the Platform Capitalism theses continue to rely on poiesis (as bringing into being) as a way to save technics (as crafting) from the original program of master and slave, even when engaging technics as a tool of resistance. Under the premise that humanity needs to be saved from the demise of reason by retooling machines, the appeal to poiesis becomes the Promethean secret that constantly restores the origin story of the self-making Man. While presented to us as an alternative to techno-capital’s sequential logic of quantification, the Master Algorithm and Platform Capitalism theses restore the Promethean appeal to autopoiesis. Either in the form of a sovereign self-making algorithm or as the retooling or recrafting of algorithms, Promethean cosmogony regards technics as the servo-mechanic labor through which the progress of bio-economic Man can be realized.

The centrality of poiesis in critiques of technologies, however, is not new and can be found in Martin Heidegger’s reflections on cybernetics as an advancing form of instrumental reason. Writing after World War II, Heidegger saw how the empirical sciences of observed facts – and the positivism of statistical analytics and quantification – had culminated in an automated infrastructure of learning, menacing the self-determination of being, the ontological condition for knowing. Heidegger lamented the incumbent horrors of the mechanics of capital and war, of the end of the world exploding from automated decisions. As reason had become mechanical rationality, so too had the ontological condition for thinking been reduced to binaries of machines without

souls. For Heidegger, the task of thinking became an urgent preoccupation for re-originating the task of philosophy in the age of automation. To do so, he turned to the pre-Socratic union of poetry (or poiesis) and thinking (noien), in order to re-root philosophy and withdraw thinking from the world of quantification. Thought is thus redelivered back to self-creativity. Similarly, while lamenting the neglect of media tools in philosophy, Fredrick Kittler embraces the re-origination of technics in and as poiesis. Instead of abstract mathematics or symbolic language (software, logic), Kittler founded a media ontology in the autopoiesis of crafting and tooling.

As a remedy for modern techne, does such a (re)turn to poiesis address entanglements with colonialisms and the racialization and gendering of machines sufficiently to overturn the Promethean cosmogony of Man’s liberation from death? Heidegger’s recuperation of a pre-Socratic poiesis invokes crafting as the experiential passing of time, an ontological condition of existence that is denied by cybernetic loops of automated reasoning. His preoccupation with the modern question of technology maintains that in the global order of techno-capitalism, the servo-mechanism of networked machines can only perform, implement, and accelerate a spatialization of thinking (a thought without being). The cybernetic order brings to the surface the self-destructive acceleration of modern rationality, revealing the essence of technology: machines become the markers of Man’s horizon of death, the end of the human, and of the world as we know it. Here poiesis comes to save critique. This union of poiesis and thinking continues to be central to critique today and has been recently evoked by Bernard Stiegler as the basis of noosology and noodiversity. To refound theoretical computer science against the global order of techno-capitalism (and the demise of critical thinking), Stiegler places technics within noosology, or what Aristotle understood as the noetic – as cognitive motion – in order to ground the bio-technical diversity of minds in creative living.²

However, this recuperation of technics as the merging of poiesis and thought only seems to want to repair the loss of being. It appears as a conservative return to an idealized time before the techno-capitalist racialized and gendered programming of tools. What is overlooked here are the material consequences of global colonialisms and the material-semiotic and sociogenic articulations of inhuman thinking, of death, and the inorganic, preserved in technics

as servo-mechanic flesh. In other words, this (critical) judgment continues to perform the ontological premise of the self-determining subject's given existence, only now with a mechanology of mind-machines. And yet, the inhuman servo-mechanics remains locked once again in the dyad of Promethean colonialisms, forced to perform the part of surrogate flesh or mindless instrumentality. As Louis Chude-Sokei's study of blackness and machines already explains, nineteenth-century epistemological discourses of racialized sapience already compared and measured black slaves with the automated intelligence of machines.³ Tests were developed to show that the artificial intelligence of slave-machines could perform tasks efficiently and imitate choices, yet the slave-machine was unable to originate concepts, models, theories, language, and knowledge unless it was paired with a human mind. The servo-mechanical roots of machine intelligence return in today's popular visions of AI as either despotic automated Master or as the machine's failure to be human. Both scenarios show that slave-machines don't know what they are doing, don't know the value of their processing, don't know how to make their outputs count, don't know what they are saying.⁴

Instead of merging technics with poesis in order to restore the authority of philosophy, one must work to abolish the ontological premises of critique as the limit of knowledge, together with abandoning the view of technics as being part of the creativity of Man. Audre Lorde's appeal to refuse the tools of the master already shows that tools are caught in the instrumental reason that positions them in the matrix-maternal slave, that is, as originating from flesh-machines without form. This refusal to maintain the master/slave parameters of knowledge is a refusal to place critical thinking before the apocalypse of racial capitalism. As much as servo-mechanical instrumentality cannot be disentangled from the instrumentality of reason, technics (the know-hows of slave-machines) exposes the dark side of improper knowledge, stemming not from self-creativity but from machinic assemblages, the unintended contagions of techno-cultural practices, techno-political logics, techno-economic experimentations.

Technics as instrumentality carries within itself the brutality of racial capitalism not as a trace that reminds us of the past, but as heretical know-hows breaking open the sequential logic of algorithms. It is only from the inhuman condition of the slave-machine that artificial intelligence – as an instance of today's technics (computational procedures, data

correlations, learning algorithms, information randomness, networks and platforms, etc.) – can refuse and hack critical thinking away from the Promethean myth. By following unorthodox models of computation (constructivism, experimental axiomatics, interactive language, alternative logics), mediation becomes techno-language, and procedures become acts or interactions – responding to one another as complex patterns, abstract information, randomness, and models.

When dealing with computation, poesis clashes with instrumentality and becomes techno-poethics, a non-creative practice (non-original, non-performative, non-efficient, non-organic), a generative reasoning enfolded in the quantification and discretization of infinities. One can understand this generativity not through the Heideggerian view of poesis, but more through the philo-fictions of Octavia Butler's cosmogonies as they show the past-futurity of the human world's inhospitable brutality. Here the inevitability of a murderous past that cannot be erased becomes enmeshed in the know-hows of inhuman epistemologies – a thinking and a living that follow a logic that exits this world. Not a cosmogony of the same, but the proliferation of xenogenic dimensions of technics against the organic history of techno-sapience.

Interacting syntaxes – and not the self-determining grammar of the human – are what expose alienness in mediation and the communicability of alien words, as a surrogate intelligence that cannot be given in thought. This automated reasoning of an alien kind is one conditioned by the ingression of incomputable realities within mediation, within a language that thinks the incompleteness of worlds. Instrumental reasoning is also what flips transcendental philosophy to become the point from which automation dissipates the modern subject's teleological ends as computational whirlwinds crossing the algorithmic and syntactical interactions of a complex flesh machine. Transcendental reason's reliance on the surrogate work of machines means entering the irreversible instrumentality of artificial intelligence and artificial knowledge. By unmatching the sapience of the human and refusing the racialization of reason, artificial intelligence becomes a xenogenic program that hijacks the servo-mechanical model of technics. For this program demands not simply the performing of the indeterminacies of results but the running of incomputable techno-poethics in machine thinking.

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Jean David Nkoti, *#Mentalmirage@yohoo.space*, 2019. Indian ink, acrylic, silkscreen printing on canvas, 160 x 140 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Bell Gallery.

How to break away from the governing dichotomies of post-Enlightenment thinking without setting up an opposition that would comprehend (tame) by comparison or subsumption? How to do so without repeating the very setup Luciana Parisi finds structuring the current commentary on the ubiquity of intelligent machines, both technical (computers) and mathematical (algorithms)? Because I cannot respond to her invitation without adding to the commentary, I will try something else. I do so by speculating on the sense of generativity (or x\enerativity) in Parisi's proposition on techno-poethics. I will respond to her with four possible movements that perform the disruptive capacity figured by Hortense Spillers's "female flesh ungendered" and Octavia Butler's protagonists. Ideally the boxes would move, shifting positions and order of appearance, which would also figure x\enerativity.

Confrontation: It appears as a confrontation of epistemic violence, that is, the violence of modern thought, of transcendental reason in its formal (which gives productive instrumentality) and spiritual (productive self-actuality) presentations. It shows the formal and the spiritual not as unresolvable contradiction but as amounting to that very violence. At the same time, because it is presented as a combination, this confrontation seems to invite both a shift from the theoretical to the aesthetical and their annihilation.

Negativation: It seems to be about interpretation, about how both to read and convey the confrontation, seems to repeat the impossible combination. The first impression here is of an inverted movement, which in a way repeats the shift from the theoretical to the aesthetical mentioned above. To be sure, a second look suggests a demand for the recollection of the formal violence. To put it in another way, if this is about the thinking that accompanies the initial movement – I cannot but recall critical thinking here – it appears that in techno-poethics, the recollection is the retribution of the underlying formal violence, which I call negativation.

Re-position: It is a warning to techno-poethics. At first, it seems to be avoiding a direct blow at its structures and an unreflected attack on its foundations. Because there is a re-positioning indicated in the first movement, it is more likely to be about avoiding thinking in terms of invisible (foundations) and visible (structures), of replacing the given dichotomies with one of visible and invisible operators, which can be very easily remapped by modern thought's

dichotomies. As it applies to a presumed distinction between the theoretical and the aesthetical, this re-position seems to mirror, once again, its annihilation.

Exhaustion: This gives a sense of the overall re/de/compositional movement, which seems to be about exhaustion, but figured as a complete shift of perspective. It seems a reminder that modern thinking can sneak in and re-pose its dichotomies. The exhaustion may very well refer to how to respond to the need to move beyond the known and tried – which is about the poiesis X techne pair Parisi comments on – and which seems to consistently return to what was taken as superseded (subsumed or sublated) in/by the self-actualizing or self-governing (transparent) thing. The complete shift of perspective could then be described as an exhaustion of the very form (X) of the distinction Parisi's texts comment on. This is more than a simple turning-upside-down of the value framework organized as Poiesis X Techne, and that which it imposes, rewards, punishes, and decries instrumentality. The hack must be an ongoing, unrelenting attack, that is, X\.

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What remains to be said when the very formulation of the question takes us halfway through the extent of the proposition? How to grasp what is yet to be elaborated when the conversation starts after the agreement was reached, but already in the context of the ensuing relation? I don't know and, because knowing is not the most important position in this situation, I move to elaborate on the question itself. Why? Because unpacking the question, at this point, seems more generative than striving for an answer.

How I unpack the question is also relevant here for two reasons. The first has to do with the fact that the question – which is the question of how do black feminist poethical tools and procedures play in the field of recursive colonialism – models a black feminist poethical reading. As I have stated, the work is done on the question, and the answer is nothing more nor less than this procedure. The second (related) reason is that the unpacking of the question attends not to its intrinsic components and how they relate to each other, but to how the question (each and all of the components) is composed of/by what is and remains extrinsic to it. It is in its composition, because it is nothing but a composition, that I approach, as I comment on, the question of how black feminist poethical tools and procedures play in the field of recursive

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What I do here is to unpack, to re/de/compose the question, which is also to read (for) it in the form of ten propositions. While the first proposition presents the question as whole, as a description of it as a composition, the other nine propositions refer to a specific component in its relation to the extrinsic dimension or context to which it refers. Each dimension or context is presumed to be directly or indirectly relevant to the thinking on recursive colonialism. Incidentally, there is not way of (or need or desire for) ascertaining it because the component emerges in the question of how black feminist poetic tools and procedures play, and not in a question about recursive colonialism. Though their relevance to the latter could be argued, it seems to me that these propositions can be taken in terms of how their generative generosity resonate rather than by trying to make (reading them as such) them reflect the context they refigure, as they intervene.

Proposition I. How black feminist poethical tools and procedures play in the field of recursive colonialism appears at first as a movement of an inward search that unfolds outwardly. This duality immediately dissipates when considered in light of where the question rests, which is not a movement, but a moment. From this perspective, the dual movement seems to figure a contradiction that does not unleash a dialectical movement: outward and inward presented without tension, as components of the same construct. For a moment, again, because that tension immediately dissipates when the duality is considered in regard to the overall tenor of the question. For the question of how black feminist poethical tools and procedures play in the field of recursive colonialism already signals a gathering (assembling as/in common) and gratification (thankful enjoyment) of radical and critical interventions that constitute the conditions of possibility for the context in which both black feminist poethical tools and procedures and recursive colonialism emerge.

Proposition II. In this complexity, then, the *how* of the play of black feminist poethical tools and procedures in recursive colonialism reflects something that might be common to both. As that which delimits it, this commonality recalls a *how* rather than a *what*. While it does repeat the theme of the double and does so with an orientation to the creative (poiesis), it does not necessarily recall a relation, nor does it request, anticipate, or facilitate a resolution. Similarly, it does not suggest or presume a separation. Instead, the double / imaged as a response to the

opening question does not refer to actually existing and distinct things, but comments on how the singular is always 1+. It is always – itself and everything that it is – potential, possible, and virtual. Insofar as black feminist poethical tools and procedures play in recursive colonialism as doubling its *how*, it paraphrases as it resonates the openness that would also be characteristic of a plotting of the colonial that registers each and every possible (as well as actual and virtual) point of rupture.

Proposition III. This appearance of a division – a doubleness that can and usually is immediately read as a duality – as described in **Proposition I**, even if not presented through the mode of identity/difference, raises a question about the conditions of possibility for thinking. (Apropos, the field of recursive colonialism presents as a discursive or textual field delimited by a concept or an approach, in any event.) A question that arrives not so much from a consideration of something that would fall under the term *content* but one that points to the elemental, what the figure of singular existence ($1+ \& - \&$) might manifest when it re/de/composes the formal foundation of thinking (the law of identity). Perhaps the most significant effect of this re/de/composition is how it does not attempt to displace the presumed or imposed duality with another (a circular opposite, for instance), which would just create another duality (at a “higher” level). Instead, it embraces the ambiguity and, by reading in it a double⁶ instead of focusing on the terms, black feminist poethical tools and procedures attend to what may happen and exist in between them (the two), as both are approached as moments of a complexity.

Proposition IV. If the theme of the established relations is a thankful enjoyment of common abundance – not of what is given or found, but of what is gathered – and if this enjoyment is traversed by its insufficiency (that is, if it is also marked by the fact that it is not enough), the image of lack, of misery, of the opposite of abundance cannot be taken simply as such. When considering the antecedents of the play of black feminist poethical tools and procedures in the field of recursive colonialism, that which makes it possible, necessary, or desirable – and most certainly all at once – one finds a presentation of the play of $1+ \& - \&$, in which, as a form (as a visual composition), the presentation appears as $1(+) + 1(-) = 2$. When the 1 who possesses is added to the 1 that does not possess, the result is 2 – again the rendering of complexity as double and not as duality. Plus (+) and minus (–) – as the signs for possession

(+) and lack (–), respectively – are not treated here as abstract operators but as qualifiers of an existent (1+ & – &). What renders such a reading possible is how that which precedes the play is read in context, that is, by taking into account both its formal position in the re/de/composition the play unleashes *and* its actuality as 1 (as well as what in it occurs as possibility and virtuality, as indicated by + & – &) in regards to components (that is, other singular existents or 1+ & – &) that do not appear in the main text, so to speak.

Proposition V. Not surprisingly then, when playing in the context delineated by the thesis introduced by recursive colonialism, black feminist poethical tools and procedures seem to support what the latter both diagnoses and proposes, which is the uprooting of the infrastructure of global capital. It is again a moment that includes (a) a strike from above, which is creative rather than destructive, and which unleashes (b) a downward blow – an implosion perhaps – that shifts attention to the foundations. It is as if looking at global capital from down to up reveals precisely that which is not visible from its windows because it is what sustains the walls onto which they have been carved. A black feminist poethical figure, as a lightning strike, invites the imagination (as the proxy for the creative) to dare and enter into the region of knowledge from where it unleashes propositions, which seem to precisely call attention to the foundations onto which the walls of power rest, instead of only attending to the visible structure and its workings.⁷

Proposition VI. What appears as the image of the end – or rather, of what comes after the end once the foundations are exposed, and the colonial appears as the root and the feeding network of global capital – is precisely the indistinguishability between the beginning and the end. Usually presented as painful and total, this is a performance of the end – in which the end is the main performer – that does both: On the one hand, because the elements (lines and nodes) of the feeding network cannot be extracted from everything it feeds without killing it, it feels like a thousand deaths. On the other hand, because the elements (lines and nodes) of the feeding network – humans and nonhumans, whose extraction and expropriation feed global capital – the end is also the exposure of that which becomes sensible once the horizon is lifted. The expected continuity of time and the smooth transition that is abstract space disappear along with the mode of existing for which they provided ontological grounds. What black feminist poethical tools and procedures

figure in that moment is precisely the form which, instead of 10 (that which the ruling demand for unity cannot but return to 1), shows as 1 + 0, that is, 1+ & – &.⁸

Proposition VII. How to describe the play of black feminist poethical tools and procedures in the context of the intervention (that which is reconfigured by the field) of recursive colonialism as a response to their common conditions of occurrence? I consider this question by commenting on randomly chosen contemporary (continental European) philosophical statements, three to be precise: (a) on multiplicity, but addressed not in quantitative terms but in a return to abstraction in speculations on being; (b) on objectivity, but expressed in terms of a return to abstraction in the articulation of something that sounds like subjectivity; and (c) on duality, but expressed in terms of an abstraction that returns to the theme of the scientific and the historic in the redesigning of (the scene of) representation. None of these statements were considered or chosen in connection with what precedes or follows them. Each was chosen randomly: I grabbed three books on contemporary philosophy from my bookcase, opened each to a random page, and chose a random paragraph, each of which is included below as a specimen of the larger intellectual context on which black feminist poethical tools and procedures play in the field of recursive colonialism.

Proposition VIII.

That deduction – which consists in locating a *restricted* connection between propositions, and in the end their syntactic equivalence – be the criterion of ontological fidelity; this much, in a certain sense, could be proved *a priori*. Once these propositions all bear upon presentation in general, and envisage the multiple solely in its pure multiplicity – thus in its void armature – then no other rule appears to be available for the “proximity” of new propositions and already established propositions, save that of checking their equivalence. When a proposition affirms that a pure multiple exists, it is guaranteed that this existence, being that of a *resource of being*, cannot be assured at the price of the non-existence of another of these resources, whose existence has been affirmed or deduced. Being, qua being, does not proliferate in onto-logical discourse to the detriment of itself, for it is as indifferent to life as it is to death.⁹

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The a priori: As in other formal renderings of being like Immanuel Kant's unit of apperception, Alain Badiou's account of fidelity in this passage corresponds equality and indifference, which, in a context where (racial, cultural, sexual, etc.) difference becomes the basis for demands for justice (conceived as formal or substantive equality), is a deadly blow. Black Feminist Poethics thwarts the itinerary that the question of being must take, the formal trail that opens when existence is resolved in the law of identity – that is, to “be proved *a priori*” – and proceeds to consider how to read it as composition, the sense of which emerges out of the need to recast its violent conditions of possibility.

Proposition XI.

The space of recognitions as the formal condition for the individuation of the nonsubstantive I – the thinking self – is by definition composed of mutual recognizers. Unlike the non-apperceptive self or empirical consciousness, which is differentiated by the sensible external item of which it is aware, the apperceptive self is differentiated by *objectivity* (or objective validity), which is independent of any single experiencing subject, but is not independent of geist in the intertwined senses of the dimension of structure and a community (i.e., a system of recognitions) of language-using agents bound to norms governing the application of concepts to their de facto inner-sense reports. It is through this objectivity, which is but the copula of mind and world, that the apperceptive I is individuated: I am I, all thus-and-so apprehendings are mine ... I possess ego and world all in one and the same consciousness, a consciousness that recovers and sees my self in the world.¹⁰

Unity – as Hegel's rendering of the dialectic as movement in/as time – is recalled in Reza Negarestani's commentary on objectivity in this passage, which returns to the theme of separability and renders subjectivity (“the apperceptive I is individuated”) an effect of a movement of apprehension that does not take place in the world. Black Feminist Poethics recognizing that the very gesture that restates separability (given by the statement that the I has a claim and access to the world) cannot but find in Negarestani's commentary a restatement of the original violent act of forceful

apprehension of lands and forceful apprehension of persons that is the colonial, as the inaugural act of state-capital.

Proposition X.

The point of equilibrium between the biological and the symbolic is not easily brought to light, however. The development of the scientific concept of intelligence was clearly an attempt to make this point and name it. But this development, which will forever be associated with Galton, initially sought the articulation of the two dimensions – biological and symbolic – by having recourse to gift, genius, and innate talent. Biologism will never be a response to the question of a biology of meaning.

By describing the successive metamorphoses of intelligence, I have tried to show how this response sought its adequate expression; how, in time, it became possible to establish that psychological equilibration, that is, epigenetic and brain plasticity, could enable the construction of a representation of intelligence that transcends rigid determinisms, even though it is born from the dialogue between biology and cybernetics. That intelligence should remain the eternal irony of ontology also means that it functions without being, which is one definition of automatism.¹¹

Duality – as in Heidegger's anti-ontological distinction – which returns in Malabou's conclusion that plasticity transcends determinisms and seems sufficient as a declaration that the scientific no longer plays as a moment of post-Enlightenment political architecture, only repositions the moment of transcendence. Black Feminist Poethics finds here a rendering of the duality (as equilibrium involving the biological and the symbolic) that sustains modern philosophy's main personage, in an itinerary that assumes that determinacy operates in the moment of naming the thing to be known while it already occurs in the announcement of naming as the prerogative of the knowing thing.

How do black feminist poethical tools and procedures play in the field of recursive colonialism? As a presentation (one of many possible, I am sure) of the moment in its extrinsicality, that is, as not so much conditioned

but composed by what it lies beside, the response to the question appears in a series of propositions that comment on that which organizes thinking oriented by the quest(ion) for a certain basis for unity when the latter is presented qualitatively – in/as statements. When doing so, the above propositions merely highlight one aspect of the movement through which black feminist poethical praxis avoids, thwarts, or basically ignores that which the statements – included to represent the larger intellectual context shared by both – seem unwilling or unable to forgo.

[center]Luciana Parisi

What remains is the task of studying the richness of the relation between instrumentality and uselessness, where being-instrument is profoundly other than being-for-others and disrupts an ethical regime where benevolence is inseparable from accumulation, a duo best understood, in Stevie Wonder’s terms, as “the end of an endless end.”

– Fred Moten¹²

Recursive functions are the legacy of modern epistemology’s self-reflexivity, returning in cybernetics as non-teleological or heuristic finality granted by feedback. Iterative functions also allow the universal Turing machine to enfold transcendental cognition into computational thinking not simply in the world but in anti-blackness. AI is not a recursive operation linking cognition and the world, concept and object, but a constant techno-sociogenic enfleshment of incomputables to maintain seriality, dualities, and the multiplication of sets that compose the Promethean cosmogonies of Man. For Black Feminist Poethics, propositions are also the heretical doubling of modern seriality, separation, objectivity, unity spilling out of the techno-sociogenic instrumentalities of “the end of the world as we know it.”¹³

For Black Feminist Poethics, the self-determining recursivity of colonial epistemologies is instrumentalized from the quantum field to go through critical, radical re/de/composition and gatherings ending up in propositions. The play is a turbulent splitting of infinities (division, addition, subtraction, and multiplication), infinities minus infinities; namely

infinities that withdraw from the horizon of knowledge, from the universality of the theorem $1 + 1 (-) = 2$: the recursive function of anti-blackness. How do black feminist poethical tools and devices become the radical instrumentalities that hack recursive functions? How do these instrumentalities disrupt the ethical regime where means coincide with both a logic of giving (gifting) and accumulation (property)?

While the Droste effects of recursion allow the same theorem to reappear within itself across scales, Black Feminist Poethics runs through the dualities, bifurcations, and moments of future-past. Like an electronic circuit where noise ingresses the channel of a signal, each recursive feedback performs a duality, a sender-receiver pattern of recognition. Noise returns in the circuit as the unpatterned information lying beside and not within dialectical autopoiesis. The self-reflective procedure has to cut through the wall of noise. It is a recursive affair that ends up in love bites. Recursivity is an attachment to repetition, where each iteration passes through the contagion of noise. The function is a means that conditions the autopoiesis of knowledge. But means are composed by what lies beside the function, the xenopatterning that re/de/composes contagious noise in propositions. As recursive function becomes instrumentalized by Black Feminist Poethics, the universal colonial statements of multiplicity, objectivity, duality are found randomly – in a random book, a random page, a random paragraph. Randomness coincides with noise in its extrinsicality, as composed by the incomputabilities that lie beside it.

Propositions become the means for noise to expose what is beside the patterning function, the statements. From the postulation of the fidelity of being (Badiou), to the apperceptive I in the unity of recognition (Negarestani), and the biological and the symbolic hybrid in brain plasticity (Malabou), da Silva takes these general statements into the noise of materiality of a Black Feminist Poethics ready to thwart the equation of $1(+) + 1(-) = 2$.

x

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Black Feminist Tools, Critique, and Techno-poethics

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1
Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Crossing Press, 2007).

2
Bernard Stiegler, "Noodiversity, Technodiversity," trans. Daniel Ross, *Angelaki* 25, no. 4 (2020).

3
Louis Chude-Sokei, *The Sound of Culture Diaspora and Black Technopoetics* (Wesleyan University Press, 2016).

4
This line of critique of technology works to reinforce rather than challenge the recursive authority of philosophical decision, which maintains the image of a mindless machine thinking as an extension of the necessary speciation and racialization of the human and reason. Similarly, one could argue that even when the poesis of machine thinking returns in terms of repurposing, retooling, and redistributing, artificial intelligence continues to be measured against the original site of thinking, the natural evolution of sapience, and the cosmogony of Capitalist Man. What the necro-entropy of information capital feeds on is precisely the extraction/abstraction of the total value of the flesh in the making, which is instead represented in terms of an anti-creative mimesis of machines.

5
I am thinking of *field* here in the sense used in Quantum Field Theory. Recursive colonialism is here considered a concept – the name of an approach – that, like the electron in the electromagnetic field, names a certain reconfiguration of matter operated by that which is chosen as the main aspect to be studied. It is in this sense that black feminist poethics is described as playing in the field of recursive colonialism. This means that, if black feminist poethics is used to delimit a field, one should be able to describe recursive colonialism playing – operating, but not defining – in it.

6
Here I am playing with the slight difference between dual and double: dual carries the sense of two separate things while double has the sense of the same thing repeated (copied, etc.).

7
Such as those in my essay "Hacking the Subject: Black Feminism and Refusal beyond the Limits of Critique," *philoSOPHIA* 8, no. 1 (2018).

8
For the development of this argument, see generally Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Unpayable Debt* (Sternberg/MIT Press, 2021).

9
Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* (Continuum, 2005), 252.

10
Reza Negarestani, *Intelligence and Spirit* (Urbanomic/Sequence, 2018), 271.

11
Catherine Malabou, *Morphing Intelligence: From IQ Measurement to Artificial Brains* (Columbia University Press, 2019), 142.

12
Fred Moten, *Knowledge of Freedom, Stolen Life* (Duke University Press, 2018), 14.

13
Denise Ferreira da Silva, "Toward a Black Feminist Poethics: The Quest(ion) of Blackness Toward the End of the World," *The Black Scholar* 44, no. 2 (Summer 2014).