

1. Commons sense and the resistance of the object

“The transcendence of private property is therefore the complete *emancipation* of all human senses and qualities, but it is this emancipation precisely because these **senses** and attributes have become, subjectively and objectively, *human*. The eye has become a *human* eye, just as its *object* has become a social, *human* object — an object made by man for man. The *senses* have therefore become directly in their practice *theoreticians*. They relate themselves to the thing for the sake of the thing, but the thing itself is an *objective human* relation to itself and to man, and vice versa. Need or enjoyment have consequently lost their *egotistical* nature, and nature has lost its mere *utility* by use becoming *human* use.”

— Karl Marx, “Private Property and Communism”

Below, from the poem “Where the Blues Began,” in *Hughson’s Tavern*, by Fred Moten

where the theoreticians will become senses in their practice

where the theoreticians will not be seeing, hearing where the theoreticians will sear, the
theoretician is a seer where the theoreticians will be seen and heard in their practice

where the theoreticians will touch themselves where the theoreticians will become sensual in
their practice

where the reverse will always be in excess where the sequence is for nono and maxine where
reading and recite this scene to John Gwin, my daddy

where they go plot paradise, blue bolivar, boll and marvel where mask and boll and cut and
fry and groove

where the senses will become theoreticians in their practice

— Fred Moten, “where the blues began,” in *Hughson’s Tavern*

Fred Moten / “necessity, immensity, and crisis (many edges/seeing things)”
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There's a more than critical criticism that's like seeing things--a gift of having been given to love things and how things look and how and what things see. It's not that you don't see crisis--cell blocks made out of the general meadow, and all the luxurious destitution and ge(n)ocidal meanness, the theft of beauty and water, the policing of everyday people and their everyday chances. It's just that all this always seems so small and contingent against the inescapable backdrop of constant escape--which is the other crisis, that is before the first crisis, calling it into being and question. The ones who stay in that running away study and celebrate its violently ludic authenticity, the historicity that sends us into the old-new division and collection of words and sets, passing on and through, as incessant staging and preparation. This necessity and immensity of the alternative surrounds and aerates the contained, contingent fixity of the standard.

The alternative, and the ones who stand (in) for it, can only be defended in what Mario Pedrosá calls its “experimental exercise,” which happens everyday, and in the recognition of its exercise, which is what I think Marx refers to when he speaks, in “Communism and Private Property,” of the everyday engagement in criticism that is an essential part of a communist way of life, and which sometimes he more than critically enacts when he engages in critique, in the elaboration of a general theory of crisis, and in the urgent address of specific instances of crisis. Questions concerning the theory and actuality of crisis are no less urgent now because crisis is always with us. Seeing things doesn't hide the crisis that critique discloses; rather, it locates more precisely, within a general tendency for upheaval that it constitutes. Seeing things, the alternative seeing of things, the seen and seeing alternative, which a certain deployment of crisis is meant to police, is the crisis of genuine disclosure and generative disruption.

The crisis of deprivation on a global scale is a function of policing that responds to a global ecologic of generation that regulative power brutally (mis)understands as a crisis of law. This is to say that crisis is not only a function of policing but that it has a policing function; it is also to say that crisis is ongoing, generative resistance to the regulation, the policing, that it generates. This poor description of the interplay of policing and crisis is trying reverently to disclose a reversal that already animates *Policing the Crisis*, the classic attendance of Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke and Brian Roberts to the range and force of the generative social and aesthetic upheaval of the alternative in England since World War II. Hall and his fellows analyze the ideological manufacture of crisis as a mode of interpretative regulation. The racialization of already extant criminal activity allows its epidermalized “novelty” to be interpreted as crisis. But the criminalization of that activity, in its relation to the normalization of modes of appropriation whose brutality and scale dwarf any and every instance of “mugging,” is the real problem because, in the end, it was never about this or that instance or collection of instances of law breaking; it was, rather, about the social self-defense of jurisgenerative capacity of which mugging can be said to be a particular manifestation, noteworthy not because of its brutality or venality or degeneracy but only because its enactment of self-defense through (re)propriative acts are susceptible to a condition in which they reinforce the brutal axioms of ownership and exception.

Criticism, the capacity to see things in their branching and unfolding and generative differentiation, attends to generation while critique, as Marx deploys it, attends to the regulation and policing of generation and while degenerate critique, which seems to be deployed today almost everywhere in the normal human sciences, is driven by its own implicit claims of national identity of political subjectivity that have themselves been made subject to a force, and been understood by way of a logic, of degeneration implying a mystery of loss and of what was lost. Here's where the neoliberal lament regarding "the crisis of democracy" (which was, according to Samuel Huntington and his fellows, a function of there being too much democracy) can be understood as the animating trace of certain folks, claiming to be on the left, whose lament of the current loss of "our democracy" is driven by nostalgic fantasies of a democracy that supposedly was held within the structure of, rather than resistance to, American exclusion. It's not coincidence that this convenient repression of American exclusion is usually accompanied by an assertion of American exception which either takes the form of an invocation of "our" best intentions or, more pragmatically, as the assertion of a right to do just about anything in the name of national defense, whose complete detachment from imperial aggression is sanctioned by the serial invocation of crisis.

When people respond to the suppression of the alternative--and Hall and his fellows brilliantly illuminate how state interpretation of the alternative as crisis is a fundamental element of that suppression--the word riot is deployed in order to augment that suppression; but when suppression of the alternative is more (im)properly understood as a response to the alternative it also becomes possible to understand that with regard to the insistent previousness of the alternative it is more accurate to say, over Sly Stone's growl or Joe Strummer's sneer, that there is, and already has been, a riot going on. This is about the anoriginary force of tumultuous derangement, a generative sociopoesis given in and as everyday sensuality. To rise to the defense of this sacred, ordinary, generative violence--to protect it from the ongoing murder--is often to risk a kind of appropriation of the very propriative force one seeks to combat with an otherwise animating fugitivity. Such uprising can take the form of burnin' and lootin' but, even more easily, such appropriation can take the form of a critical account of the justificatory causes of burnin' and lootin'. Meanwhile, what always remains or, more precisely, what must be understood as the irreducible remainder that animates such physical acts as well as such critical accounts, are everyday and everynight things. It's not about the looting of loot or the assault of persons who take shape as shops and wares, or about the insurgents' loss of or exclusion from citizenship or belonging that supposedly makes the former inevitable; it is, rather, all about insurgence as the performative declaration of what we are and what we have and what we give. Put another way, the seemingly infinite production of crisis finds its limit in the infinite rehearsal of generative capacity, in the open field of a generative grammar, in the fecundity of a range of generative principles, all of which reveal the sclerotic constraints that are fostered by an empiricist attitude whose structuring force in the determination of Anglo-American intellectual identity can't be traced back to a certain valorization of the grasp, and the philosophical nomination of the possessive individual to the office of manager of the enclosure, by way of the bloody fingerprints of a transcendental subject who is unable or unwilling to see things but who can neither let things go nor pass things on.

The riot that's goin' on in a party for self-defense. The question concerning its causes, its sources, shouldn't be left to liberal or neoliberal pundits and prime ministers, even when

their more or less racist and ageist elitism leads them to say, with a kind of ignorant and imprecise accuracy, that the causes are cultural. What they don't mean is that culture is the imprecise word we give to regenerative resources of insurgent social life. There's another way of living that exhausts imposed arrangements. It's where and how people fight. When seemingly random and unorganized acts of self-defense erupt against the violence of the state and capital, the only important question is how to maintain their connection to the social field they are meant to defend. This is a question concerning the corrosive, reconstructive force of certain practices that Michael Herzfeld thinks of in terms of "cultural intimacy--the recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of a common sociality, the familiarity with the bases of power that may at one moment assure the disenfranchised a degree of creative irreverence and at the next moment reinforce the effectiveness of intimidation." But what if we begin to consider, against the grain and over the edge of whatever combination of the critique of authenticity and the appeal to upright, paralytic sovereign recitations of the citizen consumer, that the social poetics Herzfeld is after is an undercommon intellectual project that begins to emerge precisely when the distinction between insiders and outsiders breaks down, when a certain kind of communal claim is made in a certain kind of walking down certain city streets, and when that claim is given in and as an active disruption of the nation-state, in and as a kind of masque in which the very habits of the damned are taken on and, thereby, altered in their free, constant and already given alteration. Meanwhile we confront the emergence of new black acts--of the kind E.P. Thompson describes in *Whigs and Hunters*--now outlawing autonomous cybersocial organization for self-defense emerge under the self-regulating cover of the ones who internalize the embarrassment they refuse, the generativity non-citizens claim.

The notion that crisis lies in the ever more brutal interdiction of our capacity to represent or be represented by the normal is as seductive, in its way, was the notion that such interdiction is the necessary response to our incapacity for such representation. Their joint power is held in the fact that whether abnormality is a function of external imposition or of internal malady it can only be understood as pathological. Such power is put in its accidental place, however, by the ones who see, who imaginatively misunderstand, the crisis as our constant disruption of the normal, whose honor is given in and protected by its representations, with the ante-representational generativity that it spurns and craves. This is the crisis that is always with in; this is the crisis that must be policed not just by the lethal physical brutality of the state and capital but also by the equally deadly production of a discourse that serially asserts that the crisis that has befallen us must overwhelm the crisis that we are; that crisis follows rather than prompts our incorporative exclusion.

There's a connection between poetry and violence that Amiri Baraka, among others, began to explore by way of these terms and which now needs to be re-explored in the full awareness that Barak's movement extended, rather than disavowed, that antinomian opening of the field that can be traced back through Charles Olson and Sun Ra, Emily Dickinson and Harriet Jacobs, Anne Hutchinson and Tituba, and beyond. The poetics of the open field, especially when performed in the narrow cell, was always tied to the sociopoetics of riot, of generative differentiation as a kind of self-care, of expropriate disruption as a kind of self-defense, of seeing things as a performed social theory of mind. Baraka took it out, and sometimes tried to take it home, which drove it through him and even further out, in the name of an enformant poetics, spreading the news, and the new in the giving and taking of

form, as lemons, and people piled on steps, disarrayed inappropriately against every propriative and counter-propriative intention that claims to have put them there. We still enact, because we desire and cannot live without, the immense poetry of war, by which Wallace Stevens meant and didn't mean a poetics of social pregnancy, the international, anti-national embarrassment of seeing things and making things. The poetics of the alternative is funereal and venereal, surviving in denotative self-defense and the righteous distortions it enacts in rough advent. There's a This is England poetics, a Luv 'n Haight poetics, moving without moving in and against the brutal smallness of imposed needs and nationalized histories with the kind of out lyricism that only comes from being constrained to be somewhere else, that will have already come from the other side to keep on going, that had already come with those of us who are the other things we see.

8.19.11

ROCK THE PARTY, FUCK THE SMACKDOWN,

Fred Moten

http://www.poetrysociety.org/psa/poetry/crossroads/new_american_poets/fred_moten/

under Bill Brown's blue chicago there's |
unrest in response to continued scolding.

thing object. matter ain't the same
as one another. things don't represent
they must be broke. they cannot pay attention
to objects like objects so they stay mad
all the goddamn time, broken glasses
everywhere. but I sound better since you
cut my throat. the checkerboard is also a
chess board. it's also a cutting board and a
sound board. it's also a winding sheet and a
sound booth.

now you're bored with all these healthy choices
and you don't want to sound as clean as this.
shit smoothed out on me by accident too.
how did I get here? I lost my ideological
mama and her things. her thing's in storage
in north las vegas but no matter, ain't no thing,

'cause when the morning breaks I'ma get my sound back
and all my native weather will be mine.

--from *Hughson's Tavern*

There Is Religious Tattooing

Fred Moten

Audio available Here: <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/239080>

for a long time, the lotion stigma swirled
on the man who clothes me with a broken

world. I came when they called me. that
cotton rubbed me the wrong way all the

way inside over the course of time. way before
cotton sewn into the coat of the one
who clothes me. before I started clothing

them with paper. before cotton sewn into

their coats they curled up on flat boats
all the way back up the country. the beaded
strips of leather and cotton made me come
to myself when he called me and wrote me

on the one who clothes me. pour some water
on me. make coming matter cut and twirl

on me. the law of emulsion is always broke
on me. somebody pour some beautiful jute

on me. let her blow some horn on me. the man
who clothes me in my skin is gonna write

on me. your writing moves to stop on me.

someday they're gonna curve this on a pearl

on me but now it's time to go and I can't wait
to get up out from here. it's simple to stay furled

where you can't live. for a long, long time I've

been wearing this other planet like a scar on me.

--From *Hughson's Tavern*