Drawing on continental and decolonial feminist philosophy, *Spectral Inheritance: Unlearning the Maturity-trope* addresses the centrality of the notions of “maturity” and “development” in discussions of human subjectivity, temporality and ethics. Building on Sylvia Wynter’s framework, the dissertation proposes to read the Euromodern genres of Man in developmental terms. The notion of im/maturity organizes who is capable of sovereign self-governance and who must be governed. By analogy with a normative developmental model of a racialized figure of “the Child,” immaturity-status is assigned to populations and demographics deemed incapable of self-governance. This invention of the civilizational figure of the Child is central to Developmental Man’s atomistic ontology, which is premised on hierarchy, the denial of vulnerability and the severance from a constitutive web of relationality. Such severance is embedded in histories of colonization and separation of children from their communities in Euromodernity and the transgenerational inheritances thereof.

In dialogue with Sylvia Wynter, Alia Al-Saji, María Lugones, Judith Butler and others, this dissertation proposes *spectral inheritance* as an alternative reconfiguration of the nexus of subjectivity, ethics and temporality. Displacing chrononormative developmental tropes of maturation, spectral inheritance acknowledges the coexistence of the plural past in a structure of reinvention, reconfiguration and response to and through its haunting. It insists on unlearning the response-debilitating legacies of Developmental Man and relearning a response-enabling relation to the plural past. Employing feminist figurations, Fanonian sociogeny, genealogical theories of subjectivation, and engaging feminist theories of response-ability, this text is an exercise in such spectral inheritance, asking what it means to inherit the catastrophic worlds of Developmental Man response-ably as an ongoing work of unlearning and co-becoming through a responsive relation to the plural past.

This is the doctoral dissertation of Ruben Hordijk, supervised by Prof. Madina Tlostanova and Dr. Edyta Just.

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Spectral Inheritance
Unlearning the Maturity-trope

Ruben Hordijk
Abstract

Drawing on continental and decolonial feminist philosophy, *Spectral Inheritance: Unlearning the Maturity-trope* addresses the centrality of the notions of “maturity” and “development” in discussions of human subjectivity, temporality and ethics. Building on Sylvia Wynter’s framework, the dissertation proposes to read the Euromodern genres of Man in *developmental* terms. The notion of im/maturity organizes who is capable of sovereign self-governance and who must be governed. By analogy with a normative developmental model of a racialized figure of “the Child,” immaturity-status is assigned to populations and demographics deemed incapable of self-governance. This invention of the civilizational figure of the Child is central to Developmental Man’s atomistic ontology, which is premised on hierarchy, the denial of vulnerability and the severance from a constitutive web of relationality. Such severance is embedded in histories of colonization and separation of children from their communities in Euromodernity and the transgenerational inheritances thereof.

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Keywords: spectral inheritance, maturity-trope, developmental man, response-ability, vulnerability, unlearning, childhood, family abolition, hauntology, sociogeny, genealogy, figurations, feminist theory, decoloniality, continental philosophy
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Note on cover illustration

Donna Haraway retells the story of the notorious lab-experiments between the 1950s and 1970s by Harry Harlow. She notes his ironic, sadistic narrative-strategies to cope with the decades of torture of rhesus-monkeys. The monkeys were put on what Harlow called a “rape rack” to be inseminated: the infants were immediately put in isolation. A graduate student standardized the isolation protocol that ensured that the monkeys would from the very first day never see another living creature save the experimenters’ arms during the first 15 days. This is one of Harlow’s legacies to laboratory hardware, as Haraway writes: “called by its designer ‘the well of despair’ or ‘the vertical chamber apparatus,’ developed not only to achieve total social isolation, including visual contact, but explicitly to reproduce the state of utter hopelessness described as characterizing human depression” (Haraway 1989, 242; emphasis added). Harlow sought to prove that attachment and affection are necessary for mammals. This he did by depriving monkeys of all corporeal contact and letting them “choose” between a metal “surrogate mother” that provided milk but no warmth, and another surrogate mother made of cloth that provided warmth but no milk. The anxious deprived monkeys clung onto the warm cloth. Contemporary canonical reference to Harlow’s studies never fail to mention the “unethical” nature of the experiments but cite it as the definitive authoritative scientific evidence for attachment theory. For example: “Whatever we now think of the ethics of Harlow’s research, he proved beyond any doubt that deprivation of body contact is not something that suits mammals” (Waal 2010, 16). In this way, there is a simultaneous gesture towards our own humanity and progress of ethical standards, while respecting the paternal authority of Harlow: histories of severance and powerlessness (dis)appear in the uncovering of a timeless (severable) truth about human and mammalian nature. This narrative-strategy comforts and solidifies the modern subject-position of benign dominance and progressive temporality, through a double affirmation of the scientist’s sober, realistic positivism, which is the foundation of knowledge, and our evolving sense of morality. I am not citing this as scientific evidence for what I call the social-maternal-ancestral, but, on the contrary, as a testament to the severance from the social-maternal-ancestral and the designs that turn vulnerability into powerlessness.
Preface

"History is not something to be read. And it does not refer merely, or even principally, to the past. On the contrary, the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do (...) And it is with great pain and terror that one begins to realize this. In great pain and terror one begins to assess the history which has placed one where one is and formed one’s point of view (...) thereafter, one enters into battle with that historical creation (...) attempts to recreate oneself according to a principle (...) more liberating (...) the attempt to achieve a level of (...) freedom which robs history of its tyrannical power, and also changes history."

—JAMES BALDWIN

“The problem considered here is located in temporality,” Fanon writes (2008, 201). How to become futural, when a colonial world attempts to enclose his being and foreclose any new beginning? When a white world fixates him to an essence spun of a thousand fictions and histories not of his own making; when complex histories are erased, intergenerational chains of transmission are broken, and one’s traditions are disfigured or ossified as allochronic object of study for the ends of colonial knowledge, administration or rule; when the affective space one inhabits is orchestrated by white presence and temporality; how to become futural when the legacies of violence are written in the bodies, locations and communities of the damnés? Socialized (or, better: subjectivated) as middle-class Martinique subject consciously identifying with Frenchness and unconsciously identifying with whiteness as site of belonging, meaning and identity, Fanon ultimately gave up on the attempt to be a legitimate heir of white French culture once he was confronted with the fact that it was built on the negation of his very existence. The attempt at finding a legitimate standing in a return to alleged African histories and essences felt equally as an inauthentic escape from his predicament in a racist-colonial world. Fanon emphatically rejects being chained to legacies and inheritances and attempts to embrace his own and his generation’s task of making and sharing breathable and creative relational worlds. A breathable future, he insists, requires a radical break with Euromodern sociogeny. But it would be too simple to read Fanon as a version of modernist temporality that has to turn away from the past for the sake of becoming futural. Fanon knows (although perhaps at times tries to escape) that the “burning past” of generations of oppression lives on in the tensions of his muscles, the rhythms of his breath, the unconscious identification with white values and in the repudiation of his own Black being (Fanon 1967, 4; Scott 2010; Al-Saji 2021; 2023). The question of Fanon’s breathability involves bearing
witness to the lived experience and inheritances of colonial subjection, both as a writer and as a psychiatrist. As Alia Al-Saji writes, “I think that *Peau noire, masques blanques*, at once, embodies the affective weight of the ‘burning past’ and renders it bearable—by carrying its burden with us. It makes the past hesitate” (Al-Saji 2023, 33). This bearing witness breaks with the colonial order of a single white present that encloses the Other to the past and promises only a single future—one of civilizational whiteness.

Fanon asks what it means to become “actional” and to claim futurity in an attempt at overcoming what Nietzsche called reactivity, a state of being that the racialized in a white society are forced into (Fanon 2008). But to be futural is not so much a rejection of pastness in order to become a new sovereign subject unburdened by the past; it is to learn to become responsive to and through that past—which requires sociogenic transformation of social, political, cultural and economic worlds that enable that responsivity. Bearing witness refuses the single, uni-versal timeline that delegates the multiplicity of life-worlds to the past in the name of a single present and white civilizational futurity. In this generative refusal, bearing witness participates in the transformation of this single unbreathable world by prying open the disavowed inheritances, legacies and tendencies of the plural past, allowing for a “reconfiguration of the past” (Al-Saji 2018) and the making of other worlds.

The various voices ensembled in this dissertation—María Lugones, Sylvia Wynter, Friedrich Nietzsche, Gloria Anzaldúa, Judith Butler, Kelly Oliver, Nina Lykke, among others—take up different generational, local and planetary challenges. From their various interventions from different subject-positions, I hear resonances in their stories: how to respond to the burden of the past and overcome the stifling legacies of violence? Their different answers also all point in a similar direction: it is neither through disavowal of the past, nor through return to a prior state that needs to be purged from contaminating external influences, but through a spectral embrace of the plurality of the past in a critical and creative reinvention thereof. Besides, perhaps, the reactive obsession with individual greatness in Nietzsche, my teachers all emphasize that this is more than a question of individual becoming and entails a radical restructuring of Euromodernity’s catastrophic world of severance, fragmentation and debilitation. Although it implicates everyone, the “affective weight of the past” is carried, inhabited and inherited differently by differently situated subjects (Al-Saji 2018). This dissertation addresses what I believe should accompany every radical politics of undoing, interrupting, abolishing

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1 The invoked *us* refers to people who disproportionally are forced to carry the weight of the *longue durée* and ongoing formations of imperial and colonial debilitation. This revolutionary point of departure for radical psychiatry is developed by many traditions of the oppressed, including in feminist movements since the 1960s.
and/or transforming the response-debilitating structures, focusing on how we
differentially inhabit and inherit these structures. This is a work of ongoing and
never-ending unlearning our (the reader may decide for themself whether or in
what ways they consider themself addressed) investments and implication in
response-debilitation, and relearning to critically engage in response-enabling
co-becoming.

If, from the perspective of the damnés, Man’s promise of civilizational
futurity has always shown to be in fact a process of genocidal, omnicidal
defuturing (Ghosh 2022; Fry and Tlostanova 2021), now the Euromodern figure
of Man aspires little hope for any futurity for anyone (with perhaps the exception
of the less than 1%), facing the imminent threat of no-future. In a widely shared
sense of lack of futurity, what does it mean to belong to one’s time and take up
a generational challenge (Fanon 2008, xvii)? In the ongoing work of figuring
this out, as a process of re-con-figuration of my and our relationship to the plural
past and the possibility of alternative futures, one thing is clear to me: the
attempt at breaking with the past, to exorcize its ghosts, to let the dead bury the
dead and turn our gazes solely towards the future, guarantees the reproducing of
the cycles of oppression and transgenerational effects of debilitation. What does
it mean to learn to become a response-able heir to those response-debilitating
legacies? How to learn to inherit critically the constitutive transgenerational
effects of oppression? How to inhabit them in ways that do not reproduce them,
and let fragmented Others of Man carry most of its weight, infesting others with
the haunted spirits of the past that reside in all of us? How to learn to (re)tell the
story well, in a way that I need to tell it (Trinh 1989), to reclaim and enact my
own responsivity and response-ability, which does not make the Other
serviceable to the self, thereby debilitating responsivity of others in the name of
a substantive self, and continue to add to the debris that the angel of history
cannot piece back together (Benjamin 2007)? The storm of progress, the
imperial timeline (Azoulay 2019) with its racialized temporalities (Al-Saji
2021), might not cease until there is no human world possible; but neither can it
exhaust the possibilities of the debris it leaves in its wake. Attending to this
debris, as well as attending to the modes of attending, nurtures the relationship
to the multiplicity of the past that prevent all of us from being replicators of
systems of abuse and transgenerational legacies of violence.

The lessons that the personal is political, or that existence is sociogenic,
which enabled me to tell my story, are lessons that I was able to learn by
listening to other stories. In particular, I learned how the nuclear family is one
of the most catastrophic and cruel social technologies ever invented, an
intergenerational trauma-machinery that allows for structural abuse in a way that
is constitutive of our being. But I also learned to avoid reading this ontogenically
and read it as gendered and racialized assemblages that sever and fragment
communities and individuals in different-yet-related ways. Tracing cycles of
oppression, violence and abuse, in a world ensnared (but not contained) by
Euromodern colonial-capitalist patriarchal, antiblack, (cis)heteronormativity, that transmit the affective weight of the transgenerational legacies of violence unevenly. The nuclear family as institution, somewhere between an impossible ideal of bourgeois white civility and the enforced realities of social organization of bodies and kinship that erode forms of community, does not only press differently on differently situated for subjects, but also inscribes and obscures these differences through the universal figures of Man, Woman, Family and—a nodal point for this dissertation—the Child: an abstract yet facially, sexually, classed, etc. inflexed figure embodying immaturity and the normativity of an allegedly universal non-sociogenic development into adulthood. The nuclear family is a bedrock of capitalism as a (raced, classed) ideal attainable to few. The imposition of this ideal severs the many modes of multigenerational communal living that keep structures of abuse in check. If on the one hand the isolation of the nuclear family is what makes it a transgenerational trauma-machine, then at the same time surveillance of race and class prevent the mythic dream-home from it being a shelter. Since we have all been children (distinct from the dubious status of Child to which we are differently positioned), this is where we first bear witness to the sociogenic truth that simultaneously constitutes us. For many, scenes related to the nuclear family or aberration thereof, involve the most intimate memories and affective dwellings, where first a sense of self, dreams of belonging and yearnings form themselves in ways that become a constitutive haunting. Even when coming to understand its unbearableness, unbreathability and/or undesirability, their ghosts are there to stay. It is about learning to live well with the ghosts, not their attempted exorcism (Derrida 2012; Tuck and Ree 2013; Gordon 2008a). I also had to learn that these cycles of oppression my and our implicate in them, is not the whole story: this story is sometimes unnarratable, and in the telling or the telling of the impossibility of its telling, there are necessary gaps, interstices and opacities. The ability of witnessing and storytelling, the response-ability to the past as the praxis of creative and critical reconfiguration of the plurality of the past, does not draw from sites of subjection only. There is a force that enables to retain or (re)learn this responsivity and response-ability despite (yet through and within) the response-debilitating systems of Euromodern fragmentation and severance.

I understand childhood years (enclosed by the figures of the Child and immaturity) as constitutive subjection and as participatory witnesses in the sociogenic truth that we inherit and inhabit. The response-ability to “become who we are” (Nietzsche 2007) as witnesses to our personal and political

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2 Often the possibility of response is all but foreclosed and a response-able relation to the past is debilitated (Hartman 2008a; 2008b). Often narratability is not desirable and can further response-debilitation, weighing down more heavily on certain subjects.
sociogenic becoming, taps into the oldest human legacies of the collective praxis as *homo narrans* (Wynter 2001). As storytellers and participatory witnesses within a collective sociogenic truth, we need not mechanically reproduce its codes of fragmentation and dehumanization and repeat the cycles of abuse, but can honor the response-enabling precedence by response-ably engaging in retellings and reconfigurations that enable the Other’s responsivity (Oliver 2001) and acknowledge the multiplicity of the past instead of trying to close it off and draw our substantive identities from it.

Finally, I keep having to learn the entanglement of response-enabling inheritances and response-debilitating ones and resist the attempt at separating one from the other (my moralizing Protestant inheritance, perhaps, that I continue to have to unlearn): just as the purity of the white bourgeois family and people’s investment in legitimate personhood that derive from that antiblack patriarchal organization of kinship does not exist, so does the purity of resistance to the hierarchical and fragmented world of Man not exist. As spectral heirs dwelling in the *impure impurity* of both response-enabling and response-debilitating inheritances, there is no past or future state of being or moral code to guide us, but only the impure attempt at ethical co-becoming through unlearning our (my) investments in pure identities and legitimate personhood, and building social and political worlds that enable responsivity to all in their multiplicity, opacity and differences.³

Fanon’s voice(s), emerging from the multiplicitous legacies between Martinique, France and Algeria, between the West Indies, Europe and Africa, claimed his generational challenge in the struggle for Algerian and pan-African decolonization and revolution, to help end the inheritances of colonial response-debilitation. The different voices put in dialogue in this dissertation all made/make their interventions from their different and multiple locations, often in various ways targeted by imperial formations of debilitation (Puar 2017), implicated or erased as subjects “who were never meant to survive” (Lorde 2007), articulating their generational challenges differently. These voices tell stories that interrupt and force me to “hesitate” (Al-Saji 2014) and to unlearn the affective and cognitive habits of whiteness and masculinity that I ignore at my own and others’ peril. But this con-frontation is also agonistic, allowing me to figure out my generational challenge, at once personal and political. My hope is that I engage the others’ stories to tell my own in a response-able way that is response-enabling, and does not extract from other stories in order to

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³ An ethics of responsivity and response-ability must necessarily be critical of any normative standard of “ability” and must be antiracist and committed to neurodiversity.

⁴ Etymologically, this term combines “with” and face-to-face, in an examination of truth: “1630s. Action of bringing two parties face to face, for examination and discovery of the truth” (Etymology Online).
substantiate an identity for myself, or to obscure my own situatedness, but participates in the multiplicitous storytelling that allows for the (re)tellings of many other stories—as a praxis of honoring, witnessing and reweaving the plurality of the past for a plural futurity. Whether I succeed or slip back into phallogocentric and antiblack tropes of the view from nowhere/above (Haraway 1988), or overrepresentation (Wynter 2003), is not up to me to judge, but I hope for a spirit of generous critique on this ongoing journey of unlearning and co-becoming.
INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1: The Maturity-trope, Severance and Feminist Response-

Ability

The question is not who will come after Man, but rather how to exit the world dominated by him.

–ARIELLA AISHA AZOULAY

The maturity-trope

This dissertation starts from the following proposition: Modern subjectivity emerges as a perpetual negotiation between maturity and immaturity both within and among subjects. Immanuel Kant’s famous definition of the Enlightenment captures its logic well: “Enlightenment is man’s emergence out of his self-incurred immaturity (selbstverschuldeten Unmündigkeit)” (Kant 2013a, 54). Immaturity (Unmündigkeit) is defined as the incapacity to use one’s own understanding without the guidance (Leitung) of someone else. What becomes apparent in Kant’s writing is what I will call, borrowing Sylvia Wynter’s framework, a developmental genre of Man, which grafts the development of the abstract universal model of the individual (qua white, male, bourgeois, etc.) from immaturity to maturity onto the development of human society and human history. The modern invention of “the Child,” which separates children from adult society (Ariès 1996; Illich 1973; Firestone 2015; Foucault 1991; 1998), becomes the object of new sciences and technologies in need of guidance, training and discipline, to straighten his development into adulthood; marking the passage from an unruly natural state of pre-subjective animality or savagery to heteronormative civil personhood and social and moral responsibility. At the same time, the immaturity-status of the Child, “by design deprived of civil rights and infantilized” (Gill-Peterson 2018, 2), is distributed among many demographic groups to denote who counts as full-fledged subject, person or citizen and who counts as property or sub-person temporarily or perpetually stuck in immaturity and thus in need of external governance. This differential distribution of im/maturity differs widely across contexts, requiring sociogenic and genealogical approaches to show the interlocking or intermeshing systems of race, gender, religion, age, dis/ability, etc. as un/fit for mature self-governance and in differential need of guidance, governance and/or/as subjection; or at the border-case, all too structural in Euromodernity, deemed completely incapable of development, a waste of efforts, or a parasitic force on the health of a nation or humanity. The dehumanizing frame of im/maturity
marks and exposes Man’s Other(s) to a whole range of response-debilitating violence, ranging from infantilizing care to genocide.

As Wynter and many others have shown, the notion of the human and the epistemic order in Euromodernity are thoroughly racialized and the language of im/maturity must be understood as such. Race as “allochronism” or “denial of co-evalness” (Fabian 2014; see also Lugones 2010; Rifkin 2017) does not only place the racialized Other prior to or outside of historical time (with the white West as the present), but also serves as the discursive frame for legitimate governance and exploitation determining who is able to develop, to what extent and through which means; or whether, in the progressive arch to civilization, it is at all possible to mature or to the contrary that extermination is regrettably inevitable or even desirable (Lindqvist 2012). This moral and scientific language finds its counterpart in the differential exploitability and disposability of populations (Mbembe 2003; Lindqvist 2012). The language of maturity reconciles Euromodern ideals of freedom with the subjugation and domination of those deemed immature. John Stuart Mill says as much in On Liberty immediately after introducing his no-harm principle:

It is, perhaps, hardly necessary to say that this doctrine is meant to apply only to human beings in the maturity of their faculties. We are not speaking of children (...) Those who are still in a state to require being taken care of by others, must be protected against their own actions as well as against external injury. For the same reason, we may leave out of consideration those backward states of society in which the race itself may be considered as in its nonage. (...) a ruler full of the spirit of improvement is warranted in the use of any expedients that will attain an end, perhaps otherwise unattainable. Despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement (...) Liberty, as a principle, has no application to any state of things anterior to the time when mankind have become capable of being improved by free and equal discussion. Until then, there is nothing for them but implicit obedience to an Akbar or a Charlemagne, if they are so fortunate as to find one. (Mill 1982, 69; italics added)

Mill and Kant disagree on whether white women are mature subjects (or at least capable of mature subjectivity), and to what extent other “races” can be improved and reach maturity. But the hierarchical logic of civilized mature subjects governing the immature Other, “provided the end be their improvement,” is a shared assumption across their different times and locations,

5 Whiteness understood in terms of race and class as marker of civility and true womanhood or manhood (Spillers 2003; Lugones 2007; McClintock 1995; Baldwin 1985; Fanon 2008; discussed in more detail in chapter 3).
“hardly necessary to say.”6 “The fair sex,” long held by definition in a legal status of immaturity, was often described in terms of perpetually maintaining infantile or immature characteristics. Schopenhauer called women “big children all their lives, something intermediate between the child and the man” whose destiny is “the propagation of the race,” i.e., to bear the child who can turn into a full mature man (cited in Cavarero 2016, 4). Next to the contestation of the status of (white) women as im/mature subjects, “woman” thus mostly features as maternal space within the maturation-developmental discourse and breeder of the (male) Child who turns into a mature Man. Again, as Anne McClintock (1995) and others have pointed out (Castañeda 2002; Jackson 2020; Gill-Peterson 2018), this works by analogy between the individual and race: the individual Child must learn to separate from the mother to mature as social and moral agent through the intervention of the paternal law (in psychoanalytic terms the move from pleasure-principle to reality-principle). Analogously, humanity must emerge out of its irrational state of nature—engulfed by an unruly maternal space that is not cultivated and ordered according to patriarchal principles. Ranjana Khanna demonstrates this link between colonial and maternal space as the “dark continents” through which enlightened subjectivity defines itself oppositionally (Khanna 2003), akin to McClintock’s concept of “anachronistic space,” which would be in need of male conquest (McClintock 1995).

The maturity-trope of civilizational discourse in general and in psychoanalysis in particular is most evident in Sigmund Freud’s discussion in Totem and Taboo, in which he argues for

a comparison between the phases in the development of men’s view of the universe and the stages of an individual’s libidinal development. The animistic phase would correspond to narcissism both chronologically and in its content; the religious phase would correspond to the stage of object-choice of which the characteristic is a child’s attachment to his parents; while the scientific phase would have an exact counterpart in the stage at which an individual has reached maturity, has renounced the pleasure principle, adjusted himself to reality and turned to the external world for the object of his desires. (Freud 1950, 105)

Freud may have troubled bourgeois self-understanding as the pinnacle of civilization, progress and maturity, but he does so by showing that “infantile traces” (Freud 1950, x; translation modified) of an individual and collective past of superstition and desire for violence and unbridled pleasure haunt the modern mind (the scandalous message to “civilized” subjects being that the “savage”

6 Historian Caroline Elkins shows how Mill’s argument has been a structural part of British empire, although the unsubtle language of benign parental authority governing children continued to be modified throughout the 20th century in more acceptable developmental vocabulary, such as “senior partners” working with their “junior partners” (Elkins 2022).
lurks within), thereby stabilizing a civilizational discourse by means of the maturity-trope: the shock that even modern (read: white bourgeois) neurotics and children (read: white bourgeois children) contain atavistic traces of savagery solidifies the framework of the mature civilized vs. the immature savage even when its distinction is never clear-cut, always unstable, always a threat, always in need of self-discipline or (therapeutic, biopolitical) intervention, guidance, correction.

The maturity-trope in Freud and beyond also defines queerness and transness in terms of arrested or perverted development (Gill-Peterson 2018). Freud’s theory of immature bisexuality leading to mature heterosexuality is fully consistent with the racial mapping of populations onto an evolutionary-developmental scale from savagery to civilization. Queerness is similarly described as a threat of unrestrained and unruly infantilism unrestrained by proper civilized development. As one early 20th century US doctor points out, “the homosexual is often immature and infantile looking” and pertains characteristics of infantile stages, typified by “curiosity and manipulation, essentially hedonistic and self-gratification (...) Homosexuality, therefore, in some cases is the failure to develop beyond a certain phase” (Rennie cited in Gill-Peterson 2018, 88).

The monstrousity of excessive, unruly, nonbinary and infantile sexual energy outside of the bounds of proper development into white binary civilized humanity is in all these cases thoroughly racialized, as Lugones points out with the notion of coloniality of gender (see chapter 3), which takes binary sex and heterosexuality as the pinnacle of development into mature civil humanity through disciplining of immature monstrous sexual unruliness. The monstrous and unruly sexuality not yet under the yoke of patriarchal civilization points both to the need to discipline individual children (to ensure the straightness of their developmental trajectory) and racialized populations for their maturation and participation in civilized humanity. The 19th century medical discourse of disability is equally characterized by this racialized maturity-trope. Notoriously, Dr. Down’s characterization of trisomy 21 transposes the fanatic search of white scientists to map racial typologies on an evolutionary developmental scale onto his subject matter: “The number of idiots who arrange themselves around the Mongolian type is so great, and they present such a close resemblance to one another in mental power, that I shall describe an idiot member of this racial division” (Down 1866, n.p.).

Despite this instability of the dividing line between mature/immature, the meaning of the racialized Other is always-already predefined and one always comes “too late” to the allochronical hermeneutical trap one finds oneself in
Fanon challenges the coloniality of the psychoanalytic framework through the category of sociogeny, displacing the racial universal developmental frames of ontogeny and phylogeny. He criticizes the colonial psychoanalytic anthropology of Octave Mannoni, who argues that a superiority complex of the French colonizer and an inferiority complex of the Malagasy colonized preceded and enabled the processes of French colonization of Madagascar. In his discussion of Fanon’s life and work, Hussein Abdilahi Bulhan reconstructs Mannoni’s argument that “the Malagasy are seen to be children who lack the courage, desire, or temperament to grow to mature adulthood” (Bulhan 1985, 110). Mannoni argues that the reason for the dependency complex lies in excessive breastfeeding and delayed weaning, which perpetuates a state of immaturity as fundamental psycho-existential condition of the Malagasy (Bulhan 1985, 110). The Malagasy, like the Child, would continue to desire parental figures to whose authority they can bow down to in order to avoid facing the isolation and responsibility of mature adulthood. The maturity-trope thus runs through various philosophical, psychological, anthropological and political discourses across many intersections. Its relation to judgement on other ways of childrearing (excessive breastfeeding) is not accidental and will prove central to the idea of proper governance of immature bodies by mature subjects that supposedly puts the immature Other on the road to maturity. It opens the door to a justification of the most violent practices of severing children from their communities and subjecting them to civilizational development, transmuting exploitation and genocide into a matter of civilizing, development or humanization.

Freud’s speculations on the psychodevelopment of the human species was based on records of contemporary Arrernte people, who, according to scientific consensus, had to represent the most primitive stage of humanity still alive. Sven Lindqvist explains the history of how the Arrernte came to have this status and became the raw material for colonial scientific theories on primitive religion and its stages in the theories of the likes of Sir James Frazer and Sigmund Freud. The Arrernte, faced with the genocidal impact of settlers, strategized that if they were able to communicate their culture to the settlers, they might not be treated as disposable savages who had to pass away to make way for white settlement. For this reason, they wanted their rituals and beliefs recorded and with that intent they approached a nearby settler who contacted a biology professor Baldwin Spencer. The Arrernte staged their rituals for Spencer to record. But this attempt at intercultural communication and political strategy was quickly transmuted into raw data that allegedly represented the most primitive manifestation of human culture and religion still alive today (Lindqvist 2007, 40–42). This is a tragic illustration of Fanon’s and Al-Saji’s interpretation of racialization as always arriving “too late,” depriving the racialized Other of agency and reflection that is not first predefined or overdetermined by white colonial interpretation (Al-Saji 2021).
Severance

These discursive links between the Child and the Primitive and “women and children” in contradistinction with mature enlightened subjectivity are well-established (Jackson 2020; McClintock 1995; Castañeda 2002; Firestone 2015; Gill-Peterson 2018). In this dissertation I wish to put these analyses of the infantilizing discourses around racialized others, women and gender-nonconforming people, in conversation with a critique of Euromodern conceptions of the Child and its meaning for (intersectionally and geopolitically differentiated) childhood subjectivation: what does it say about the conception or genre of the human if childhood is based on the denial of the status of human personhood, and the subjecttion of these not-yet-persons to different regimes of training, discipline, protection, to ensure the straight developmental trajectory into heteronormative adulthood and civility? How is this genre of the human inherited and inhabited differently by people marked differently by the discourses and governance of civilizational development and maturation? And how to instigate its unlearning and undoing?

I am interested in connecting the maturity-trope to another frequent observation, namely that missionaries, anthropologists, conquistadors, colonial officers and (other) settlers were often shocked by the childrearing practices they witnessed in different colonial encounters. This participated in the structural attempt at destroying those forms of sociality and at severing children from communities to be subjected to the patriarchal and hierarchical principles of Man. The colonial archive is full of these ambivalent observations about the relationship between freedom, autonomy of and communal and unconditional care for children. For example, in the context of the colonization of/as Australia, Swedish historian Sven Lindqvist suggests a relation between the genocidal institutions of severance of the Lost Generations with shock of settlers in Australia vis-à-vis the freedom and love with which Aboriginal children grew up:

Aboriginal children grew up in great freedom, loved and cherished. White Australians had often known very different childhoods. Most came from Great Britain. Many remembered a childhood of hard work, sleeping on the factory floor under the machines. Others remembered a childhood without parents, abandoned in bullying boarding schools. How did they react when they saw black children growing up unpunished, surrounded by loving parents, siblings and other relatives? Even Malinowski couldn't resist raising a warning finger to the Aborigines for not beating their children. He saw it as a shortcoming in their child-rearing methods, “for it is impossible to conceive of any serious education without coercive treatment.” Other whites must have reacted even more sharply to what they perceived as laxity in Aboriginal children's upbringing. What a provocation the Aborigines’ whole lifestyle, particularly their interaction with their children, must have been to the British! A childhood without shame, without guilt, without punishment! Surely a great sense of loss
must have welled up inside them, a sense of missing all these things they were now condemning as neglect, defective hygiene, lack of manners and discipline. When they took fair-skinned children from their black mothers, was it because those children were getting something they themselves had never had, and they felt a bitter sense of lack when they saw others getting it? (Lindqvist 2007, 68–69)

I propose to understand Euromodernity through the lens of severance with a particular focus on how children are isolated and penalized in different ways, ranging from the education of “civilized” subjects deemed fit to in turn govern themselves and others, to genocidal assimilationist policies, and to genocidal attack and/or negligence (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2019). The colonial systems of tearing the social fabric of relationality, respect and reciprocity, separating “children from families. Children from the land. Children from our political system and our system of governance” (Simpson 2017, 75) is what I call the severance from the social-maternal-ancestral. There is a counterpart to the European histories of severing children in Europe from other spheres of sociality, to make childhood a separate stage to be managed and controlled through technologies of discipline in the institutions of the family, schools, orphanages, houses of correction, etc. and/or subjecting them to alienating forms of labor (Ariès 1996; Foucault 1991; Marx 1953), in which childhood is understood and manifests itself as subjection to a higher authority. The list of structures of severance organized by states, the Church and “the market” is endless: the lost generations in Australia (Garimara/Pilkington 2019; Lindqvist 2007), residential schools on Turtle Island (Truth and Reconciliation

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I borrow the term Euromodernity from Lewis Gordon but use it slightly differently: Gordon means the West (always entangled with whiteness) as the universal definition of belonging to the present and having a future—modernity functioning as allochronism of the non-Western Other—and insists on the racist provinciality of the Euromodern in the name of plural modernities: multiple ways of inhabiting the present and building future-worlds (Gordon 2021). First, I am less interested in multiplying modernities and more interested in the critique of the time as an imperial timeline that divides past, present and future (Azoulay 2019). The figuration of spectral inheritance starts from the multiplicity of the past that persists, insists and exists in the present with the imperative of responding differently to the multiplicity of the past for reinventing response-enabling relational worlds. Second, to submit that there is an equivalence to Afro-modernity and not just a Euro-modernity, leads to a complicated connection of the Euromodern project to space or place. Every space contains multiple and relational histories including the space designated as Europe, although that very name is inseparable from the legacies of Euromodernity as the murderous migration policies continue to protect and thus call into being the notion of a sovereign Europe. So, my usage of Euromodern refers to the universal civilizational project since 1492 that despite its multiplicitious historical articulations has the pretension of universal truth and undermines pluriversality. This means it is not to be equated with place or identity, but names critically what is usually championed under the names “the West” or “Western.”
Commission of Canada 2015; Duran 2006), the Middle Passage and enslavement premised on the denial of all kin-ties and relation besides the relation between owner and property on Abya Yala and Turtle Island (Spillers 2003; Roberts 1997; Hartman 1997; Sharpe 2016), are notorious cases; as are the different manifestations of displacement, genocidal “assimilation” through adoption or boarding schools, exploitation, abuse and disappearance of Sami children through boarding schools and displacements (Knoblock 2022); the forceful removal of Romani children under the Habsburg monarchy and ongoing (transnational) racist adoption structures with the “best interest of the child” at heart (Chai 2005); the stealing and illegal adoption of Argentinian children during the 1976-1983 dictatorship (Abuelas de Plaza Mayo 2007); the Church and state-organized export for adoption of “illegitimate children” in Ireland (Shildrick 2020); the disappearance of Yemeni children meant for adoption to Ashkenazi Jewish families in the early years after the Nakba and establishment of the state of Israel (Fezehai 2019); the forced adoption of “illegitimate children” of unwed young women in the Netherlands between the 1950s and 1980s especially of mothers with Surinamese, Antillean or Indonesian roots (NOS 2019); the incarceration of children at the US-Mexico border (Luiselli 2017); the so-called child welfare system or “family policing system” that targets and disciplines Black families in the US (Roberts 2022); long and ongoing histories of forced sterilizations of Indigenous and other racialized people on Abya Yala and Turtle Island (Caranza Ko 2020; Clarke 2021) and elsewhere; and a host of other genocidal biopolitical and necropolitical technologies that structurally aimed to destroy language, culture, identity, other social, ethical and political worlds, and make children vulnerable to ultimate exploitation, abuse and disposability. This brief and utterly incomplete index of examples (indeed, it is hard to think of any location, population, state not characterized by such histories of severance) is not meant as a comparison or flattening of differences, but as a way of highlighting a structural element of Euromodernity, inherent to the logic of the genre of Developmental Man, and the haunting and haunted grounds of the present. As I will argue for

9 A brief selection from recent news reports just related to the Netherlands, my country of origin: (i) Dutch childcare benefit scandal: during the 2010s, tens of thousands of parents and families were falsely accused of making fraudulent claims to childcare benefits, leading to massive debts and many removals of children from homes. This was in part due to an algorithmic assessment of people who are considered “risk factors,” which Amnesty International and others have called out for its structural racism (citizenship status, last name, socio-economic status, and also gender, were criteria of whether someone would likely be a fraud or a risk) (Amnesty, 2021). (ii) structural sexual abuse at SOS Children’s Villages in Suriname: from the founding in 1972 until the closing in 2006, there was structural sexual abuse and mistreatment
understanding subjectivity and time as a form of inheritance, not as something we have but as something we are, the violence of severance and development are carried differently by differently situated subjects; the modes of subjectivation of Developmental Man perpetuate these cycles of violence and make dehumanized others carry the lion-share of the “affective weight of the past” (Al-Saji 2021). This unevenly distributed “weight of history” (Mbembe 2017, 177) is a collective response-ability, as is interrupting its contemporary formations from these historical structures.

Further, severance also names the relationship to nonhuman animals and other nonhuman others: the separability of nonhuman animals—and historically, humans and infants—to manipulate in a controlled, separate environment for experimentation is foundational for Euromodern science; the daily “sacrifices” of nonhuman animals and the ghosts of the deceased upon whose bodies medicine has thrived bear witness to this foundational and structural violence; not to mention the staggering number of cattle being separated on the very day they are born from mothers and others for profit to be extracted from their dystopian lives. Even though this falls outside of the scope of this dissertation, severance is inseparable from this structural violence against nonhuman animals and the destruction of environmental habitats. The cover illustration (see the story of Harlow’s monkey experiments) gestures towards severance and the powerlessness it induces, acknowledging it as the haunting grounds of our epistemic order.

The list of Euromodern terrors—names that cannot contain the terror they signify—cannot always easily be divided into colonizer vs. colonized but point to a complex set of relations where different groups are differentially produced through the modes of subjectivation/subjugation/subjection of Euromodern Developmental Man. The fragmentation into different identity-groups according to race, gender, sexuality, class, dis/ability, age, religion, etc. is an effect of Man and requires collective response-ability to unlearn and undo that past and reconfigure the constellation past-present for other response-enabling modes of futurity for the flourishing of all.

At this point I would like to introduce the first story to connect these threads of maturity, civilization, childhood and severance. The dissertation is punctured by brief stories of human and nonhuman children, mothers and others.

of Surinamese children in the care of the Dutch international children’s aid organization that organizes shelter for children in need (Nieuwsuur, 2023). (iii) Fortress Europe and the denial of family reunions: In the 2023 forging of EU deals to strengthen Fortress Europe that legalizes mass detainment, the Dutch government pushed for the possibility of detaining minors. Later that year, the government fell due to the insistence of the prime minister to refuse family reunions of people on the move, which led to the election victory of the fascist Islamophobic Party for Freedom.
During the writing process, these narratives gathered and generated the figurations and serve as points of orientation and guidance throughout the rhizomatic (or mycelial) network of figures and concepts. Stories are one of the ways of maintaining transgenerational transmission, a way of acknowledging and reconfiguring the relation to the past that enable responsivity, recreation and reinvention in the face of the present moment, building other futures (Simpson 2011; Trinh 1989; Trinh 2011; Hordijk and Ilicenko 2024). Stories accompany the text not as examples but as ways of keeping theorizing plural, non-systematic and open-ended modes of re-membering and responding to and through the plural past. The stories include scenes of extreme violence of severance that are constitutive of the civilizational-developmental Euromodern projects. The ethics of retelling such stories are always fraught with ambivalence. As Saidiya Hartman writes,

> Are we witnesses who confirm the truth of what happened in the face of the world-destroying capacities of pain (...) the sheer unrepresentability of terror (...)? Or are we voyeurs fascinated with and repelled by exhibitions of terror and suffering? What does the exposure of the violated body yield? (Hartman 1997, 3)

Writing from a non-innocent position of impure impurity, these pertinent questions remain unresolved, oscillating between the inevitable repetition of violence through exposure and the necessity of bearing witness (Hartman 2008b; Achenbach 2024). The stories involve witnesses to gendered and racialized violence—reader’s discretion is advised.

In her Myths of Male Dominance (1981), the Marxist-feminist anthropologist Eleanor Leacock relates her historical research of the colonization of the Innu of Nitassinan (referred to as “Montagnais-Naskapi of Canada”). She draws on the reports of the Jesuit missionary Paul Le Jeune (1591–1664). Le Jeune considered the main obstacles to the Christianization of the Innu to be (i) their flexible power-system not based on centralized hierarchy but on fluid, context-specific authority; (ii) the independence and autonomy of women, flexible sexual mores, and equal possibility for divorce; and (iii) an “excessive love” for their children and the absence of discipline and punishment as part of the social fabric. The Jesuit program of colonization set out accordingly to (1) create “permanent settlement and the institution of formally recognized chiefly authority” (Leacock 1981, 46); (2) “introducing the principle of punishment (...) in social relations” (1981, 46); (3) Christian “education” of children (based on discipline and punishment), and (4) a nuclear family structure based on male authority and female obedience. In short, Le Jeune aimed to institutionalize patriarchal hierarchies that require subjection to discipline, punishment and monogamy to move from the level of “savage” to the level of Christian civilization (obedience of children towards parents; of women towards men; of Man towards God—whose closest representative in this context is, of course, Le Jeune himself). Le Jeune was a firm believer in the possibility of instruction of the “uncivilized” in the ways of Christian civilization but equally firm in his conviction that the Innu left to their own devices are hopelessly lost: “I would not...
dare assert that I have seen one act of real moral virtue in a savage [sic]. They have nothing but their own pleasure and satisfaction in view” (cited in Leacock 1981, 49). Shocked by the sexual freedom and autonomy of women, Le Jeune reprimanded an Innu man:

“I told him that it was not honorable for a woman to love anyone else except her husband, and that this evil being among them, he himself was not sure that his son, who was there present, was his son. He replied, ‘Thou hast no sense. You French people love only your own children; but we all love all the children of our tribe.’ I began to laugh, seeing that he philosophized in horse and mule fashion.” (cited in Leacock 1981, 50)

Even more upsetting was the lack of discipline and punishment for the children. By being “as free as wild animals” there was a lack of “a peremptory command obeyed, or any act of severity or justice performed” (cited in Leacock 1981, 54). For Le Jeune, the ideas of justice, virtue and morality required discipline and punishment to raise oneself above the level of wild beasts; humanization, civilizing and Christianizing entail obedience to commands from an authority from above that transcends the untamed freedom of an alleged animal savagery: “The Savages [sic] prevent their instruction; they will not tolerate the chastisement of their children; whatever they may do, they permit only a simple reprimand” (cited in Leacock 1981: 46). The solution is to “remove the children from their communities for schooling” (in Leacock 1981, 46.) based on the principles of discipline and corporeal punishment. Le Jeune’s report continues noting the struggle and opposition to implementing punishment as a means of social cohesion. One famous anecdote speaks of a French boy who hit an Innu child who started bleeding; the Innu demanded gifts as a countermeasure for this offence, but instead Le Jeune organized a public whipping of the French boy as a punishment for his deed, whereupon some Innu members tried to intervene and protect the French boy from the physical punishment. Ultimately, despite the resistance, Le Jeune writes about the “successes” in implementing his colonization program and thereby “Christianizing/civilizing” the Innu: “an act fit to astonish all those who know the customs of the Savages [sic], who cannot endure that any one should teach their kinsmen; but God has more power than nature” (in Leacock 1981, 51). Corporeal punishment is the means to move from the savagery of nature to the civilized obedience to the power of God the Father; watched over and administered by the missionary, the faithful servant of Christ who stands closest to God in this hierarchical scheme and bears the responsibility for the salvation of the souls of children —and adults— through obedience to patriarchal power.10

This text opens and connects many paths of inquiry concerning different ideas about childhood and modes of subjectivation: one conception of childhood is

10 Leacock further addresses the reasons why the Innu might have compromised and hesitantly became more receptive to Le Jeune’s Christianization program. Caught amidst the pressures of the 17th-century fur trade making the Innu more vulnerable to warfare and raids, she speculates that the patience and tolerance towards the Jesuit program might have been attempts of part of the Innu to maintain strategic alliances, whereas other sections of society continued to resist these changes.
rooted in the belief that savagery and sin have to be weeded out, and morality and obedience have to be obtained through discipline and punishment, overseeing the process from selfish nature to moral sociality; and that children are the property of their parents, the legitimacy of one’s identity being based on ensuring the paternal line of the offspring. The other respects the autonomy and freedom of children undergirded by multi-generational and multi-gendered communal care, in which biological parenthood has little relevance (especially fatherhood).

If historically there has been a multiplicity of genres of the human, and if the contemporary world is under the yoke of Euromodern genres of Man, how are these different genres of the human inhabited and inherited? In what ways do severance (isolation, separation) and fragmentation (denial of autonomy and freedom, subjection to a higher authority through hierarchy, discipline, obedience, punishment) as inscription onto the body produce a sense of self and identity in relation to hierarchical power? But also: if this 17th century account offers a glimpse of early attempts at colonial efforts to “civilize” and marks the beginning of a multigenerational series of efforts of colonization especially through severance of children from land, community, language and culture that marks them as inherently and perpetually inferior, how is the past carried differentially as “haunting legacies” (Schwab 2010) and embodied inheritances of multigenerational histories of subjection to hierarchical power? How does it implicate us differentially yet collectively in the hierarchical and fragmented world of Developmental Man? How to unlearn our investment in these figures of Child and Man, and (re)learn becoming response-able for the creation of response-enabling worlds and the demolition of response-debilitating calamitous worlds of Man and the unevenly and unjustly distributed weight of the past (Mbembe 2017; Al-Saji 2023)?

I am not sure if I am able to handle these weighty questions, and certainly not whether I can hold the invoked “we” in a collective albeit differential, non-homogenous sense, from the nettled questions of positionality, allowing me to move more smoothly through a more accommodating world (Ahmed 2006) due to markers of privilege (white, male, Global North, EU passport-holder), which makes others carry the affective weight of the past and prevent the past from “hesitating” (Al-Saji 2014). This writing is an attempt and search at doing this response-ably. Whatever its inevitable (yet hopefully generative) failures, shortcomings and blind spots, I stay committed to the necessity and possibility of coalitional work (Harney and Moten 2013), even

11 Although the Jesuit mission shows the purportedly moral face of colonization, it operates on the same plane as genocidal exploitation and extermination, as becomes clear in the 19th and 20th century genocidal assimilationist residential schools (Morgensen 2011).
if/as complex and painful work (Lugones 2003; Tlostanova 2019; Roshanravan 2020). I take the following words of Fred Moten to heart:

The coalition emerges out of your recognition that it’s fucked up for you, in the same way that we’ve already recognized that it’s fucked up for us. I don’t need your help. I just need you to recognize that this shit is killing you, too, however much more softly, you stupid motherfucker, you know? (Harney and Moten 2013, 140–141)

My other guiding principles are the decolonial imperative of unlearning in order to relearn (Mignolo and Tlostanova 2011; Azoulay 2019) and a feminist ethics of response-ability (Oliver 2001; Haraway 2016; Barad 2010; Anzaldúa 2012). I figure unlearning and response-ability through Lugones, Anzaldúa and Al-Saji, arguing that response-ability is not only the response-ability to the Other’s response-ability (Oliver 2001) but also to the plural past and the reconfiguration of the present constellation to the past for the undoing of the catastrophes of colonial temporality (Al-Saji 2023) for the sake of (re)making breathable worlds, in which all can flourish. The inquiry into Child, Developmental Man, childhood subjectivation, severance, aimed at response-ability to the plural past, thus requires an unlearning of what Foucault calls “the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us” (Foucault 1983, xii). This desire and investment into respectable mature selves, which Lugones calls a “unified sovereign self” based on the fragmentation of others, I call the legitimate heir: Developmental Man’s modes of subjectivation make us desire our own subjection, which we continue to infest the Other with, perpetuating Developmental Man’s response-debilitating cycles of violence.

The argument
This dissertation explores the nexus of subjectivity, ethics and temporality, oriented towards an unlearning and exiting of Developmental Man and towards cultivating the alternatives from the multiplicity that never got fully assimilated and absorbed by these Euromodern legacies—even when this multiplicity is never separate or separable from the latter. It argues that the discourses of maturation and development are central to Euromodern organization of subjection, morality and time; and it proposes the alternative figuration of spectral inheritance as a reconfiguration of the nexus of subjectivity, ethics and

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12 Importantly, the quotation continues by differentiating between different socio-political positions related to but not determined by positionality.

13 Feminist philosophers and theorists have often emphasized the irreducible relation between ethics and subjectivity, challenging a phallogocentric tradition that seeks to separate them as separate fields of philosophical inquiry.
temporality that seeks to unlearn the maturity-trope and to learn to live response-ably in the wake of Developmental Man’s catastrophic worlds. I propose the figure of the legitimate heir to name the investments in the maturity-trope and Developmental Man, and employ the figure of the spectral heir as alternative position committed to the ongoing process of unlearning and becoming through a response-able relation to the past.

It asks: how to respond response-ably to the multiple inheritances of both the Euromodern legacies of severance, fragmentation and violence, and the multiple sources and traces of resistance and worlding otherwise/elsewhen? As a structure of spectral inheritance, the question of subjectivity and ethics is about responding, affirming and transforming these inheritances for response-enabling worlds for all.

The relation between subjectivity and ethics on the one hand and temporality on the other is emphasized in different ways: in relation to the maternal body not as stable ground but as temporalization (Söderbäck 2019); from a posthuman Darwinian perspective of open-ended becomings (Grosz 2004); from attending to colonial duration and the ongoing histories of racialization and colonization (Sharpe 2016; Hartman 2008; Al-Saji 2023; Lugones 2010); from emphasis on relation to ancestrality in critical and creative reinvention, transformation and resistance (Alexander 2005; Anzaldúa 2012), to name a few. The structure of argumentation follows works of feminist philosophers to on the one hand critically identify structures of oppression and on the other affirm the immanent resources for worlding otherwise: Kelly Oliver’s witnessing to counter recognition (Oliver 2001), Margrit Shildrick’s vulnerability to counter phallogocentric discourse on the monstrous (Shildrick 2002), María Lugones’ resistant subjectivities/multiplicity countering multiple oppressions/fragmentation (Lugones 2003; 2010). The conceptual pairs are not to be understood as existentially and socio-politically separable realities, but as impure and intertwined inheritances and tendencies that we necessarily inherit (spectral inheritance) and have to learn to relate to response-ably in their impure inseparability (spectral heir).

Let me introduce my main argument through my cast of characters: Sylvia Wynter, Friedrich Nietzsche, Judith Butler, María Lugones, Kelly Oliver and Alia Al-Saji.

Sylvia Wynter
Jamaican transdisciplinary philosopher, scholar, novelist, dancer and actress Sylvia Wynter introduces the notion of genres of the human and outlines the Euromodern hegemonic conception of Man that undergirds the contemporary colonial order of things is central to this dissertation. Put very briefly (for a more extensive discussion, see chapter 3 and especially chapter 4), Wynter proposes a comprehensive theory of the human and history, arguing that (i) a European,
white, bourgeois, male conception or genre of the human, which she names Man, has become hegemonic around the globe through colonization; (ii) this genre of Man is based on the structural othering and dehumanization of hosts of groups with race/racialization at the heart of its self-Other logic; and most importantly (iii) from the space of liminal subjectivities that are structurally barred from inhabiting this norm of Man, a potentiated double-consciousness emerges from which the Euromodern genre of Man can be toppled, and a new genre of the human and a new humanism can emerge, no longer based on dehumanization but capable of addressing the environmental, economic and other socio-political catastrophes of modernity and our contemporary moment.

In chapter 3, I borrow this terminology to introduce the developmental genre of Man with a particular focus on the civilizational figure of the Child. In chapter 4, however, I propose a different reading of how different genres of the human are enacted, inhabited and inherited. With and against Wynter, I argue for the non-universality of Euromodern Man’s modes of subjectivation based on hierarchy and severance. In short, Wynter’s argument is that different genres of the human are inhabited in the same way through neurochemical systems of reward and punishment on which human identity and morality are construed. One orients towards what is good (morality) according to one’s genre of the human through which one defines oneself (identity); this relies on the constitutive distancing from bad behavior which is mapped onto the space of otherness. I suggest that this notion of identity and morality is not a universal biochemical structure according to binary system of reward/punishment, self/Other, good/bad, but has itself sociogenic origins in structures of childhood subjectivation according to the principles of severance, hierarchy and fragmentation that are inherent to Developmental Man. Further, unlike Wynter who claims that the genre of the human is a fundamentally closed system, except for liminal subjects with potentiated double consciousness, I argue that there is never a full closure and that inheritances are always multiple and inherently open-ended.

Friedrich Nietzsche

Wynter’s sociogenic theory of the genres of the human argues for the universality of binary systems of identity and morality, with Fanon, W.E.B. Du Bois and others paving the way for an unprecedented overthrow and revolutionary redefinition of what it means to be human. German philologist and philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche’s genealogical method is precisely concerned with the relation of morality and identity and how they emerge. He suggests that (transcendental) morality co-emerges with psycho-existential investments in (substantive, pure) identity, as an attempt at getting a grip on the uncontrollable and threatening forces of earthly becomings, shielding oneself and taking revenge upon that which overpowered the person. Persuasively, he
argues that this reactive psychology emerges from the experience of powerlessness.

Reading Nietzsche with Wynter, and Wynter with Nietzsche, allows for arguing that—unlike Nietzsche’s racist historical speculations and Eurocentric and phallocentric fantasies of active warriors and a motherless philosopher’s Child—Euromodern genres of Man are based on the experience of powerlessness by subjecting all children and most others to hierarchical power in myriad ways. Nietzsche’s genealogical method helps to differentiate between how different genres of the human are inhabited and inherited; Wynter helps to de-universalize Nietzsche’s Euromodern genealogy of morality and identity and mobilize Nietzsche’s insights for decolonial purposes.

My version of Nietzsche is seen through a Deleuzian lens, particularly indebted to Deleuze’s Spinozist distinction of transcendental morality (Nietzsche’s reactive slave-morality) and immanent ethics (Nietzsche’s active master-morality). However, I rework the category of activity, which in Nietzsche and Deleuze highlights self-driven expansionism rather than relationally embedded inter/intradependency, as a non-reactive, relationally embedded web of responsivity (with, among others, the help of Oliver and Cynthia Willett). My reading of Nietzsche is also informed by the Nietzschean traces in traditions and methodologies of the oppressed, as in Fanon, Gloria Anzaldúa and Ofelia Schutte, in whose work the problematic of affirming one’s fragmented and constitutive inheritances in a critical and creative work of self-transformation is posed more poignantly and dealt with much more critically than Nietzsche was ever able to. The figuration of the spectral heir as a critical recreation and response-ability of the plural past for response-enabling co-becomings is indebted to the Nietzschean theme of amor fati, in particularly in the works on liberation and self-transformation in Fanon and Anzaldúa.

Judith Butler

The influences of Nietzsche’s genealogical method are traceable through French philosopher Foucault’s and U.S. queerfeminist philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler’s theories of subjectivation. Here the contingent forces of history produce subjects within an immanent field of power with no outside; resistance is not an external opposition to power but immanent to its workings. In a psychoanalytic reading of Foucauldian “subjectivation,” Butler argues that one becomes a subject through “passionate attachment” to the very norms and power to which one is subjected (Butler 1997). But does the above story not point to different ways that normativity and power operate, and therefore fundamentally different ways of modes of subjectivation and subjectivity, of how different genres of the human can be inhabited? Does Butler’s theory of constitutive relationality as vulnerable exposure to externality (and therefore normative power that one is always-already subjected to) “overrepresent” Euromodern
legacies of the maturity-trope, the Child, Developmental Man and the hierarchical method of children’s subjection/subjectivation, conflating them with universal theory of subjectivation and power? In other words, is there not a conflation between a foundational experience of hierarchical power (potestas) that produces powerlessness (see Nietzsche), and experiences that are based on a fundamental respect for the vulnerability and autonomy of each and every one regardless of age? I argue that Butler (i) repeats what Wynter calls the “overrepresentation of Man” by combining a universalizing psychoanalytic human anthropology with Foucauldian understanding of the immanence of the field of power with “no outside;” and (ii) that a distinction between vulnerability and powerlessness can remedy this overrepresentation. This is for the sake of affirming Butler’s intention of pushing for a feminist ethico-political horizon based on vulnerability and constitutive relationality, but disentangling it from the universalization or overrepresentation of modes of subjection and subjectivation specific to Euromodern Developmental Man.

**María Lugones**

With the help of Argentinian decolonial feminist philosopher María Lugones, I want to address an important methodological consideration based on my usage of the story of Le Jeune and the Innu. Some readers may see a neat binary opposition between colonizer and colonized through which the rest of the narrative is spun as a problematic starting point. Introducing the story of Le Jeune and the Innu as a story for guidance and orientation within the dissertation, might suggest a decolonial framework based on the “colonial difference” and the triad modernity/coloniality/decoloniality: a prior state of different, more egalitarian modes of sociality that gets structurally attacked by colonizers but remains a resource for decolonial resistance despite and against the hegemonic modern/colonial imposition. However, this dissertation is committed to trouble the framework of colonial difference—for the sake of affirming the generational and transgenerational task of decolonizing knowledge.

I argue that Lugones’ methodological and ethical commitment to impurity must itself be read impurely to avoid the re-entrenchment of purity-thinking in the name of impurity. What I mean by re-entrenchment of purity-thinking in some modes of decoloniality is that one’s positionality vis-à-vis the colonial difference would determine whether one is on the side of impurity or purity: the colonized would have privileged access to impure relational modes of resistance based on ancestral and communal resources, whereas those on the side of the colonizer geopolitically/geohistorically embody the logic of purity, fragmentation and domination. My starting point remains, of course, as (ana)foundational (Moten 2018) principle of feminist and any anticolonial methodology of the oppressed (Sandoval 2000), that all knowledge must be situated and cannot gloss over intersectional and geopolitical differences;
however, it rejects the tendency to conflate epistemic position and subject-position, as well as subjectivity and subject-position.\textsuperscript{14} This would re-introduce the principles of pure identity-thinking and fragmentation that decolonial and other theorists attempt to undo. Although I will continue the tradition of setting up critical conceptual pairings to name the hegemonic structures and counter-principles to resist them, I do not understand them in a binary logic, but based on the principle of \textit{impure impurity}, always-already entangled and mutually constitutively contaminating (Lugones 2003; Derrida 2012; Barad 2010). From her commitment to impurity, multiplicity and thick historicity of every multiple self, she explores what it means to encounter the Other embedded in structures of fragmented, hierarchical power yet in excess thereof. Building on this, I reinterpret the Levinasian paradigm of response-ability for the Other’s response-ability as an impure praxis of unlearning.

\textit{Alia Al-Saji}

The critical phenomenological work of diasporic Iraqi decolonial philosopher Alia Al-Saji provides a powerful and useful framework for understanding the “affective weight of the past” shaped by imperialism and its unequal distribution on different people and populations through histories of racialization, plunder and debilitation. Al-Saji mobilizes Henri Bergson’s \textit{durée} or duration for decolonial purposes, which understand the entirety of the past as coextensive with the present, and a phenomenological interpretation of Fanon for theorizing how the imperial past manifests in embodied lived experience in the present and structurally debilitates the \textit{damnés}. This allows for a \textit{temporal} rather than a \textit{geospatial} interpretation of the concept of coloniality.\textsuperscript{15}

As I argue in chapter 2, Walter Mignolo’s articulation of coloniality runs into trouble by overemphasizing geographical locality, at times conflating epistemic position and geospatial location (Mignolo 2000). In an age in which decolonial discourse is employed by authoritarian nationalisms around the globe, it is of key importance to avoid this conflation. Understanding coloniality instead as a debilitating temporal structure—an ongoing past that shapes and is concentrated in the present and bars alternative relationships to the past and thereby alternative futures—implicates everyone, albeit in different ways, for the immanent reconfiguration of the relation to the past in ways that bring out the alternative worlds whose becoming coloniality forecloses.

\textsuperscript{14} Oliver makes the helpful distinction between \textit{subjectivity} and \textit{subject-position}. Although one can never speak about subjectivity without taking into account subject-position, the former is never reducible to the latter (Oliver 2001; 2004).

\textsuperscript{15} This is not to deny the importance of geopolitical distinctions, nor is it to say that there are no other decolonial ways of approaching the relation between temporality: e.g. Daniel Wildcat’s turning to mnemonic reading of space (Wildcat 2005) or Tlostanova’s “imperial-colonial chronotopes” (Tlostanova 2007).
Al-Saji’s work on de/colonial temporality finds resonance in literature on hauntology (Derrida 2012; Schwab 2010; Gordon 2008a): it addresses the haunting of the past (as opposed to an empty, homogeneous time of the present), which draws attention both to the weightiness of the (imperial) past but also emphasizes how its crushing weight never achieves a full closure of the plurality of the past where a ghostly multiplicity insists. The ethico-political horizon is not of overcoming the past but learning to relate to the ghosts that both host debilitating and enabling possibilities, to bring out alternative futures that are harbored in the plurality of the past and to take up the impossible and ongoing work of redressing the open wounds of unfolding imperial catastrophe. Spectral inheritance refers to this ontological/hauntological structure that inherently implicates everyone albeit differently in the response-ability to and through the plural past both as ontological structure and ethical imperative (Derrida and Stiegler 2002; Barad 2010).

Kelly Oliver

Finally, I am indebted to US feminist philosopher and novelist Kelly Oliver for many lucid readings of the philosophical canon and proposing response ethics as an ethical paradigm, which is a critical feminist reworking of the Levinasian imperative of infinite responsibility to the Other (Oliver 2019). Oliver argues that subjectivity itself is an ethical and relational structure of witnessing: the pre-, inter- and intra-subjective space —technically, inter-subjectivity is a misnomer because relationality is originary, so there is no subjectivity prior to relation— of response enables subjectivity to emerge and in turn to be responsive to the environment and to the Other:

Responsivity is both the prerequisite for subjectivity and one of its definitive features. Subjectivity is constituted through response, responsiveness, or response-ability and not the other way around. We do not respond because we are subjects; rather, it is responsiveness and relationality that make subjectivity and psychic life possible. In this sense, response-ability precedes and constitutes subjectivity, which is why, following Levinas, I argue that the structure of subjectivity is fundamentally ethical. We are, by virtue of our ability to respond to others, and therefore we have a primary obligation to our founding possibility, response-ability itself. We have a responsibility to open up rather than close off the possibility of response, both from ourselves and from others. (Oliver 2004, xviii)

Oliver’s suggestion of subjectivity as relation of witnessing and ethics as response-ability is formulated directly in opposition to the Hegelian-Kojévian

16 The word “possibility” is misleading and must not be understood in an Aristotelian teleological sense but within a framework of immanence and positivity (Deleuze 1988).
recognition model of self-Other, which, as she persuasively argues, is itself a consequence of hierarchical power that undermines subjectivity (as witnessing) and ethics (response-ability) rather than being its ground. Oliver argues in a Levinasian vein that one is response-able for the Other's response-ability, which returns her understanding of ethics to her understanding of subjectivity as witnessing. Although the early formulation focuses on humanistic concerns in the face of sexist and racist oppression, Oliver's writings always speak to more-than-human elements, not only compatible with but in more recent writings explicitly addressing a planetary ethics of environmental and animal justice (Oliver 2009; 2015). This allows Oliver's response-ability to speak to posthuman and new materialist feminist approaches to response-ability (Haraway 2016; Barad 2010). Crucially, the "ability" in response-ability does not pertain to a normativity of what kind of ability is desirable or worthy, but is committed to multiplicity, difference and opacity. In my view, response ethics harbors non-ableist different becomings and respects the Other's right to opacity.

With Lugones and Al-Saji, I extend response ethics and response-ability to mean an addressing of the weight of the past and a response-ability for reconfiguring the relation to the plural past. The plurality of the past refers to the necessary excess of the uni-versal civilizational project of Euromodernity that seeks to deny the plurality of the past and place it on a single imperial timeline that treats the past as closed (Azoulay 2019). The name I suggest for the trace of non-identitarian response-enabling inheritances that allow for (re)inventive and (re)creative responsivity to the plural past and unchartered queer co-becomings outside of the normative developmental trajectories of Euromodern Man, is social-maternal-ancestral. The term social-maternal-ancestral seeks to avoid a naturalization of the maternal as it occurs in some feminist and conservative discourses alike, and remains the cornerstone of contemporary developmental psychology through the mother-child dyad. The social-maternal instead of the natural-maternal aims at acknowledging and honoring the matrix from which we spring whilst insisting on the always-already social configurations of its existence, avoiding any implicit or explicit allocation of responsibility to certain bodies and identities. As transgenerational inheritance, I explore its temporality through the category of the ancestral transmitted and honored through a social erotics, as M. Jacqui Alexander (2005) and Audre Lorde argue (2007).

The feminist subject and the maturity-trope
For setting the scene of the relation between feminist philosophy and Developmental Man, I map out various dominant responses to the maturity-trope—as a paradigm for the hope of feminist emancipation (rather than liberation), as a model of subjectivity and ethics not based on matricide, as
symbol for white heteronormative reproductive futurism and as the imposition of a white supremacist kinship-system that forecloses alternative configurations of past, present and future. These are some important yet selective and non-exhaustive signposts that orient the subsequent discussions.

_Emancipation as maturation_

Many philosophies of liberation and emancipation note the link between oppression and maintaining the oppressed in a state of immaturity. One common response is to reclaim the maturity-trope as liberatory or emancipatory. Here is Enrique Dussel from the preface to *Philosophy of Liberation*, in which he compares the center to the father and the periphery to the oppressed child:

Written from the periphery, for persons and peoples of the periphery, this book nonetheless also addresses readers in the center of the present world system. It is like the alienated child who protests against the overbearing father; the child is becoming an adult. (Dussel 1985, viii)

The theory of oppression, alienation, and liberation is shot through with these familial metaphors with liberated adulthood as the horizon of disalienation. Simone de Beauvoir notably relies on metaphors of immaturity and maturity in *The Second Sex* (2009) and *Ethics of Ambiguity* (1962). Since Beauvoir extensively wrote on childhood and its relation to the meaning of human subjectivity and freedom, these metaphors are not incidental. Beauvoir understands childhood as “happily irresponsible” (Beauvoir 1962, 35) where one does not (yet) have to face one’s crushing freedom and responsibility for one’s choices. At the same time, the situation of childhood is understood as fundamentally one of submission: “the real world is that of adults where he is allowed only to respect and obey” (Beauvoir 2009, 293). But this state is “metaphysically privileged” because “the child escapes the anguish of freedom” (Beauvoir 1962, 36). From this metaphysical sketch of childhood as bad faith, irresponsibility, escape from one’s freedom, the figure emerges everywhere: from “man’s” historical outgrowing of childish dependency (i.e., the racialized time of the maturity-trope) to analogies with oppressed groups as being in a state of childhood. Beauvoir does not criticize the discursive equivalence of oppressed people with children, but instead states that their situation in fact does make them like children in an enclosed world of unfreedom and irresponsibility.

The southern planters were not altogether in the wrong in considering the negroes [sic] who docilely submitted to their paternalism as “grown-up children.” To the extent that they respected the world of the whites the situation of the black slaves was exactly an infantile situation. This is also the situation of women in many civilizations; they can only submit to the laws, the gods, the customs, and the truths created by the males. Even today in western countries,
among women who have not had in their work an apprenticeship of freedom, there are still many who take shelter in the shadow of men. (Beauvoir 1962, 37)

One finds uncanny echoes of the Kantian “blameworthiness” of the immature self (selbstverschuldeten Unmündigkeit): Beauvoir argues that many women and other oppressed people are due to “ignorance and error” inescapably engulfed in the state of immature irresponsibility (and therefore are like children). But whereas the (temporally dislocated, non-coeval) enslaved and “the Mohammedan woman enclosed in a harem” are forced into immature irresponsibility, Western women choose their bondage: “the child’s situation is imposed upon him, whereas the woman (I mean the western woman of today) chooses it or at least consents to it” (Beauvoir 1962, 38). Thus, the situation of childhood is one of oppression and metaphysical irresponsibility and unfreedom. The situation makes the oppressed like children; though oppressed, it alleviates them from the anguish of freedom; consequently, the program of emancipation is to assume one’s freedom and to be on the road to full-fledged, mature adulthood. This road to maturity is a historical achievement of Western modernity and Western women “today” are ready to throw off their shackles whilst other women remain fixed in a state of immaturity. In Beauvoir, the systematicity of the maturity-trope comes to the fore: both the individual and humanity (ought to) move from immaturity to maturity. Many groups like “the Mohammedan woman” fluctuate as timeless or non-coeval figures who are perpetually stuck in immaturity, whilst the West/Western woman (ought to) continue the road to freedom and maturity.

At the same time, Beauvoir’s work is also highly influential for the linking of women’s and children’s liberation, a feminist tradition arguing for family abolition (Lewis 2022), which this dissertation is indebted to and whose political horizon I share. Most famously, Shulamith Firestone draws on Beauvoir, read in conjunction with Ariès’ history of childhood, to develop the argument that modern childhood is a structure of oppression—“childhood is hell” (Firestone 2015, 93) and that children’s liberation needs to be part of the program of feminist revolution. The child subject, she argues, is denied their autonomous will and thereby created as the infantile and obnoxious bourgeois child. Firestone’s analysis of childhood oppression, however, seems to attribute the ideals of autonomous individualism, the telos of the maturity-trope, to children subjects. “By now people have forgotten what history has proven: that ‘raising’ a child is tantamount to retarding [sic] his development. The best way to raise a child is to lay off” (Firestone 2015, 82). This autonomous individual is the real person lurking inside a child or infant subject, whose wishes are constantly disrespected: “Do they ever consider that the real person inside that baby or female animal may not choose to be fondled then, or by them, or even noticed?” (Firestone 2015, 81). Although the critique of disrespecting children’s
wills and boundaries certainly has its place, it risks emptying out all forms of relationality and make the figure of the autonomous, mature individual as the epitome of liberation.17

Dorothy Dinnerstein, like Firestone and Beauvoir, argues for maturation as emancipation. She diagnoses that men and women within the modern bourgeois family remain stuck in childhood psychological complexes and cannot attain maturity.18 Dinnerstein rightly points out many psychological repercussions of differently gendered socialization resulting from being raised primarily by an isolated woman condemned to the patriarchal institution of motherhood.19 At the same time, the modern family nevertheless emerges as the latest stage of a teleological development toward maturity and liberation. Following Beauvoir and Firestone, the racial figure of early savage history (state of nature) denotes a state of immaturity or infancy. Dinnerstein is inclined to agree with Beauvoir and Firestone that patriarchy has been the constant in human history and a state of nature, which Western modernity is ready to overcome. But even if the myth of matriarchy were true, she contends, following Victorian scientific opinion, the rise of patriarchy would be a civilizational achievement and necessary step to overcome humanity’s primal infancy or

17 In Firestone’s chapter on racism, the familial metaphors of children and parents are uncomfortably used to address racial hierarchy and relations in the US (Firestone 2015). For a critical discussion of Firestone’s racial and familial figures, see Spillers (2003, 161–164). For a critique of childhood oppression that does not rely on the racial figures of the American Grammar Book but asks about the relationship between authoritative racial structures and parental figures, see for example Ashanti Alston (1983).

18 Self-help and psychological literature on childhood trauma often work with the idea that, due to childhood complexes, one has not fully attained maturity, which requires work with the “inner child.” The idea that childhood traumata make one “stuck” in the past, which through work with the inner child can be released to enter into the present, implicitly reasserts the necessity of entering into the present as mature adult having successfully liberated from and incorporated the past child. As Claudia Castañeda points out, “Once the adult’s temporal distance from childhood has been secured, the adult draws on the past as a resource for the present. The adult returns to childhood to reappropriate the child he or she once was in order to establish a more stable adult self. Here, the child is primarily valuable insofar as the condition of childhood can be revisited in order to be left behind once again” (Castañeda 2002, 5).

19 The psychoanalytic sleight of hand, however, does this by purifying sociogenic factors to arrive at a non-sociogenic, pure family drama purged of race and class markers, by for example writing out nannies from the scene of the family (see McClintock for a discussion of Freud’s erasure of nannies from the Oedipal family; 1995, 84–91). See also Adrienne Rich’s added reflections in the revised edition of Of Woman Born, on the institution of motherhood in relation to racialized labor of nannies; here she reflects (in a feminist spirit of unlearning) on her own tendencies to appropriate and take for granted the availability of racialized care (Rich 2021).
immaturity (Dinnerstein 2021, 202–203). In chapter 3 I call this trope of racialized time the *inheritance of stupidity*.

**The maternal model: relational philosophy**

A different feminist response that does not pose attaining mature subjecthood as its horizon of liberation, instead rejects the maturity-trope as itself pertaining to phallocentric subjectivity. In the maturation model (especially in its psychoanalytic guises) women are often reduced to the maternal, which in turn is reduced to the natural, and maturation involves separation from the maternal-natural to arrive at individuation and socio-moral responsibility. Instead, feminists who focus on maternity (instead of seeing in it the origin of female subjection, as in the proponents of the maturation model) seek to open a space for different subjectivity, ethics and relationality that remains buried underneath the patriarchal erasure, confinement or stereotyping of the female, feminine and maternal. This literature displaces the individual ontologies of the Western canon and instead emphasizes constitutive relationality, sociality and eros (Cavarero 2016; Irigaray 1985; Willett 1995). If sociality and morality have traditionally been defined against the maternal-natural, then the maternal offers a way of reconfiguring subjectivity, sociality and ethics.

Much of this literature relies on Julia Kristeva’s concept of the *chора* and Luce Irigaray’s work that reclaims a space within and outside phallocentric discourse’s foundational matricide. In this category I am thinking of Willett’s *Maternal Ethics and Other Slave Moralities* (1995), the early work of Oliver (1997), and more recently Söderbäck’s *Revolutionary Time: on Time and Difference in Kristeva and Irigaray* (2019). This literature is often dismissed or criticized for valorizing the source of patriarchal oppression, for essentializing motherhood and womanhood, heteronormativity, and for unproblematically assuming white bourgeois motherhood or family relations without addressing its racial formation. This is especially true in Kristeva, Irigaray and Cavarero, whose rich re-readings and careful appropriations of canonical texts do often rely on unproblematized notions of white motherhood and family, which in turn rely on the abjection of Blackness (Spillers 2003; Hartman 1997; Broeck 2019). Willett and Oliver, on the other hand, do explicitly address the overlapping and interlocking of oppressions. Nevertheless, as Oliver also writes retrospectively (Oliver 2019), this feminist literature of the 1990s often does not challenge the heteronormative family save the lack of participation of fathers in matters of childrearing. But instead of dismissing this literature, Söderbäck argues that despite this uneasy reliance on whiteness of canonical European feminist philosophers, a critical and

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20 “[T]he whole of our western culture is based upon the murder of the mother. The man-god-father killed the mother in order to take power” (Irigaray 1988, 47).
productive usage is possible and needed through an engagement with Black and queer critique (Söderbäck 2019).

It would also be a mistake to suggest that a focus on maternity is necessarily Eurocentric. Some African feminist philosophers/theorists focus on motherhood precisely as a way to counter the Euromodern gender-binary, normative family-constellations, and reduction of motherhood to a natural function and source of oppression (Oyèwumi 1997 and 2016; Nzegwu 2006). Despite some incommensurable differences, there are important resonances between Oyèwumi and Nzegwu on the one hand and some U.S. Black feminist work on mothering on the other hand. Alexis Pauline Gumbs makes the key distinction between motherhood (as white supremacist bourgeois institution based on legitimate heirs and property-relations) and the practice of mothering: “The practice of mothering (…) is older than feminism; it is older and more futuristic than the category ‘woman’” (Gumbs 2016a, 9).

I am indebted to the feminist tradition of rethinking the maternal as cultivating a non-phallogocentric logic grounded in embodied sociality and care ethics, but agree with the necessity of reading it with and through Black, decolonial, Indigenous and queer theory. I argue that this project of (un)grounding sociality, relationality and ethics, must be separated from a transhistorical and natural mother-child dyad. With the figuration of social-maternal-ancestral, I wish both to take up the feminist legacy of relational ontology and ethics based on constitutive sociality, yet sharply distinguish it from any usage of a mother-child dyad that is made to serve as a non-historical, non-sociogenic ground for an alternative relational ethics and subjectivity. I do not think that the figure of the mother-child dyad, so prevalent in our imaginary, and in conservative and (some) feminist discourses alike, and foundational for contemporary (developmental) psychology, can be separated from the heteronormative and white institution of the nuclear family and all the hierarchies and fragmentation of Euromodern Man it implies.

Queer subjectivity and the Child

Since the maturity-trope relies on what I call the civilizational figure of the Child (see chapter 3), a brief discussion of and distinction from Lee Edelman’s usage of the figure of the Child is in place. Edelman argues that the figure of the Child is at the heart of any politics, no matter how conservative or revolutionary, as the investment in futurity. This makes all politics, and the Symbolic order itself,

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21 This is not to suggest that Oyèwumi and Nzegwu’s arguments are commensurable: the former argues that motherhood must be understood as non-gendered category (separate from Western ideas of womanhood) whereas Nzegwu seeks to reclaim a non-patriarchal African interpretation of gender through an African concept of motherhood.
fundamentally heteronormative. He opposes queerness against the “reproductive futurism” of every Symbolic order, defining the former as “embodying the remainder of the Real internal to the Symbolic order” (Edelman 2004, 25). Queerness, Edelman claims, names the side of those not “fighting for the children,” the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism. (…) The queer comes to figure the bar to every realization of futurity, the resistance, internal to the social, to every social structure or form. (Edelman 2004, 4)

Although Edelman does distinguish between “actual historical children” and the figure of “the Child” as heteronormative investment in futurity arguably inherent to every politic, this distinction seems to disappear in the remainder of the text—other critics of the figure of the Child do maintain that distinction more clearly (Castañeda 2002; Gill-Peterson 2018). Further, Edelman insufficiently addresses how this figure is circumscribed by (North American) whiteness (Muñoz 2009; Smith 2010; Morgensen 2011). Since the Symbolic or what Hortense Spillers calls the American Grammar Book relies on genocide of Indigenous people and the disposability of Black lives, racialized others never belong to futurity and therefore, in their very being/becoming, trouble or queer the coherence of the Symbolic premised on whiteness and white futurity (Lorde 2007; Gumbs 2016; Smith 2010; Alcoff 2015). As Andrea Smith argues, An indigenous critique must question the value of “no future” in the context of genocide, where Native peoples have already been determined by settler colonialism to have no future. If the goal of queerness is to challenge the reproduction of the social order, then the Native child may already be queered. (Smith 2010, 48)

Gumbs equally challenges the assumptions around queerness and whiteness and offers a provocative definition of queerness that puts (Black) mothering directly in relation to queerness.

Asserting that the labor of mothering is always in collaboration with a reproductive narrative, always reproducing heteronormativity, ignores the fact that there has been a national consensus for centuries that Black people should not be able to mother. Every force, from coercive sterilization to the dismantling of welfare has been mobilized to try to keep us from doing it. (Gumbs 2016d, 119)

Gumbs defines queerness, quite broadly, as “that which fundamentally transforms our state of being and the possibilities for life. That which is queer is that which does not reproduce the status quo” (Gumbs 2016c, 116). This approach to queerness resonates with the literature on queer temporalities and critiques of chrononormativity (Freeman 2010; Lykke 2022), which is relevant for the critique of Developmental Man and the task of overturning Man toward a multiplicitous, pluriversal becoming of the human. Developmentalism
emerges as a raced and gendered assemblage that continues the ontogenic/phylogenic universality that Fanon challenged through the category of sociogeny. I draw on queer studies and (queer) disability studies to challenge the chrononormativity of the ideal or normal development of the individual (Burman 2008; Puar 2017; Hedva 2016; Al-Saji 2023; Bloem 2021), in favor of sociogenic approaches from a commitment to difference and plurality/multiplicity (Lugones 2003).

A brief note on relationality

Edelman’s “antirelational thesis” of queerness (Muñoz 2009, 11) does pose an important question about the notion of relationality. Whereas the strategy of some feminist, decolonial and Indigenous philosophers is to reclaim modes of relationality that are disavowed by phallogocentrism and heteropatriarchal settler colonialism, some queer and Black theorists question the desirability and breathability of relationality that are always-already circumscribed by white supremacist heteropatriarchal social arrangements, seeking escape-routes, lines of flight, fugitivity (MacCormack 2020; Moten 2018). My usage of relationality thus will not be fully consistent: as orientation (relational ethics, relational subjectivity, constitutive relationality), I use it in the aforementioned critical, creative and reinventive sense for a theory-praxis of the otherwise/elsewhen against the atomistic and binary models of Developmental Man. At other times, relation is a descriptive epistemological term that requires a qualification of what kind of relation. In particular, I oppose responsive or response-able relationality to reactive relations, the latter drawing on Lugones’ concept of fragmentation and Nietzsche’s psychological inquiry of reactivity. I will further qualify when I use relationality in the sense of the undesirable/unbearable/unbreathable modes of inescapable imposed relationality as it is sometimes used by Black and queer theorists.

Black, decolonial and Indigenous (queer) critique (continued)

Although the meaning of relationality widely differs, Black, decolonial and Indigenous studies share a commitment to a complex negation of Western or Euromodern civilization (Robinson 2000), simultaneously challenging Euromodern presuppositions and frameworks at its roots and (re)creating the tools for other modes of worlding. Here I briefly introduce three thinkers—Anzaldúa, Hortense Spillers and Leanne Betasomasake Simpson (Nishnaabeg)—who accompany the text (for their clear vision on queer temporality and becoming, affirmation, and refiguring of childhood). Even when they are not the main focus of the upcoming chapters, they provide a grid for rethinking temporality, sociality and ethics that undermine and address the inheritances of Developmental Man.
Reflecting on her writing praxis in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa describes it as a taking up of a shamanic legacy that aims at transformation at the level of the unconscious: “I realize that I was trying to practice the oldest ‘calling’ in the world—shamanism—and that I was practicing it in a new way” (Anzaldúa 2009a, 121). The role of the shaman is to “mediate between the cultural heritage of the past and the present everyday situations people find themselves in. In retrospect I see that this was an unconscious intention on my part in writing *Borderlands/La Frontera*” (Anzaldúa 2009a, 121). This shamanic temporality—mediating between collective pasts and present concerns—affirm the multiplicity of inheritances and histories that are often fragmenting or fragmented, dispossessive and enabling in an inventive, creative re-articulation in the present: Anzaldúa’s shamanic aesthetics take as a methodological task what Al-Saji calls the “reconfiguration of the past” (Al-Saji 2018). The shamanic temporality of Anzaldúa’s writing is a gathering place of the co-existence of multiple temporalities. This mediating between the already-there and present concerns, emphasizes that invention is always reinvention: through imaginative (re)invention, it enacts the past in its configuring and refiguring of the present. It is the work of affirmation and transformation of the multiple pasts. Elsewhere, Anzaldúa calls this “the Coyolxauhqui imperative:”

Coyolxauhqui is my symbol for the necessary process of dismemberment and fragmentation, of seeing that self or the situations you’re embroiled in differently. It is also my symbol for reconstruction and reframing, one that allows for putting the pieces together in a new way. The Coyolxauqui [sic] imperative is an ongoing process of making and unmaking. There is never any resolution, just the process of healing. (Anzaldúa 2009b, 312)

As is clear from the quote above (“there is never any resolution, just the process”) Anzaldúa’s usage of the word “healing” is not to be understood as restoring prior wholeness or a teleological trajectory towards a desired, “healthy” state. Because of these associations with healing, many decolonial theorists are cautious to use the word (e.g. Al-Saji 2023, 21; Simpson 2017, 103). As long as it is understood as part of a queer becoming that is always a reworking, reconfiguration and reinvention of the multiple fragmenting and enabling inheritances without any normative notion or state posited at the origin or as teleological goal, the word “healing” can be helpfully understood as an ethical imperative of the spectral heir.

Spillers works on a similar work of affirmation and becoming that simultaneously embraces the histories of terror that form Black life and refuses the definitions of the human and gender upon which this history of subjugation is based. Attending to the constitutive misnaming of Blackness in the grammar of white supremacy that she inherits, Spillers argues for the potential of a radically different becoming from dis-figured Blackness:
we are less interested in joining the ranks of gendered femaleness than gaining the insurgent ground as female social subject. Actually claiming the monstrosity (of a female with the potential to “name”), which her culture imposes in blindness, “Sapphire” might rewrite after all a radically different text for a female empowerment. (Spillers 2003, 229)

I read this, like Anzaldúa’s method, as a work of affirmation and transformation of even the most terrible of inheritances. Instead of the Beauvoirian dream of emancipation towards/as maturity, there is the process of liberation as critical reconfiguration and queering of multiple pasts for response-enabling and breathable worlds. The exiting of Developmental Man, the Child, Woman, the Family, and all the dehumanizing figures they rely on, is here figured as spectral inheritance, the affirmation and transformation of the plural past in both its response-enabling and response-debilitating legacies. That said, to write an ethics of affirmation always runs the risk of facile celebration that fails to address the unequally distributed weight of the past (Al-Saji 2023; Mbembe 2017, 177). This failure is not to be overcome but must continue to trouble the text, and continue the imperative of collective and individual response-ability to the plural past, as impossible and always incomplete work, which by necessity falls short.

Finally, Simpson’s discussion of Nishnaabeg principles of childrearing based on “queer normativity” offer a glimpse of alternative figurations of the social and the human that can be read as a radical critique of, and displace, the maturity-trope of Developmental Man and provides tools for unlearning the civilizational figure of the Child.

There was a high degree of individual self-determination in Michi Saagig Nishnaabeg society. Children were full citizens with the same rights and responsibilities as adults. They were raised in a nest of freedom and self-determination. Authoritarian power—aggressive power that comes from coercion and hierarchy—wasn’t a part of the fabric of Michi Saagig Nishnaabeg philosophy or governance, and so it wasn’t a part of our families (Simpson 2017, 4)

Simpson notes the contrast with hierarchical, patriarchal settler principles of childrearing in reference to Champlain’s observations of the nonpunitive and freedom-based childrearing practices as “his white male way of acknowledging (…) freedom and authentic power” (Simpson 2017, 4). Samuel de Champlain’s observations read as follows:

The children have great freedom among these tribes. The fathers and mothers indulge them too much, and never punish them. Accordingly they are so bad
What is inconceivable to Champlain is that the Child is not in need of disciplining to ensure a Christian self. Instead, children are considered as autonomous and self-determining, whilst always-already embedded and participating in the web of sociality of responsibilities and care. As opposed to the technologies of severance and fragmentation through which a search for identity and recognition emerges from experiences of powerlessness, children are witnesses to and participants in the sociality that envelopes and enables their responsive and relational self: co-becoming and self-determination coalesce.

**Masculinity and the maturity-trope**

As a final background contextualization of this dissertation, I must name another source from which this project sprung. I came to understand the weight and the pull of the maturity-trope, as well the violations it is based on and that it ends up reproducing of the maturity-trope, through discourses on masculinity. If my socialization as boy and man implicitly relied on many of Developmental Man’s imperatives, much of it is explicated and forcefully advocated for by Jordan Peterson, the conservative Canadian psychologist who became the spokesperson and daddy-figure for many young men. I have been troubled by the question of why he finds so much resonance with men of my generation, who often find recognition in his compassion for the plight of men, whilst stirring up hatred against trans folk and everyone with deviating political and sexual orientations, in a passionate defense of the most traditional perspectives on masculinity, gender-relations, the holy nuclear Family, morality, society and nature. The appeal of Peterson seems to me symptomatic of the legacies and lure of the maturity-trope. Peterson’s disciplinary childrearing advice in particular explicitly shows how the dream of maturation is based on actual disgust and hatred for children’s desires and becoming. Subjecting them to parental and paternal authority to break their wills (presented as selfish, tyrannical and savage) to become normal and respectable to conservative society starts with a fundamental disrespect for the Other: you are worthless, you ought to feel ashamed of yourself, and strive towards the ideal of mature adulthood to become an acceptable human being who can bear to live with yourself. It is hard to resist the conclusion that Nietzsche’s inquiry into bad conscience and reactive psychology rooted in self-contempt—“how can I bear to live with myself”—speaks to the whole masculine drama striving towards mature manhood, which

22 Just as Le Jeune, Champlain is greatly concerned with the alternative sexual mores and the impossibility of determining the paternal line and legitimate offspring, thus illustrating the connection between the maturity-trope and the necessity of producing legitimate heirs.
is grounded in negative affects of shame, guilt and self-loathing. Reading how Peterson raised his children, it is not hard to see the source of this. My disturbance with the question why Peterson resonates with young men is one that haunts me personally: I am quite convinced that a younger version of myself—an unhappy teenager trying to overintellectualize the sources of depression—could have felt the attraction of Peterson’s message. From the idea of spectral inheritance—the entirety and plurality of the past coexists with the present; there is only a living with the ghosts and learning to re-relate to them to remake the world, no exorcism or enlightened conjuring away is possible—and as spectral heir, I am not writing this as someone who has attained a higher, more mature and sophisticated vantage point from which one can look back and look down to judge my former, “less mature” self—and thereby others. It is part of my becoming and the ghosts remain there, there is only the ongoing work of (re)learning to live well with them. The spectral heir remains committed to the ongoing unlearning of “the fascism in us all” (Foucault 1983, xii) and maintains the task of response-ability to those ghosts as reconfiguring of the relation to the past for a different future. Although I will not directly address this in the dissertation, this work also stems from what I see as a generational task of redefining masculinity away from Peterson’s patriarchal hierarchies and reactive psychology of maturation (“this shit is killing you too, however much more softly”), committed to an-archical queer multiplicity, difference and transgenerational justice. Where Peterson embodies the Judgment from the Father from above who shouts “grow the hell up!” as guilt- and shame-ridden subjectivation towards an ego-ideal (full mature adulthood and manhood), the dissertation responds instead with: I’d prefer not to. Let’s unlearn maturity, exit the hierarchical world based on discipline and genocide that the figure of the Child (and Man, Woman, Family) uphold, and embrace queer co-becoming and other world-making based on the multiplicity that neither the figures and institutions of Child, Man, Woman or Family could ever discipline or contain!

**Chapter overview**

In the next chapter (chapter 2), I introduce some key theoretical paradigms and methodological considerations. Here I ask: what does it mean to write as a spectral heir? Moving between feminist theory, continental philosophy and decoloniality in their multiple intersecting and overlapping connections, I position myself as doing feminist philosophy whilst avoiding the substantive identity-claims of being a feminist/decolonial/continental philosopher, understanding the adjective “feminist” as necessarily engaged in queer, antiracist and decolonial critique. This is an attempt at unlearning disciplinary approaches to knowledge and the scholars’ investments in them as identity-labels—the desire to be the legitimate heir of a particular philosopher, method or discipline. Here I further flesh out my critique (as selective and critical...
affirmation) of Mignolo’s articulation of decoloniality, and argue in favor of a more hybrid, impure and coalitional “methodology of the oppressed” in Chela Sandoval’s sense (Sandoval 2000). In terms of methodology, I discuss sociogeny (Fanon and Wynter) and genealogy (through Nietzsche, Foucault and Butler) and argue for cross-reading these traditions in their impure entanglement and tensions. The suggestion of a socio-genealogy does not aim at a meta-theory or a grand theoretical synthesis, but is an attempt to attend to the multiplicity of stories, subjectivities and pasts in their interconnectedness. Finally, I discuss feminist figurations as a method of inquiry (Thiele 2021) in particular in relation to the figure of the Child (Castañeda 2002; Gill-Peterson 2018).

From then on, the dissertation has three clusters (more detailed summaries of the chapters start in the next paragraph): chapter 3–5, Socio-Genealogies of Morality and Identity, work out my usage of sociogeny and genealogy to understand Euromodern genres of Man with its particular modes of subjektivation.

In chapter 3, I employ Wynter’s notion of the “genres of the human” and Lugones’ coloniality of gender and argue that the idea of Euromodern Man can productively be interpreted as a “Developmental genre of Man.” I pay specific attention to the civilizational figure of the Child as pertaining to the normative developmental trajectory of Man in its individual (ontogenic) and collective (phylogenic) dimensions. I show how this is a racialized and gendered figure that relies on severance, hierarchy and the denial of vulnerability. Chapter 4 zooms in on Wynter’s usage of Fanon’s sociogeny to ask in what way different genres of the human are inhabited and inherited. As suggested above, I argue against Wynter’s mechanistic neurobiological model and instead make selective and critical use of developmental psychologist Darcia Narvaez, who proposes an evolutionary argument that “modern” modes of childrearing lead to a sense of self and world based on isolation, competition and fear, as opposed to the evolutionarily normative modes of collective childrearing that respect young people’s and even infants’ autonomy within relational interdependency. This serves to counter Wynter’s claims that genres of the humans are replicated and inhabited “in exactly the same way” (Wynter 1995, 17). However, through sociogeny and queer disability studies, I challenge the normative assumptions about both individual development, normative notions of relationality and human nature that undergird Narvaez’ developmentalist argument. Chapter 5, the final chapter in this cluster, proposes a reading of Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Morality. I agree with Nietzsche’s psychological sketch of reactivity as emerging from the experience of powerlessness, but disengage it from his racist speculations on prehistory and instead propose that he is describing the effects of Developmental Man. The chapter engages the Deleuzian interpretation of Nietzsche through the lens of immanent ethics (active master-morality) and transcendental morality (reactive slave-morality) and proposes to understand
that the opposite of reactivity is not the activity of the philosopher’s Child or Warrior, but relationally embedded response-enabling responsivity.

Part 2, Feminist Ethics of Response-ability, focuses on key concepts for ethics of relational feminist frameworks as response-able ways of exiting Developmental Man, in particular through the concepts of response-ability and vulnerability. Chapter 6 stages what I see as a missed encounter between Lugones’ and Levinas’ theory of the face-to-face as it pertains to the meaning of responsibility/response-ability. I point out the tension between Levinas’ ethics of the Other on the one hand, and his antiblack, anti-Palestinian and sexist conception of the human on the other. I read this investment in a hierarchical understanding of humanity through the maturity-trope, suggesting that his famous conceptual pair of the Saying and the Said is undercut by a third category, namely “Babbling.” The veracity and dignity of the Saying must be sheltered from the unseriousness of primitive or infantile Babbling. I then propose to read Lugones as a necessary alternative and critical response to Levinas’ ethics of the face. Whereas Levinas’ uni-versal transcendental model of ethics unfolds against a constitutive backdrop of antiblack, anti-Palestinian, patriarchal fragmentation, Lugones’ ethics of the face-to-face encounter explicitly deals with the unlearning of such fragmenting perception of the self and in the process (re)learns to relate to the Other in their multiplicity and opacity. Through Lugones’ exploration of the face-to-face, I define response-ability as unlearning and co-becoming. This pertains not only to the Other, but also to the multiple yet shared pasts. Chapter 7 continues by looking at another key concept for feminist relational ethics, namely vulnerability. It attempts a critical revision of Judith Butler’s concept of vulnerability, which I argue is conflated with powerlessness (introduced through Nietzsche above). I trace Butler’s reliance on psychoanalytic developmental model of Melanie Klein and argue that the uncritical usage of psychoanalysis leads to an “overrepresentation of Man” (Wynter) that falsely universalizes a sociogenically specific constellation of (Euromodern) conception of human nature and bourgeois childhood experience. I turn to Shildrick, Nina Lykke and Anzaldúa to argue for an affirmative redefinition of vulnerability not as powerlessness or exposure to subjugation, but as relational co-becoming. This redefinition of vulnerability allows to move away from Rosi Braidotti’s proposed either/or between an ethics of affirmation or potestas or an ethics of vulnerability based on negativity and potestas (Braidotti 2006).

Part 3, Re-con-figurations Beyond Man and Before the Child, focuses on figurations as a feminist exploration of the nexus of temporality, subjectivity and ethics. They are attempts at unlearning and Developmental Man as reconfiguration of the plural past and as response-able acts of wording. Chapter 8 works out the temporality of spectral inheritance through Al-Saji’s work on colonial duration and Derridean hauntology, already outlined in this chapter.
Then, it describes the desire to be a legitimate heir through the Lazali’s analysis of the cycles of oppression rooted in colonial trauma. Finally, it mobilizes Fanon and Moten to unlearn the desire for legitimacy toward a desire to be a spectral heir. In chapter 9, I work out the figuration of social-maternal-ancestral. Whereas in earlier chapters I focus on why I connect the maternal to the social—to avoid any mystification/isolation of a mother-child dyad that is not a question of broader sociality; to dislodge it from Developmental Man’s trope of the passage from (savage, infantile) nature to sociality—this chapter focuses on the ancestral temporality through M. Jacqui Alexander, Audre Lorde and Alexis Pauline Gumbs.

I have attempted to write in such a way that each chapter can be read in isolation, yet they nevertheless belong to and cross-reference the broader conceptual framework and figurations that I build up throughout the dissertation. For the reader who has the patience and means to read from start to finish, there is a gradual build-up of the conceptual framework, with the conceptual pairs and figurations referring to the previous one where newly introduced concepts and figurations refer back, make different connections, adding other dimensions and new effects to the previous ones. This is not to suggest mastery over the constellation of figurations: there is no mature intelligence overseeing and orchestrating all the relations and its effects. Although I am response-able (or aim to increase my response-ability), the figurations exceed my conscious construction and hopefully partake in other associations and relations beyond my intention and imagination.
Vignette

For many, the 2002 movie Rabbit-Proof Fence brought for the first time the history of the Stolen Generations in Australia to the big screen. The Stolen Generations refer to children and generations severed from their community through Australian eugenic policy in the 20th century (which officially ended in 1967 but continued well into the 1970s) that removed so-called “half-caste” children from their families and put them in internment camps to turn them into a whitened subservient working class and sever them from their indigenous community, language, identity and culture. The movie was an important landmark in Australia’s memory culture, which continues to disavow the violence of historical and contemporary settler colonialism. The director Philip Noyce, a white Australian, worked closely together with indigenous actress Rachael Maza for the casting and working with the child actors. During the shooting of the scene in which the children are removed from their communities, the atmosphere on set becomes heavy. Ningali and Myarn Lawford, who play the mother and grandmother, remain lying on the ground weeping after the shooting and other indigenous crew members join them. The child actors, Evelyn Sampi, Tianna Sansbury and Laura Monaghan, seem paralyzed by the weight of the historical scene they enacted and the emotional response it triggered. Unable to fully grasp the weight of the scene (a condition not unique to their age but in a way, perhaps, shared by all), they feel it, sense it and know it. Director Noyce said about the casting of the three girls that he “wanted kids who people all over the world would want to adopt as their own children.” Despite the importance of the movie and the careful and respectful collaboration it is based on, this remark lingers: the irony seems to be lost on the director that in representing a history of dispossession the default language to connect to his audience is one of property, of mineness. The children in question are emphatically not there to be adopted; they do not belong to the audience. Can the story of severance of children from their community only be integrated into national memory by presenting children as imaginatively belonging to the outside-viewer, as figures that evoke the desire of being “my child?”
Chapter 2: Theoretical Frameworks, Disciplinarity, Methodologies

We must become undisciplined.

—Christina Sharpe

When I do not see plurality stressed in the very structure of a theory, I see the phantom that I am in your eyes take grotesque forms and mime crudely and heavily your own image. Don’t you?

—María Lugones

Introduction

In this chapter, I situate my contribution within the theoretical fields that have informed me and introduce my methodological choices. First, I deal with the questions of the relation between and my relation to decoloniality and poststructuralism (and continental philosophy more generally) and situate this work as doing feminist philosophy. Then, I provide context for my usage of genealogy, sociogeny and socio-genealogy. Finally, I introduce feminist figurations as method.

I understand the purpose of this chapter not so much as pretending to have mastered certain theoretical fields, but to make myself accountable and take responsibility for my choices and exclusions, and to make transparent what roads I have taken that have brought me here. This is equally a form of critical and spectral inheritance, aiming to select and take up the various fields that have shaped my work, without positioning myself as a legitimate heir of a particular discourse, field or discipline that needs to be clearly demarcated from other disciplines. My stance stems from a critique of disciplinarity indebted to the notions of “academic apartheid” (Sandoval 2000) and “disciplinary decadence” (Gordon 2011), which I introduce in this chapter. Most broadly, the fields that I am indebted to are so-called continental, decolonial and feminist philosophy, not as separate fields but in their always-already interrelation and entanglement. Indeed, writing as a spectral heir rejects the idea that one can delineate such fields as natural epistemic order of things, which can only exist through active or unconscious processes of purification and disavowal of its constitutive outside. As spectral heir I attempt to stay committed to each domain’s impurity rather than seeking belonging in a certain demarcated domain with its established canons.

From my undergraduate years in Liberal Arts (with a primary focus on philosophy), through my master’s in continental philosophy where I had to take modules outside of the philosophy faculty to find feminist and postcolonial theory, to the interdisciplinary Gender Studies program of my PhD, my work has never had a clear disciplinary home. During my master’s in philosophy, the
academic and disciplinary structure of filiation and (gendered) legitimacy was evident. The cohort consisted mostly of turtlenecked and bearded white men (myself included), many hoping to find favor with a particular professor who was an expert on this or that philosopher: the professors were the legitimate heirs of the philosophers they were experts on, and the hope of the student was to be the chosen son to continue the line of filiation. That this was a strongly gendered (masculine) space of intellectual comparison that sends clear signals of who does and who does not belong to that space, is well-known.

The encounters with decoloniality and feminist theory in my undergraduate years were transformative. At this time, as I was trying to figure out how these critical perspectives spoke to or were in tension with the German and French critical theorists I was also interested in, I did not yet distinguish between decolonial, postcolonial and Black Studies. During the PhD, I found that much energy is spent on demarcating these camps, where the theoretical divergences overshadowed the obvious common points of critique and departure. Are you posthuman? Decolonial? Postcolonial? Foucauldian? Deleuzian? Harawayan? (See also Ahmed 2017, 15). During the PhD, one’s discipline and theoretical framework become one’s professional (and invariably existential and personal) trademarks as modes of disciplinary subjectivation, becoming an academic subject. Paradoxically, the training in Gender Studies introduces myriad deconstructions of the disciplinary division of knowledge and critiques of the political and epistemic failings of established methodologies. But after endless deconstructions of the sovereign subject, one nevertheless must trade in identity-labels and show mastery of this field and belonging to that intellectual home, that is, pretend to be a disciplined sovereign subject and legitimate heir.

For this chapter, I employ my figurations (briefly introduced in the introduction and further fleshed out in chapter 8) of the spectral heir and the legitimate heir, asking: what does it mean to unlearn the figure of the legitimate heir in terms of disciplinarity, theory and methodology; and what would it mean to write as a spectral heir?

Much of my response to these questions in this chapter takes the form of situating myself with regard to the labels “decolonial,” “feminist” and “philosophy.” I consider this dissertation a work of feminist philosophy, although I refrain from substantives labels of “philosopher.” I consider feminist philosophy a doing and not an activity by a subject who is a philosopher. Feminism is here understood as necessarily queer, antiracist and decolonial, and a theory-praxis of unlearning of all forms of hierarchical fragmentation, and a cultivating (relearning) response-ability for a pluriversal otherwise/elsewhen. I keep the name philosophy in reference to my studies and as a refusal to distinguish between canonical feminist philosophy and feminist theory.

Although I am committed to certain forms of decoloniality and take decoloniality as an ongoing question and generational challenge, I emphatically
state that I “am” not a “decolonial(/)feminist philosopher.” Positing myself as a legitimate heir to such a tradition is not only problematic as a white man with an EU-passport, but also, I would wager, with regards to the role of positionality within decoloniality as epistemic framework (rather than ethico-political commitment). Since I am deeply indebted to decoloniality for my political and theoretical formation, much of this chapter is devoted to situating myself vis-à-vis this inheritance. Staying committed to impurity (Lugones 2003), I find it necessary to critically respond to the tendencies in decoloniality to pure identity-thinking. The critique of pure identity-thinking in some versions of decoloniality does not come from a facile dismissal of all identities as if they do not matter, but from the work toward deep coalitions from situated impure identities, indebted to decolonial and other feminist traditions. In my critique of (some versions of) decoloniality, I distinguish between decoloniality as (totalizing) epistemological framework on the one hand, and decoloniality as ethico-political orientation and commitment on the other. The latter I fully embrace and understand as the ongoing work of unlearning and relearning (Mignolo and Tlostanova 2011).

One way that I am spectrally inheriting and affirming decoloniality is as a generational challenge: decolonization has become a generational gathering point to challenge the geopolitical and intersectional injustices and to embed it historically and mnemonically in a challenge to sanctioned Eurocentric histories; I consider my work as affirming and taking up this generational challenge by naming what I consider vitally necessary, but not as an identity, scholarly or otherwise. When I say generational challenge I do not mean it in terms of a linear timeline and ideas of progress, but as the way that a generation learns to reconnect to the open-ended past by changing how we relate, respond and become response-able to/through it (Al-Saji 2018), which therefore reinvents a much older tradition and inheritance of resistance and re-existence (Anzaldúa 2012), which flows as an undercurrent underneath linear universal history that produces the catastrophic present (Benjamin 2007; Azoulay 2019).

The fact that this critique of the decolonial epistemological framework primarily has male interlocutors is not incidental: in the epistemological debates surrounding decoloniality, there is a tendency of relegating decolonial feminists to a subfield of decoloniality or pigeon-holed as “praxis.” An engagement with this other decolonial feminist tradition (e.g. Anzaldúa; Lugones; Marcos; Sandoval; Tlostanova) avoids many of the epistemological and political pitfalls

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23 The importance of subject-position in this commitment to ongoing unlearning is irreducible. If unlearning requires hesitation, as Alia Al-Saji insists, I have to remind myself that “those in positions of privilege hesitate the least” (Al-Saji 2014, 151). See also Ahmed (2006).
that arise from the master-discourse, of which Mignolo’s work is a prime example. Instead of remapping the world according to “irreducible differences” (Mignolo 2000), the work of this alternative tradition that runs through and alongside the more platformed versions of decoloniality always insisted on working through and with differences with an eye on “deep coalitions” (Lugones 2003; Tlostanova 2019). The epistemological discussion will therefore end by (re)turning to Sandoval’s *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000) as already anticipating and working through many of today’s epistemological impasses (see also Tlostanova 2010, 13–18). This tradition of decoloniality continues to inform and guide my writing—albeit only the literature available in English, whose geopolitical limitations and homogenizing and flattening effects I do not underestimate.

**The decolonial, postcolonial and poststructuralist**

Decoloniality and poststructuralism share the following contradiction: on the one hand, both are committed to a critique of rationalistic totalization and (political and epistemic) violence against otherness in order to affirm an open-ended relational worlding. On the other, as schools of thought they become increasingly bounded, insular entities. In the shadow of a hegemonic analytical philosophy, poststructuralism ossifies in a defensive protection of its borders to claim its right to exist. Decoloniality increasingly undercuts its ethico-political commitment to humbling Euromodern canons in an affirmation of multiple and subjugated epistemes, by solidifying a single framework with a narrow canon. In both moves, there seems to be the return of a certain attempted mastery over the limit of its own discourse, strategies of incorporation or exclusion that seek to neutralize the otherness that haunts its discourse (Derrida 1982). Mignolo frames the epistemic position of poststructuralism and the decolonial option as respectively a critique from “inside” modernity and from an epistemic “outside.” Derrida situates his deconstructive project as an opening up from “within” but in order to show that the “inside” is always-already contaminated by the outside—as the limit of philosophy that philosophy constantly seeks to master by incorporation, repression or exorcism; but the outside always comes back to haunt an inside that proves to be always-already impure.

Within decoloniality, emerging from a different-yet-related problem-space, there is also an emphasis on impurity, mostly through the work of María Lugones. Lugones analyzes the construction of the modern subject as built on a purity-thinking that requires the fragmentation and labeling of tainted others (as

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24 Recently, the critique of decoloniality from a postcolonial perspective has received more attention in the literature, see especially the issue “Postcolonial Responses to Decolonial Interventions” in *Postcolonial Studies* (Colpani, Mascat and Smiet 2022).
deviant, as Black, queer, etc.) to become a pure unified subject. Lugones works to undo the violence of the unitary subject by showing how it relies on the dehumanizing, animalizing fragmentation machinery of modernity that marks the contaminated Other; she does this by reclaiming the impurity of a plural self that does not have to police its segmented parts; in order to build “deep coalitions” across and through differences rather than through a unity built on the repression of differences. Reclaiming plurality and impurity counters the modern epistemic and political investment in pure and transparent identities.

Paradoxically, despite the commitment to dismantling ways of purity-thinking, the purity of belonging to one or the other field, to be within one or the other discourse, assumes a backdrop of pure epistemic and disciplinary divides. This translates within decolonial option into a gate-keeping of who counts as decolonial or postcolonial or poststructural. For poststructuralism, in turn, France pertains its imaginary centrality on the world-map, so that the theories can make claim to universal status (even if it is in content anti-universalistic) and provide a privileged arsenal of concepts for the left to understand, criticize and resist the global capitalist order. The referent poststructuralism can then perpetuate a Eurocentric epistemic imaginary, where its geographical location is not a sign of situatedness but instead a taken for granted guarantee of its universal(izable) reach.

What do the mutual interest in the question of inside/outside on the one hand, and the themes of contamination and impurity on the other, mean for the relation between decoloniality and poststructuralism? What do inside and outside mean? And what does it mean for the possibility of deep coalitions?

I argue that the spatial metaphors of inside/outside of the “colonial difference,” the influential framework developed by Mignolo, undercuts the decolonial commitment to impurity, by reinscribing epistemic and subject-positions on a geographical/geopolitical map. This epistemic move relies on the transparency of pure identities (their mappability) prior to their impure epistemologies different from Western purity-thinking. Through the framework of being on one or the other side of the colonial difference, with purity belonging to the West and impurity to decolonial alternatives emerging from elsewhere, the decolonial option risks desiring a pure impurity. In order to take up a project of decolonization, it is important to depart from impure impure positions: epistemic, subjective, political. From this impure impurity, the epistemic and political positions need to be understood in their prior entanglement, without thereby effacing their differences and power-relations. In a Q&A after a guest lecture, Karen Barad responded to a question about the relation between Indigenous onto-epistemologies and their own agential realism by suggesting that we should not approach the question as a relation between one system of thought with another system of thought (as if they were bounded entities), but as a relation or entanglement “all the way down” (Barad 2021, n.p.). This to me seems crucial for affirming pluriversality: The impure impure approach to the
epistemic, historic and political questions aims for an understanding of pluriversal not as a relation between already constituted and bounded worlds, but a relational view based on the prior entanglements of the multiple worlds. I will make this case for a relational view historically and geopolitically, with reference to Pal Ahluwalia (2005) and Lewis Gordon (2008b; 2021), and epistemologically with Chela Sandoval’s *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000).

One of the troubling aspects of decolonial literature is the slippery referent “the West.” At times, decoloniality seems to be aimed at the *dominant Western civilizational project*, which acknowledges a plurality of histories and epistemologies on all sides of the colonial difference. Decoloniality would then denote an intervention in the epistemic *imaginary*: the ways we have internalized this civilizational project in our ways of doing research, thinking, feeling, relating to each other and other earthlings. At other times, the West designates a *geographical location*. In the slipperiness between these two, lies the rub. Decoloniality as an ethical move, orientation or intervention then becomes a static framework based on location and pure identity-positions.

This has implications for what it means to “delink:” is it an *epistemic levelling* that challenges what counts as valid knowledge and who is allowed to make knowledge-claims? Or does it mean that we must delink from anything that comes from the West as a *location*? Mignolo seems to waver between these positions. At times, he situates his argument as countering the “imaginary of the modern/colonial world system” (Mignolo 2000, 23). At other times, the West means political geography, defined as “the European Union plus Britain and the United States” (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 5). At times it is both: “What constitutes the West more than geography is a linguistic family, a belief system and an epistemology” (Mignolo 2015a, xxv). Decoloniality then oscillates between on the one hand a movement, intervention and opening that invites an unlearning of internalized modern/colonial grammar and a relearning of or reorientation towards other modes of knowing and doing that would trouble the disciplinary frameworks of knowledge and the categorial-hierarchical ways of ordering the world; on the other, it becomes an ossified structure, a new world-map that points at pure identities based on location and subject-position.

The equation of epistemology with location is bound up with Mignolo’s notion of delinking from Western epistemology, as a regionalizing or provincializing of philosophy: “Philosophy is a regional and historical endeavor (...) it is an aberration to project a regional definition [Greeks who called their activity philosophy] of a regional way of thinking as a universal standard by which to judge and classify” (Mignolo 2015a, xi–xii). This view further influences the relation between the decolonial, the postcolonial and the poststructural. Poststructuralism would belong to that same genealogy originating with the Greeks and, despite its critical stance towards its tradition, share the main tenets of Western epistemology. This is a “Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism” that remains blind to the colonial difference or to other
epistemologies (Mignolo 2000, 315). This also provides the basis for decoloniality’s distancing from the postcolonial, which, in Mignolo’s view, is derivative of poststructuralism (or postmodernism) and therefore uses the same Western epistemological grammar. Decolonial delinking is grounded in other genealogies and offers different epistemologies that are not reducible to Western epistemology: “while postcoloniality is anchored on postmodernity, decolonization and decoloniality are anchored on the symbolic legacies of the Bandung conference and the debates of the 1950s, during the hard times of political decolonization. We have moved from eurocentered to decolonial epistemology” (Mignolo 2015a, xli). It is important that these arguments are not based on the contents of this poststructuralist text or that postcolonial thinker, but purely on their epistemic or geographic location—where the epistemic and geographic are often (but not always) conflated, as I will now show in a discussion of Mignolo’s Local Histories, Global Design (2000), in which he worked out his epistemological framework of decoloniality for the first time in its entirety.

Here, Mignolo argues that the West has imposed its local history as global designs, hiding the relativity of its own locality: “From the epistemological perspective, European local knowledge and histories have been projected to global designs” (Mignolo 2000, 17). The intersection of other local histories/knowledges and the imposed global designs leads to a “border-gnosis,” a multi-perspectival way of knowing that grapples with the ideas of the West but maintains its own sources of thought from which “an other thought” emerges. Border-gnosis is a reference to Anzaldúa’s Borderlands/La Frontera (2012) and Mudimbe’s gnosis as a way of conceptualizing African knowledges vis-à-vis Western epistemologies (Mudimbe 1988), functioning in an analogous way to the “double consciousness” (Du Bois 2005) or “demonic grounds” that Sylvia Wynter mobilizes (see chapter 4). The project of pluriversality is in Mignolo’s view one of epistemic levelling where Western thought is provincialized and ceases to be the mythical entity of universal knowledge. From here, other knowledges can co-exist in a non-hierarchical way.

To counter the “mono-topic” hermeneutics of the West, Mignolo proposes a “pluritopic hermeneutic” (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 252): instead of taking the Other as an object of study (the known) of an alleged universal knowledge by and for the modern (Western) subject (the knower), pluritopic hermeneutics takes into account the different sides of the epistemic divide of the West vs. the Rest: the colonial difference. The aim of this “border thinking” is “to erase the distinction between the knower and the known” (Mignolo 2000, 19). Although Mignolo insists that he is making epistemological claims rather than ontological ones, there is a lot of ontological baggage that comes with his epistemic position, which is in danger of equating subjectivity, being, knowing and locality. Those marked by coloniality become the potentiated border-thinkers from where epistemic plurality emerges and thrives, against the
enclosed universalisms of Western zero-point epistemologies that are on the other side of the colonial difference, i.e., inside modernity.

When we look at what Mignolo’s pluritopic hermeneutic entails in practice, we see that the geographical interpretation of the West takes the upper hand: it equates *imaginary, location* and *epistemology*. It becomes clear that any theory that is from Europe or the West is inherently *Eurocentric*:

Postmodern criticism of modernity as well as world system analysis is generated from the interior borders of the system—that is, they provide a Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism. The colonial epistemic difference is located some place else, not in the interiority of modernity defined by its imperial conflicts and self-critiqued from a postmodern perspective. On the contrary, the epistemic colonial difference emerges in the exteriority of the modern/colonial world. (Mignolo 2000, 315)

Mignolo criticizes the Western *imaginary* when he claims that Derrida or Deleuze and Guattari somehow provide the abstract conceptual model that can be applied to a particular case elsewhere. I agree with the importance of the leveling of the epistemic imaginary—and this “shift in the geography of reason” (Gordon) is, in some circles, underway in a way different from a few decades ago; the decolonial option has contributed to this shift. But Mignolo is making much stronger claims. He is not simply criticizing Deleuze and Guattari and Derrida because they (allegedly) replicate abstract universals and thereby illustrate the problems of the Western epistemic imaginary; Mignolo suggests that this is the case *because of* their location vis-à-vis the colonial difference. Mignolo’s pluritopic hermeneutics then finishes where it started, namely non-dialogical “irreducible difference:”

the question is not to choose between one or the other but to understand the irreducible difference between both and the epistemological potential of border gnos (epistemology) of Khatibi’s “an other thinking,” Derrida (or Deleuze and Guattari, for that matter) remains “in custody” of the universal bent of the modern concept of reason [based on the] reproduction of “abstract universals.” (Mignolo 2000, 84)

Geohistorical location determines the limits of theory and cannot be critically translated, reworked or inherited differently: the ambivalence of the West as imaginary or geographical/geopolitical location leads to a conflation of *Eurocentrism* and *coming from Europe/the West*. I can only read this as disastrous in its implications for coalitions and positionality, agreeing with Gordon:

Poststructuralism functions within decoloniality as a colonial element or form of coloniality. (…) For decoloniality, this problem becomes acute where theory is undertheorized. Where this is so, the result is often an appeal to theorists with the addition of a *position* on an issue. That position—often formulated as “positionality”—is often a moral one offered as a political intervention. (Gordon 2021, 15)
This positioning in Mignolo’s framework in fact repeats the colonial map of the world where only the value-scales get inverted: Mignolo explicitly acknowledges a proximity to Samuel Huntington’s culturally essentialist position in The Clash of Civilizations: “The position I have been articulating throughout this book (…) almost naturally moves toward a conceptualization of the world order close to the one painted by Samuel P. Huntington” (Mignolo 2000, 307). Mignolo’s disagreement with Huntington is not the fact that he maps the world according to bounded cultural entities, but rather that Huntington uses it as an argument to fight for the hegemony of the West. Instead, Mignolo aims for “a world of multiple centers (…) dominated by none” (Mignolo 2000, 310). Mignolo seeks to remap the world differently, in such a way that it would not lead to pure identities:

Remapping a new world order implies remapping cultures of scholarship and the scholarly loci of enunciation from where the world has been mapped. The crisis of “area studies” is the crisis of old borders, be they nation borders or civilization borders. It is also the crisis of the distinction between hegemonic (discipline-based knowledges) and subaltern (area-based knowledges), as if discipline-based knowledges are geographically disincorporated. Border thinking allows us to remap cultures of scholarship in terms of “area-based disciplinary knowledge,” bringing together and erasing the borders between knowing about and knowing from. Border gnosia will help in imagining a world without rigid frontiers (national or civilizational) or a world in which civilizations will have to defend their unity and their purity. (Mignolo 2000, 310; emphasis original)

To counter the disciplinary coloniality of area-studies, Mignolo proposes to erase the difference between knowing about and knowing from: in this way, all knowledge acknowledges its local and historical position, without the pretense of producing universal knowledge. However, I do not see how this remapping counters purity-thinking and cannot find an elucidation of this in Mignolo’s work. To be sure, the border-thinkers have a double consciousness or border-gnosis due to their position in-between the imposed global designs of the West and the other local knowledges they sought to displace. In that way, their position is not one of unity or purity. But the equating of knowing from/knowing about and of subject-position/locality/epistemology, relies on the belief in a prior transparent mappability of identity and epistemology. In other words, this spatial mapping of epistemic and identity-positions is itself premised on a transparency of pure positions that the decolonial option charges Western epistemologies with and seeks to delink from. Decoloniality as a critique of the dominant project of Western civilization cannot rely on a framework that reinscribes every subject-position, every epistemic position, every way of

25 For a critique of Huntington’s cultural essentialism, see Edward Said (1993).
knowing back onto the world-map carved out by that dominant project of Western civilization.

This purity-logic in epistemologies entrenches a Eurocentric epistemic imaginary and a coloniality of knowledge, to which I will turn shortly (in reference to Sandoval’s notion of academic apartheid). In Mignolo, there is the paradox of wishing to deflate the West by challenging its universality, but in effect he inflates the West by taking its claims too seriously, as a hegemonic self-enclosed totality that cannot be questioned in its spurious claims except for its appeal to universality. This further makes illegible the continuous work by many feminist and de/postcolonial scholars in the preceding decades, as well as people around the globe challenging these false universal narratives since at least 1492. Turning the story merely into a “local” one with colonizing “global” effects, Mignolo accepts the narrative of the West and the world-map it produced. Gordon offers a different model for challenging the Eurocentrism of the Western canon. Instead of pointing to an outside that amounts to a position of “irreducible difference,” Gordon shows that the Eurocentric narrative of a Greek genesis that teleologically culminates in rational and scientific thought in modern Europe is a very partial, limited and racist fiction. He explicitly moves away from such non-relational accounts and offers relational ways of revisiting our plural histories and epistemologies. The story of philosophy has always had multiple centers and languages—systems of thought and language always influence and relate to others through which other thoughts emerge. Whereas Mignolo takes the Western fiction of a monopoly on philosophy at face value (by affirming other modes of thought that fall outside of it), Gordon deflates the imperialism of Eurocentric narratives by telling different, better, relational, pluriversal histories of philosophy (Gordon 2008b; 2021).

The postcolonial: a product of poststructuralism?

To start from a prior entanglement of multiple worlds complicates the relation between poststructuralism and postcolonialism as well. Recall that for Mignolo the important contradistinction with postcolonial theory is the latter’s replication of and alleged origin in Western theory and methodology, whereas decolonial thought emerges from elsewhere. In his article “Out of Africa: Poststructuralism’s Colonial Roots,” Pal Ahluwalia challenges the usual chronology that postcolonial theory is simply derivative of poststructuralism, by arguing that it is actually poststructuralism itself that is rooted in coloniality:

Isn’t it plausible that the questions which have become so much a part of the post-structuralist canon—otherness, difference(…)the lamenting of modernity and the deconstruction of the grand narratives of European culture arising out of the Enlightenment tradition—are possible because of their post-colonial connection? (Ahluwalia 2005, 138)
Instead of pointing to May ‘68 as the most important historical event from which poststructuralist thought would grow, Ahluwalia turns to the Algerian war of independence and the collapse of the French empire as a more significant historical event. He points to the complicitous omissions and silencing of the role of Algeria in the personal and intellectual formation of Cixous and Derrida: by tracing the “spectre of Algeria” (Ahluwalia 2005, 148) in the work of these assumed-to-be-French poststructuralists, he seeks to trouble the alleged Frenchness of poststructuralist theory, and, by extension, the derivative status of postcolonial theory as being modelled after French theory. Instead, poststructuralism is itself a product of (post)coloniality. I will try to corroborate this view in chapter 6, where I analyze how Levinas situates the emergence of (post)structuralism in the context of colonization and decolonization.

To trace coloniality in the texts of Derrida and Cixous is different from reducing them to an epistemic or geographical location; such a critical reading would be an injunction to learn to speak more response-ably and question our own practices. This injunction to response-ability requires grappling with our own contaminated impure epistemic and geopolitical positions, from which we must nevertheless act. To claim a position outside of this would undermine impure response-able situating of ourselves and our work.

Lugones’ principle of impurity

Lugones’ legacy with regard to the colonial difference is ambivalent. On the one hand, there is a clear “methodological imperative of decolonial feminism” to coalition work (Roshanravan 2020, 120), to “learn about each other as resisters to the coloniality of gender at the colonial difference, without necessarily being an insider to the worlds of meaning from which resistance to the coloniality arises” (Lugones cited in Roshanravan 2020, 120). However, Ofelia Schutte (2020) points out the tension between two diverging yet interrelated sides in Lugones’ theorizing: Based on Lugones’ essays in feminist philosophy since the 1980s, the emphasis has always been on experience-based impurity, multiplicity, mestiza ge, heterogeneity, and multi-layered complexity of resistant active subjectivity facing multiple oppressions. With Lugones’ work on the coloniality of gender, the emphasis seems to shift towards a “highly structured theory of the modern/colonial capitalist world system,” which “[prioritizes] one historical event happening over five hundred years ago (along with the kernel of relations generated by it) (…) over and above any other analysis of race and gender” (Schutte 2020, 104; 112). One might well ask, then, whether the “commit[ment] to seeing each other as not consumed by coloniality” (Roshanravan 2020, 132) is not in tension with a framework that starts and ends with the positionality of everyone vis-à-vis the colonial difference. This is not to challenge Lugones’ claims that many and the most important resources of resistance are located in resistant communities and potentiated double
consciously, transmitted through “habit, reflection, desire, the use of daily practices, languages, ritual knowledge, a thinking-feeling way of decision making” (Lugones 2020, 34), a multiplicity that exceeds social fragmentation. Emphasizing the principle of impurity as impure impurity loosens or at least navigates the tension that Schutte points out between the early “diasporic peregrina” voice and the decolonial “community-bound peregrina” voice (Schutte 2020).

**Countering academic apartheid: Sandoval’s methodology of the oppressed**

In 2000, Chela Sandoval published *Methodology of the Oppressed*, which set as its goal to “decolonize theory and method” by synthesizing a wide variety of critical methods. Sandoval sets out to counter the fragmentation of critical discourses, which she describes as a neoliberal governance of difference. Instead, she suggests that

a shared theory and method of oppositional consciousness and social movement is the strategy of articulation necessary to resolve the problematics of the disciplinization and apartheid of academic knowledges in the human and social sciences. (Sandoval 2000, 78)

Sandoval’s analysis of the apartheid of theoretical realms is akin to Gordon’s notion of “disciplinary decadence” (Gordon 2011) or Lykke’s comparison of disciplines with nations protecting their borders (Lykke 2010). Gordon starts out from the colonial genesis of disciplinary knowledge and suggests a “teleological suspension” of method where one sets out with a problem rather than a consensus on lexicon, canon and method; Fanon’s sociogenic approach being a primary example of such a suspension. Lykke equally notes that “with a historical perspective (…) disciplinary borders [like national borders] come to represent power relations rather than rational cuts in the body of knowledge” (Lykke 2010, 20). Sandoval’s approach to methodology is a clear shift form the knowledge-production for itself, or for the discipline’s sake, with the clear goal of creating a global, critical, “oppositional” consciousness. The aim of the methodology of the oppressed is directly political or pedagogical as a way to counter the fragmentation of critical theory for a neoliberal university. Sandoval moves across various theoretical domains and discourses that in the academy usually remain separate, rearticulating a possible shared and coalitional project between Anzaldúa’s *la facultad*, Haraway’s cyborg-feminism, Barthes’ semiotics and Fanon’s transdisciplinary phenomenological existentialism. What Sandoval’s translation of one discourse into another effects is a *levelling of the epistemic imaginary*. Whereas Mignolo’s delinking uplifts border-thinkers from the underside of modernity whilst always remaining tethered to the West as point of reference, Sandoval’s translations and hybrid method undo the phantasmagoric lure of “the West” by resituating and appropriating theories from the center to the extent that they are useful. This is, of course, not to say
that a Barthes or a Derrida are necessary interlocutors for developing a toolkit for critical thinking.

Lewis Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon explicitly move away from such non-relational accounts and offer relational ways of revisiting our relational plural histories and epistemologies. They do so in an affirmatively critical twist on Audre Lorde’s “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house:”

slaves have historically done something more provocative with such tools than attempt to dismantle the Big House. There are those who used those tools, developed additional ones, and built houses of their own on more or less generous soil. It is our view that the proper response is to follow their lead, transcending rather than dismantling Western ideas through building our own houses of thought. When enough houses are built, the hegemony of the master’s house—in fact, *mastery itself*—will cease to maintain its imperial status. (Gordon and Gordon 2006, ix)

Although Mignolo and Walsh (2018) also cite this approvingly as an additional decolonial approach, it seems to me to be incompatible with Mignolo’s position. To be clear, I fully embrace the starting point and commitment to a plurality of knowledges that fall outside Euromodern canonization and will always exceed any attempt at decolonizing the canon. I would even say that Gordon’s more relational and plural approach can also raise hierarchical classifications and standards for what counts as philosophy or civilization: “Wherever human beings were afforded sufficient time for reflection, ideas on organization and the makeup of reality followed” (Gordon 2021, 4). Despite the pluralizing effects that focus on relational histories rather than a West vs. the Rest story, this idea suggests that there must be an overcoming of a prior state of scarcity and bare animal survival in order to become political and philosophical—one of the master tropes of Euromodernity that combines the linear timeline with stories of animalization and progressive humanization. Here the decolonial argument for an irreducible pluriversality of epistemes, politics and worlds stands: starting from complex multiplicity and relationality instead of moving from primitive to sophisticated.

The insistence on epistemic borders between the West and the Rest leads to epistemological impasses and political disorientation. To the extent that we are committed to textual traditions and epistemological public debate, I insist on the necessity and inescapability of taking up the *impure impure* position of the spectral heir without recourse to the purity of location.

The logic of purity that seeks to demarcate the decolonial, postcolonial and poststructural and map it geopolitically and epistemically on one or the other side of the colonial difference, reiterates this academic apartheid and would hamper the development of an imbricated, impure decolonial toolbox. Sandoval’s methodology reflects the entanglement of different theories, histories and worlds that are less concerned with defending one’s epistemic territory and that I interpret as an open invitation to coalitions across differences.
Genealogy, sociogeny and socio-genealogy

With the term socio-genealogy I point to two main sets of influences: the genealogical tradition of Friedrich Nietzsche, Michel Foucault and Judith Butler on the one hand, and the sociogenic critique of Frantz Fanon and Sylvia Wynter on the other. This is not to suggest that there is a coherent usage of genealogy or sociogeny shared by the various authors, but nevertheless point in certain directions of inquiry and different traditions I am indebted to. Importantly, a socio-genealogical approach that constructively cross-reads Nietzsche, Butler, Lugones, Fanon and Wynter is not meant as a new comprehensive and totalizing method for understanding subject-formation, but an attempt to attend to the multiplicity of stories, subjectivities, sites and pasts in their interrelatedness.

Genealogy

Genealogy is employed in roughly two ways: first, it is often used loosely as Foucault-inspired critical histories of the present that are reflexive of their own situated interpretative choices to distinguish them from ruses of history as a neutral description of a natural linear chain of events that the writer records rather than constructs (see for example Lykke 2010, 96–101). Second, and this will be the way I will be using it, it is a materialist theory of how historical forces work on the body and thereby produce the subject. Nietzsche’s Genealogy is an attempt at a non-metaphysical material analysis of the history of humanity, how ideas of self, subject and soul arise through the violent play of forces that have no inherent meaning. Nietzsche’s approach becomes crucial for Foucault’s understanding of the body, history and the subject, as is particularly evident in works like Discipline and Punish (Foucault 1991), in which Foucault attempts to demonstrate how a certain soul or subject is produced through the subjection to modern regimes of discipline in the prison, the school, the army, etc. From this, the Foucauldian and Butlerian theory of “subjectivation” emerges, which analyzes the simultaneous interplay of subjection to power and one’s enabled agency through that subjection. Foucault describes genealogy as follows:

The body is the surface of the inscription of events (…) the locus of the dissociation of the Me (to which it tries to impart the chimera of a substantial unity) (…) Genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history’s destruction of the body. (Foucault 2003, 357; emphasis added)

The sense of self is a chimera of a substantive identity as a necessary fiction that we come to desire through processes of subjectivation: underneath is nothing but “the various systems of subjection” and “the hazardous play of dominations” (Foucault 2003, 357). Genealogy, as a theory of subjectivation, is about inheritance.
Foucault points to Nietzsche’s distinction between *Herkunft* (descent) and *Erbschaft* (heritage). *Erbschaft* tries to turn to a dignified origin from which the self can find its proper standing: history and lineage as one’s possession that ensures substantive identity. This is the sense in which I use the figure of the *legitimate heir*, although I arrive at that figure through Édouard Glissant, Karima Lazali and Fred Moten (see chapter 8). *Herkunft*, on the other hand, is a history or conglomerate of “the exteriority of accidents” that do reveal the notion of a unified self as chimeric, and “fragment” this unit in infinite amount of forces and influences that have no ulterior logic or metaphysical unity: “The body—and everything that touches it: diet, climate, and soil—is the domain of the *Herkunft*” (Foucault 2003, 356). If in Nietzsche this notion of the body and history is circumscribed by the racist bio-centrism of 19th century thought, Foucault turns it into a hermeneutics of the modern subject. Butler, in contrast to Foucault’s interpretation of following the surfaces of the body of history without any depth or secret truth hidden underneath, attempts a more psychoanalytic reading, arguing that subject-formation occurs through children’s vulnerable exposure and subjection to norms and rules not of their own making. Although Butler acknowledges that this is not the same as the formation of political subjectivity, they argue that the play of vulnerability, intolerable dependency, desire for recognition that ensues is the ground for political formation as well (Butler 1997). For Butler, genealogy indicates the important difference between an *individual* and a *subject*, where the latter term presupposes subjection to a matrix of power that is fundamentally impersonal:

The genealogy of the subject as a critical category, however, suggests that the subject, rather than be identified strictly with the individual, ought to be designated as a linguistic category, a place-holder, a structure in formation. (…) No individual becomes a subject without first becoming subjected or undergoing “subjectivation.” (Butler 1997, 10–11)

In chapter 7, I argue that the combination of the Foucauldian understanding of power as field of forces with “no outside” and the unproblematised universality of psychoanalytic theory leads to what Wynter calls Man’s overrepresentation of itself “as if it were the human itself” (Wynter 2003, 261). In this dissertation I do not engage further with Foucault and his Eurocentrism and latent antiblackness (see e.g. Weheliye 2014). As Kelly Oliver points out, unlike Foucault and Butler, Nietzsche leaves space for an alternative earthly, bodily inheritance of affirmation instead of only the subversion of an external matrix of power one is subjected to (Oliver 2001, 66); for Nietzsche, these are the bodily inheritances of (virile) *activity*, the immediate expression of one’s power and freedom. Although they share an immanent or monist ontology that takes power as an external force-field, displacing an ontology which separates a prior inner potential or action, the distinction between activity and reactivity becomes less distinguishable in Foucault and Butler. This alternative inheritance for
earthly activity is crucial in my argument, which I will rework with Oliver and others as socially embedded responsibility.

Genealogies of modern subjectivation offer resources to think through the effects on subject-formation of the raced, gendered, classed and ableist maturity-trope, but in the cases of Foucault and Butler, can simultaneously eclipse differential geopolitical positions and histories. I follow Lugones’ partial agreement with and critical intervention in the Foucauldian understanding of power/resistance, which on my reading applies equally to Butler’s usage of genealogy and subjectivation. Lugones agrees that power always begets resistance, but disagrees with the sources of this resistance. Whereas both Foucault and Butler emphasize that resistance emerges within the same field of power and can only reiterate and subvert that field of forces within its own immanence, Lugones argues that traditions and communities of the oppressed in fact do rely on resistant resources precisely outside of the field of imposed (colonial) power:

Foucault’s account of resistance coincides with my argument in thinking that oppression calls resistance forth, but he misses what I think is crucial to resistance (...) the agency of the resistor in these cases is what I call “active subjectivity” (Lugones 2003), a minimal form of agency that includes habit, reflection, desire, the use of daily practices, languages, ritual knowledge, a thinking-feeling way of decision making, which may not be part of the meanings of the institutional and structural meanings of the society but may be part of the meanings in the resistant circle. Thus, the meaning of the resistance will be unintelligible to the oppressor and may be done with or without critical reflection, but always without an understanding in common between oppressor and oppressed. In the terrible encounter with the conqueror and the colonizer, Indigenous and African resisters were fully formed as people in communities and worlds of sense. So, their resistance is thoroughly informed by that constitution and by the communal circle of meaning that permits the exercise of oneself as a person. (Lugones 2020, 34; emphasis added)

Resistance is not only the reiteration of the forces of subjugation but also taps into other (response-enabling) resources that are distinct from (although always contaminated by and partly constituted through) the logic of oppression.

This is not to suggest that genealogy is necessarily Eurocentric or antiblack.26 In opposition to the Foucauldian-Butlerian interpretation, I insist on the constitutive outside that Christina Sharpe and Lugones point to respectively: “even as we experienced, recognized, and lived subjection, we did not simply or only live in subjection and as the subjected” (Sharpe 2016, 4); “In our colonized,

26 I am thinking of foundational works like Saidiya Hartman’s Scenes of Subjection (1997) and Silvia Federici’s Caliban and the Witch (2004) that take a related hermeneutics of the body as target of historical violence in the construction of modern (non-)subjects.
racialized, oppressed existences we are also other than what the hegemon makes us be” (Lugones 2010, 746). In order to acknowledge that the necessary tools for critique are not only an immanent negation of a genealogical tradition but come from elsewhere (as an impure and imbricated difference), I use it in conjunction with sociogeny as socio-genealogy.

**Sociogeny**

Just as the term genealogy, there is no clear coherence or consensus on its usage. In this dissertation I draw on Fanon’s introduction of the term but I especially engage Wynter’s interpretation of Fanon’s sociogeny. Although Wynter attributes this to and relies on her interpretation of Fanon, it is nevertheless important to keep in mind that their usages vary (Tembo forthcoming; Mariott 2011). Fanon introduces the term sociogeny in *Black Skin, White Masks* as a radical break with the presuppositions of psychiatry in particular and the colonial order of knowledge more generally:

> Reacting against the constitutionalizing trend at the end of the nineteenth century, Freud demanded that the individual factor be taken into account in psychoanalysis. He replaced the phylogenetic theory by an ontogenetic approach. We shall see that the alienation of the black man is not an individual question. Alongside phylogeny and ontogeny, there is also sociogeny. In a way (…) let us say that here it is a question of sociodiagnostics. (Fanon 2008, xv)

In my analysis of the developmental genre of Man, I show how the ontogenic (individual development) and phylogenic (species-development) theory are co-constitutive. As Fanon points out, the recourse to the universality of psychoanalytic categories of the individual and biological categories of the human rely on racialization and fail to address that humans emerge within a sociality and history—a problematic not dissimilar from Foucault’s, but emerging from a different existential and political situation and necessity. In Fanon’s attempt at examining the *necessary* alienation of Black people (and white people) in a colonial and racist society, he must suspend the methodologies of his psychiatric training to pursue trans-disciplinarily his psychological and philosophical questioning. The sociogenetic approach to the psycho-existential drama of alienation and the (im)possibility of disalienation, also carries the mark of historical materialism: Fanon argues that the psycho-existential states he analyzes are first and foremost derived from the social, political and economic situation: “The inferiority complex can be ascribed to a double process: first, economic. Then, internalization or rather epidermalization of this inferiority” (Fanon 2008, xiv). Importantly, Fanon breaks with the Oedipal schema of ontogenetic (individual) development in psychoanalysis, arguing that it obscures the sociogenetic modes based on racialization and dehumanization that it relies on and is embedded in.
Sociogeny has inspired non-disciplinary or trans-disciplinary approaches to scholarship and the problems of human existence that cannot in advance determine what it includes and excludes as its object of analysis (Gordon 2011). For Fanon the revolutionary psychiatrist rather than the dissident scholar, sociogeny is a critical praxis (Bulhan 1985; Sheehi and Sheehi 2022). Fanon introduces sociogeny as a refusal to psychiatry’s goal to make the individual adapt to the state of normalcy. It is this purported normalcy that is the unbearable and unbreathable chokehold that prevents the possibility of an ethical life. Fanon had to break with the conventions of psychiatry that set as their goal the individual’s adaption to normative society, since it is normative society that is unbearable, causes alienation, makes life unbreathable for the racialized and damnés. These tenets of revolutionary or radical psychiatry are also shared by feminist approaches to radical psychiatry (e.g. Wyckoff 1977).

Fanon’s sociogenic approach leads to a critical reworking of Carl Jung’s category of the collective unconscious, not as a universal but as a sociogenic one. Blackness in the Euromodern collective unconscious serve as figures of Evil and Sin, the antinomy to everything human(e) and worthy, making their lives exploitable in myriad ways from small psychic everyday humiliations to the physical exploitability and disposability in the colonial capitalist world. The very appearance and existence of people with darker skins get locked into this web of signification within a world of white value, allowing white people to cathex and infect the Other with all their psychic trouble, temporarily alleviating the burden of one’s own alienation by making the Other carry it for them. Through this projection and disavowal, white people draw a stable and positive identity for themselves as center of the universe belonging to the present and future (Fanon 2008; 2004; Kilomba 2020). This resonates with Anzaldúa’s reading of Jung and her methodology (see below). It is also crucial for Wynter’s interpretation of the “sociogenic principle” and the “symbolic codes of Life and Death, Self and Other” (Wynter 2001).

Although he did not engage psychoanalysis or uses the term sociogeny, James Baldwin arrives at similar conclusions as Fanon: like Fanon, Baldwin

27 “Fanon’s active commitment to social liberation also entailed a commitment to psychological liberation. (…) the relations between individual travails and the prevailing social order. It was indeed his ability to connect psychiatry to politics or private troubles to social problems and, having made the connection conceptually, to boldly act that made him a pioneer of radical psychiatry” (Bulhan 1985, 240).

28 Fanon focuses on alienated people of color, but always has in view the possibility of a new humanism that does not chain white and Black in alienating positions of a fixed hierarchical ontology that produce the complexes of superiority and inferiority. Fanon applies this principle more widely, as one of his examples is a French police officer who is traumatized by his routine tasks as torturer of Algerian freedom fighters and turns to Fanon to make him cope more smoothly with his function as torturer (Fanon 2004).
points to the socio-politico-historical forces beyond the Oedipal family that already mark and constitute the subjectivation of young racialized children. Whereas Fanon writes about the unconscious identification with whiteness as a middle-class Martinican subject leading to a traumatic encounter in Europe, Baldwin writes from a world where the cultural unconscious offers no mirrors for identification and only abjects him as invisible, serviceable and/or a threat to serve humanity *qua* white civilization. The following passage summarizes the existential and affective level of the sociogenic transmission of the weight and terror of a hostile world beyond the Oedipal family:

This world is white and they are black. White people hold the power, which means that they are superior to blacks (intrinsically, that is: God decreed it so) (...) Long before the Negro child perceives this difference, and even longer before he [sic] understands it, he has begun to react to it, he has begun to be controlled by it. (...) behind [their parent’s] authority stands another, nameless and impersonal, infinitely harder to please, and bottomlessly cruel. And this filters into the child’s consciousness through his parents’ tone of voice as he is being exhorted, punished, or loved; in the sudden, uncontrollable note of fear heard in his mother’s or his father’s voice when he has strayed beyond some particular boundary. (Baldwin 1985, 347)

On one level, Baldwin describes the Manichean world of whiteness and Blackness that constitute the Euromodern genres of Man through the abjection of Blackness in terms similar to Fanon and Wynter. On another level, unlike Wynter, Baldwin does not describe this Manichean world in mechanical-behavioral terms (see chapter 4), but in terms of the psycho-existential fears and disavowals of white people, who thereby make the Other carry the weight of their anxieties and the past: “What it means to be a Negro in this country, is that you represent, you are the receptacle of, you are the vehicle of, all the pain, disaster, sorrow, which white Americans think they can escape” (Baldwin 1963, n.p.). As a product of a shared history that most of his white fellow citizens disavow and try to escape at all costs, Baldwin is forced to struggle with history and he emerges out of this struggle as a witness to the sociogenic forces that shape and dis/figure this genre of Man premised on whiteness, aiming to transform it into a praxis of being human based on unconditional care for each other free from hypocritical morality and hierarchical definitions of self and Other. The latter is not an invention from a *tabula rasa*, but something that he inherits from the Harlem community that he grew up in the 1920s and 1930s: the transformation of Man toward the human is at the same time an affirmation of an-other inheritance that exceeded the weight and terror of white civilization. Like Fanon, breaking out of the shackles of Man leads to an opening of human possibility of (re)creation and (re)invention: “[T]rust your experience. Know whence you came. If you know whence you came, there is really no limit to where you can go” (Baldwin 1985, 340).
In chapter 4, I will engage more thoroughly with Wynter’s interpretation of sociogeny. She recasts it more broadly as a comprehensive theory of the human and of human history as a break of the colonial order of knowledge that she argues is grounded on a bio-centrism, which is inseparable from racialization and dehumanization. Despite her break with this biocentric order of knowledge (the ontogenic and phylogenic paradigms), I argue that Wynter does not take sociogeny far enough and continues to rely on a mechanical biological understanding prevalent in the 1980s and 1990s. Instead of the Wynterian interpretation of enclosed replication of certain symbolic codes and cosmogenic narratives, I propose to read Wynter’s sociogenic theory of the human in terms of spectral inheritance, i.e., arguing for the critical and creative reinvention and reconfiguration of the plural past—i.e., resources from a relational multiplicity that exceed the Euromodern genre of Man—for different futurities. The most important methodological referent for such critical and creative reconfiguration is Anzaldúa, to which I now turn in the context of feminist figurations.

Feminist figurations
Kathrin Thiele argues for figurations as an onto-epistemic feminist mode of inquiry, which highlights the non-innocence of theories and theorizer (Thiele 2021). Figurations mostly center around a rethinking of embodied subjectivities outside of the concept of rational subjectivity. Haraway defines figurations as “performatve images that can be inhabited” and embody “condense maps of contestable worlds” (Haraway 2018, 11). Figurations are relational thinking techniques that avoid the closure of delineated definitions of concepts that can simply be applied to or exemplified by an external reality. Instead, as a non-dualist but entangled production of effects, it suggests how the material and the semiotic, thinker and thought are enmeshed in relational, multi-perspectival world(s) of negotiation and continual figuring out (Thiele 2021). They are defamiliarization devices that refigure habitual thinking and inhabiting worlds to “inherit the past thickly” (Haraway cited in Thiele 2021, 239), to embed oneself in the complexities of the world through other narratives and a different social imaginary. Thiele offers a genealogy of figurations as method by way of Gloria Anzaldúa, Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti. I will briefly retrace these steps before introducing my dis/agreements with these various usages of figurations. Anzaldúa introduces the new mestiza and nagual (shape-shifter) to think and configure liminal subjectivity of multiple selves, a consciousness of the borderlands. WRESTLING the mestiza from interpretations of Borderlands/La Frontera that overemphasized racial connotations based on blood, Anzaldúa insists on the New Mestiza as a critical figure to think and move through different worlds that are simultaneously modern and nonmodern, translating from one community to another. Against “neo-conservative assimilation,” the
new mestiza is a project of self-naming and an invitation to others to “decolonize subjectivity” and work on situated “bridge work” and “border-thinking” (Anzaldúa 2009c). Haraway introduces an array of figures as a collective working towards a “a whole kinship system of figurations as critical figures” (Haraway et al. 2004, 327), to learn to dwell in the layered complexities of our contemporary technoscientific, multispecies world, outside of the mental habits of binaries of human/machine (cyborgs), human/animal (dogs) and nature/culture (coyote). Braidotti introduces nomadic subjects as “materialistic mappings of situated, i.e., embedded and embodied, social positions” (Braidotti 2011, 4). Her Deleuzian emphasis on the materiality of the mapping is opposed to a mimetic relationship between concept and example, between model and copy that subjugate difference to an identitarian order (Deleuze 2014). Nomadic subjects configure the situatedness of identities as difference, a constant state of becoming in a global posthuman age. Figurations, for Braidotti, emerge from a politics of location that re-envision the situated subjectivities-in-becoming. As an alternative representation of these subjectivities, figurations mobilize the critical naming of the power-laden subject-locations for a Spinozist politics of affirmation of alternative horizons. Unlike the philosophical concept, such figures can function as objects of Spinozist-Deleuzean desire or “yearning” (bell hooks cited in Braidotti 2011, 22), and as such, creatively move beyond critical analysis towards alternative political horizons of nomadic becoming (Braidotti 2011, 12). Figurations are not universal models but “complex singularities” that function as “signposts” of geo-political-historical positions, affirming the power of the imagination and memory as feminist tools of affirming alternative embodied subjectivities in flux yet firmly grounded in the thick present (Braidotti 2013, 164). I would add that figurations, unlike the philosophical concept, does not aim at systematicity and coherence. The string of figurations that I use or introduce in this dissertation are, in my thinking, fully intertwined and inseparable. This does not mean that they are necessary building blocks that produce a single edifice. Figurations attempt to materially-semiotically engage with the ongoing reconfiguration of multiple realities, and do not belong to the particular network of relations I am sketching here. For figurations to reconfigure, they must travel and transform other constellations and relations.

Two final important references for feminist figurations that work specifically with the figure of the Child are Claudia Castañeda’s Figurations (2002) and Jules Gill-Peterson’s Histories of the Transgender Child (2018). Castañeda is interested in how “this insistent figuration (…) plays a unique and constitutive role in the (adult) making of worlds, particularly the worlds of human nature and human culture” (Castañeda 2002, 1). Castañeda shows how the Child often pertains to an alleged universal and normative trajectory of development into adulthood, which undermines children’s different modes of becoming: “Development continues to establish a normative, universal
trajectory for ‘the human’ (…) a universal child continues to predominate in the social sciences” (Castañeda 2002, 42). And:

the child’s potentiality is consistently framed as a normative one, in relation to which failure is always possible. Just as the child’s potential for physical growth must be ensured by specific means, so too the child’s socialization and enculturation must be secured. The vast range of psychological theories, government policies, and social welfare programs directed at procuring the child’s proper development indicate the pervasiveness of this teleological model of the child across biological, social, and cultural domains. (Castañeda 2002, 4)

Like Haraway, Braidotti and Thiele, Castañeda points out that “figuration entails simultaneously semiotic and material practices” (Castañeda 2002, 3). This is particularly pertinent with the figure of the Child given its centrality in politics (Edelman 2004), medicine (Gill-Peterson 2018), education (Foucault 1991; Illich 1973) and psychology (Burman 2008). The seemingly neutral universal discourse around the Child in these fields easily disguises the multiplicitous socio-political and existential realities of differently situated children. Gill-Peterson highlights both the inseparability of the racialized and gendered figure of the Child to the lives of actual children, and insists on its distinction: “the figure of ‘the child’ and actual living ‘children’ are entangled products of historical processes of Western subjectification, rather than representing a natural category of human life” (Gill-Peterson 2018, 9). The moral, political and scientific authority with which the Child dominates discourse affects all children (and therefore all humans) directly. The systemic violences that the figure of the Child sustains (see chapter 3) are inhabited and inherited in all our bodies, minds and spirit—albeit differentially, for sure. A critique of the figure of the Child and the critical theory-praxis of feminist figuration (as reconfiguration) thus aims at affirming it as a spectral inheritance in the way of unlearning and reinvention, in the Anzaldúan sense explored here.

“Inheriting the past thickly: ” feminist figuration as spectral inheritance

Although Anzaldúa, Haraway and Braidotti share the project of crafting and embodying alternative embodied subjectivities that embrace criticism and creativity, there are some important differences between their usages as well, notably on the contested role of metaphor in figurations. Braidotti is most vehement in her rejection of metaphor. In a section called “Against Metaphor,” she insists that figurations are not metaphors but “a cartography of the power relations that define (…) diverging positions. They don’t aim to embellish or metaphorize: they just express different socioeconomic and symbolic locations” (Braidotti 2011, 11). She has been wary of the (ab)use of metaphor in her analysis of French philosophers’ metaphorization of woman, notoriously in Derrida’s insistence of “Woman as the name of the non-truth of truth” and in Deleuze’s “becoming-woman,” which appropriates the figure of Woman by
detaching it from lived sexed/gendered subjectivities and feminist struggle. Woman becomes yet another way for the male philosopher to revitalize himself outside of a phallogocentric order (Braidotti 1990, 97–134). The same line of criticism has been levelled against her own notion of nomadism, as a metaphorical (ab)use that erases actual nomads in taking them as source of inspiration for envisioning new subjectivities at the turn of the millennium (Ahmed 2000, 82–84).

Braidotti’s criticism of metaphor may be rooted in a rejection of philosophy’s “dogmatic image of [representational] thought” (Deleuze 2014) that takes metaphor as a detour to real reality, and in challenging the ambivalent appropriative gestures of male French philosophers. At the same time, Haraway and others insist on another image of thought that does not take materiality and metaphor as opposites and places metaphor at the heart of language. Giving up positivistic dreams of a metaphor-free language of truth, the lines between science and fiction become blurred and become part of Science Fiction stories: “The collapse of metaphor and materiality is a question not of ideology but of modes of practice among humans and nonhumans that configure the world—materially and semiotically—in terms of some objects and boundaries and not others” (Haraway 2018, 97). In this sense, figurations are an affirmation of the role of metaphor in the shaping of worlds at all levels—cultural, political, scientific, etc. Figurations become a praxis of taking responsibility for metaphors and the shaping of other worlds by laying stakes on whose metaphors are in currency.

The onto-epistemic dimension of metaphor, its performative and constitutive role, has also been key in unlearning the colonization of the mind from decolonial feminists. Anzaldúa reflects on her usage of metaphor in Borderlands/La Frontera in the text “Metaphors in the Tradition of the Shaman.” Metaphors work on the imagination and the body: “the workings of my imagination acted upon my own body (…) how powerful the image and the word are and how badly I needed to control the metaphors” (Anzaldúa 2009a, 121). Metaphors hold sway of the imagination and therefore also the body. Metaphors are operative at the level of the unconscious, even when consciously they have been demystified or challenged. This is one way in which coloniality remains at work at the deepest level of the individual and collectives:

All cultures and their accompanying metaphors resist change. All Mexicans are lazy and shiftless is an example of a metaphor that resists change. This metaphor has endured as fact even though we all know it is a lie. It will endure until we replace it with a new metaphor, one that we believe in both consciously and unconsciously. We preserve ourselves through metaphor; through metaphor we protect ourselves. The resistance to change in a person is in direct proportion to the number of dead metaphors that person carries. But we can also change ourselves through metaphor. (Anzaldúa 2009a, 122)
Here a critical method of metaphor is unfolding: if metaphors remain potent in the unconscious, then criticism on the level of consciousness is not enough. It requires a replacement of the metaphor so that criticism can also spur alternative embodied subjectivities. Metaphors, along with other practices, become a shamanic practice aimed at individual and collective healing and connections between different bodies and consciousnesses.

Anzaldúa’s temporality of figuration and metaphor also illustrates an important difference in emphasis with Braidotti. Both share a criticism towards linear conceptions of time that negate the layers of multiple pasts and the reconfiguring power of the imagination and memory that open the singularity of the presence as a point in an objectified chronology. Yet, whereas Anzaldúa’s figurations emphasize the work of unlearning and reconfiguring the relation to the past (not a return to but a creative taking up and transformation of a tradition to intervene in the multilayered present), Braidotti’s cartographic project highlights the new configuring web of relations in the present. For Braidotti, figurations are a way out of what she calls the “jet lag” problem of “being behind one’s time” (Braidotti 2011, 4); critical theory’s “imaginative poverty” makes it unsuitable to give an account of the ever-changing present for an emancipatory future. Her other images also highlight the need to go beyond the old and the immanent present as the locus of the figuration: “more like a weather map than an atlas, my cartographies mutate and change, going with the flow while staying grounded” (Braidotti 2011, 13; emphasis added). Although Braidotti envisions the temporality of the figuration as a non-linear rhizomatic exploration of the co-presence of multiple times within the present, the metaphors of the “weather map” and “jet lag” can also feed into modern temporalities of acceleration and speeding up as the mode of survival within the modern. The temporality of Anzaldúa’s metaphors of a gathering place of the co-existence of multiple temporalities that would undermine critique-as-acceleration and highlight that figurations are not only a naming of the present but a mode of critical inheritance. This temporality, mediating between the already-there and present concerns, is an aesthetic practice involving a reorganization of all the senses: it exceeds the naming of the present or capturing the contemporary moment. Through imaginative invention, it enacts the past in its configuring and refiguring of the present. This approach to aesthetics, as a different sense and way of sensing, is a creative and selective embodiment of the plural past. The “search for new metaphors” occurs through a reconfiguration and “re-membering” of multiple inheritances that produces shifts in individual and collective ways of being (Anzaldúa 2015, 143).

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Nishnaabeg) has similar reflections on the unconscious effects of metaphors/stereotypes. She understands stereotypes not as “backward thinking” but as colonial “systems of control” that continue to disrupt the relational fabric (Simpson 2017, 87). Simpson also notes that, despite consciously knowing the falsehoods of the pernicious stereotypes, they

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nevertheless operate at a deep personal and collective level in self-perception holding her back and keeping her power and intelligence under (settler) control. In her teaching practices, Simpson uses this to retake control over that process by first collectively naming the corrosive internalized stereotypes in order to respond to them and, second, replace them with counter-stories and figures based on their own sovereignty and legacy (Simpson 2017, 83–94).

As Sandoval points out, there is a commonality or potential synthesis between the methods of Anzaldúa and Fanon (Sandoval 2000). Fanon explores alienation in racialized and colonial worlds and shows how it is sociogenically produced. The accumulation of cultural archetypes, stories, myths, images, associations contained in the languages and inheritances of *homo occidentalis* (biocentric Man, Developmental Man) with its color-coded universalizing binary-values systems of truth/untruth, the light of reason/dark continents, ages, etc./good/evil, purity/impurity, virtue/sin, etc. In chapter 6 of *Black Skin, White Masks* (a key chapter for Wynter’s interpretation of sociogeny; see chapter 4), Fanon explains this by way of Jung, detaching the idea of a collective unconscious as a universal structure neurobiologically inherited, and highlights its cultural and historic specificity which in modernity has colonized not only the bodies but also the minds of many around the globe:

Deep down in the European unconscious has been hollowed out an excessively black pit where the most immoral instincts and unmentionable desires slumber. And since every man aspires to whiteness and light, the European has attempted to repudiate this primitive personality, which does its best to defend itself. When European civilization came into contact with the black world, with these savages, everyone was in agreement that these black people were the essence of evil. (Fanon 2008, 166–167)

Anzaldúa, Simpson and Fanon seek paths of the undoing of this colonization at all levels of (un/sub)consciousness. Feminist figurations is one way of unlearning these pervasive and destructive figures that linger in all our colonized minds-bodies-spirits and a step in the process of reinventing other empowering figures for other response-enabling relationalities. In a word, as a theory-praxis of critical and spectral inheritance.

Figurations and metaphors can thus serve as a form of critical inheritance and a method of critically unlearning internalized oppression and relearning through relational figures and empowering objects of desire. This lens offered by Anzaldúa, Sandoval and Simpson (Nishnaabeg) could be read as a form of deconstruction as a mode of critical inheritance (Haddad 2013), a learning to unlearn the metaphors, figures, stereotypes, notions and stories that operate at a collective unconscious level (in Anzaldúa’s and Fanon’s sociogenic sense), and relearn through renaming, reweaving and responding.
**Vignette**

In Palestine, Lara and Stephen Sheehi take up a Fanonian legacy of revolutionary psychoanalytic praxis, one in which they need to suspend and unlearn the Euromodern frames based on Western ontogenic developmental psychological models, learning to engage with and support the indigenous communal practices of remembrance and resistance. They disengage from the trauma-industry’s pathologization that locates trauma in individuals alone, which does not only depoliticize the socio-political root causes of (collective and historical) trauma, but retraumatizes and exacerbates the historical trauma. International aid “does not center on Palestinian narratives and indigenous healing practices, but, instead, relies and insists on Eurocentric practices that often (by design) miss the political and social nuances of settler-colonial oppression” (Sheehi and Sheehi 2022, 102). As a colleague and community psychologist in Ramallah notes, “They train therapists and counsellors to go to people who just had their homes demolished or someone killed. They have good intentions but they might be creating a trauma that would be dealt with in other ways. This is how evidence-based models, at some level, produce ‘illness.’” (cited in Sheehi and Sheehi 2022, 102). Another colleague, Yo‘ad Ghanadry-Hakim, who worked with Save the Children reports that “western-imported manualized treatments showed that children’s trauma was actually worse in the post-treatment” (cited in Sheehi and Sheehi 2022, 102). This report got buried. The individualizing Western models to deal with trauma led to therapists isolating children for trauma screening and counseling, thus separating them from their communities and communal ways of dealing with grief. Like the inseparability of Fanon’s political militancy and praxis of revolutionary psychiatry, the sociogenic therapeutic approach is inseparable from a communal praxis and transformation of that community through that praxis, which resists colonization at all levels. Sociogeny provides more than a radical critique of the colonizing ontogenic developmental models through which abstract victimized depoliticized children can be “saved” from their individualized trauma: affirming communal narratives and analyses of their situation, their practices of mourning and resisting, go beyond diagnosis and are simultaneously a collective transformation of the community in resistance towards liberation: the creation of a new human, in the plural.
PART 1: SOCIO-GENEALOGIES OF MORALITY AND IDENTITY

Chapter 3: The Developmental Genre of Man and the Civilizational Figure of the Child

Though my first “authority” figures were my parents (and older brothers and sisters) I soon found out that beyond the world of home, there were others in authoritarian positions over me (...) the end-result always show in the inability of people in general to govern their own lives without an authoritarian figure hovering over them; it shows in their apathy, hopelessness and feelings of insignificance (...) It is here (...) that the sexism, racism, capitalism, the religious, the intellectual and moral belief systems, as well as the lying, dishonesty, irresponsibility, emotional denial, liberalism, manipulation, egotism, slavishness, etc., are taught and passed on (...) the foundation for the perpetuation of Status Quo, Power Structure (...) is laid AT HOME (...) you must start BY EXAMINING YOUR OWN DAM SELF!

—ASHANTI ALSTON

Prelude: how to raise strong and healthy Aryans

In 1934, Nazi-pedagogue Johanna Haarer published Die deutsche Mutter und ihr erstes Kind, a counseling book for German mothers on how to raise children in order to turn them into good Nazis. The first thing to do, after the newborn has arrived, is to properly clean him or her.29 Then, the child is to be isolated and put in a separate room. After 24 hours, the mother must breastfeed the child for the first time. Haarer calls on mothers to “become hard!” (werde hart!) and never to pick up, carry or caress their child, and never give in to their “demands.” From the very first day, the child should sleep by him- or herself in a separate room: “schreien lassen! Jeder Säugling soll von Anfang an nachts allein bleiben” (cited in Chamberlain 1997, 115).30 By isolating the child and separating them from others, the child is trained to become emotionally independent and rid him- or herself of any traces of weakness and dependency. Haarer does not distinguish much between the childrearing of boys and girls—all children are to be subjected to this “hard” regime. If the mother would give in to the child’s “demands,” they would become spoiled, subjecting the mother to his or her tyrannical will. The child is considered to be “impure” (unrein) by nature and must be raised in cleanliness (Reinlichkeit). This is achieved by separating the child from the “contaminating” touch of outsiders, of indulging

29 In the context of Nazi-pedagogy it is appropriate to use the gender-binary “him” or “her.”
30 “Let them cry! Every infant must from the very beginning remain alone at night.”
grandmothers or other family/community-members. The obsession with the cleanliness of the child and the fear of contamination is related to racial purity: just as the child’s body must be brought up in a pure environment and the contaminating forces must be neutralized for the child to become a strong, healthy Aryan, the nation must equally be shed from its contaminating impurities to maintain its strong and healthy composition. In describing the perils of letting the child have his or her will pushed through, Haarer uses the same language that Nazis used to describe racialized enemies: the child would become unclean (unsauber), impure (unrein), greedy (gierig) and lack any sense for order, regularity and punctuality (Ordnung, Regelmäßigkeit, Pünktlichkeit)—traits that were attributed to Jewish, Sinti, Roma and Black people (Chamberlain 1997, 101). The child should remain isolated as much as possible: not only is the separation from the mother (Trennung von Mutter und Kind) pedagogically advantageous, but more importantly, the presence of other family- or community-members would plunge the child in a world of uncleanness and “softness.” Haarer warns explicitly against the presence of grandmothers who do not understand these pedagogical principles and would indulge and “spoil” the child. The “hard” Nazi-mother must resist giving in to any of the child’s needs and to subject them to a strict temporal regime of fixed times for feeding (in sessions of exactly 20 minutes—one ought never to breastfeed without the presence of a watch, Haarer insists), toilet-training and sleeping-times. A child should be punished when they wish to join in with the grown-ups at the dinner table and try their food, as this would turn the child into an “undisciplined beggar” (Chamberlain 1997, 71).

Sigrid Chamberlain works through Haarer’s pedagogical methods from the perspective of contemporary attachment theory, to understand the psychic implications of such an emotionally deprived and disciplinary upbringing. She highlights that such a child grows up with a sense of fragmentation, without a sense of inner orientation or boundaries, with a hugely ambivalent relation to their own body (a relation mostly of disgust and discomfort), and with extreme difficulties relating to other people and their boundaries. Rather than becoming emotionally independent, the unfulfilled needs of care and love remain operative in the form of a dependency on others. Next to an incessant search for love and belonging, there remains a lack of inner orientation and a psychic blueprint of total dependency on a towering powerful figure like the one who punished, cleaned and fed them. These children, Chamberlain argues, often grow up ready to unconditionally submit to some authority-figure or ideology that embody absolute truth and belonging. In that sense, it might have been a successful formula not for producing strong and independent individuals but for raising Nazis.

Chamberlain argues that this Nazi-pedagogy was an aberration in the history of pedagogy: both “pre-scientific” childrearing methods and proper “scientific” developmental psychology point in the opposite direction and
emphasize the need for a caring bond. Not only is there a harmonious relation between “natural” ways of upbringing and “science,” this natural-scientific way of child-rearing is even conducive to democratic citizenship, according to Chamberlain, as children learn to relate to themselves and to others in a respectful way and not based on fear, disgust and hatred. It is at this point that I disagree with Chamberlain’s otherwise important exegesis of Haarer’s method and its haunting legacies. Anyone familiar with Aimé Césaire’s damning words on European colonialism of the boomerang (or ricocheting) effect of colonial methods of dehumanization returning back to the metropole (Césaire 2001), would immediately be skeptical in this suggestion that Nazi-methods are solely an aberration of European history. Indeed, the disciplinary regimes of hierarchy, isolation and severance and the obsession with discipline and purity are all too familiar in colonial institutions such as in Samiland, Turtle Island and Australia. The nature-science harmony is also challenged in ecofeminist and Marxist feminist works that show that the emergence of modern science was a structural attack on communities aimed at diminishing the role of women in other/previous systems of knowledge around medicine, community and child-rearing (Shiva and Mies 2014; Federici 2008). The tenets of deprivation and discipline might exist in an exacerbated form in Nazi-pedagogy, but, remain largely consistent with the ideas of pedagogy and development in Euromodernity. They belong to an understanding of the human based on racialized binaries of natural-maternal savagery and the paternal civilization where the passage from one to the other is ensured through the disciplining of the Child. In this sense, patri-archy is to be taken literally: at the beginning of the production of the modern subject stands the severance from the social-maternal-ancestral so that an individual Child can be isolated and disciplined onto the road to maturity.

Introduction

In this chapter, I will try to show that, although Haarer’s Nazi-pedagogy is an extreme case, all its features have deep roots in Euromodern conceptions of the Child and what Sylvia Wynter calls the “descriptive statement of the human” or “genre” of Euromodern Man. I borrow Wynter’s term genre of the human and suggest that the binaries of the Human Self vs. the Sub-human Other in Wynter’s framework are best understood as connected within a developmental model of humanity. I do this by looking at what I call the civilizational figure of the Child as it emerges in modern pedagogical philosophy, looking at John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Immanuel Kant. When I speak of the Developmental genre of Man, I do not distinguish between (Renaissance) Man1 and biogenic (19th century) Man2, as Wynter does. I look at pre-Darwinian philosophers who move towards such a secularization albeit within a monotheistic or what Wynter calls a “monohumanistic” tradition, and I will leave aside the question of where one historical genre ends and another begins.
Before delving in the civilizational figure of the Child I will clarify what I mean by a *developmental genre of Man* by cross-reading Wynter, María Lugones and Anne McClintock. In this chapter, I will introduce the terms *inheritance of stupidity and severance from the social-maternal-ancestral* as ways of naming the features of and addressing (responsively unlearning) the notions of relationality and temporality implied by developmental Man.

I use the term Euromodern (Gordon 2021) Man and the civilizational figure of the Child to clearly distinguish it from the multiplicity of contexts and histories in the geographical space that is usually designated as Europe. By Euromodern I mean the *uni-versal(izing) imperial project of modernity* of which the European Enlightenment philosophers I engage with are key exemplars and actors. This uni-versal(izing) project has had its often disastrous, often genocidal, impact almost everywhere in the world. Both inside and outside Europe, there is a multiplicitous inheritance that is never reducible to Euromodernity, but it is almost always deeply influenced by it. The tracing of this object of critique is therefore not meant as a totalizing picture of either Europe, history or any world-system, but as illustrating hegemonic imperial tendencies in the always more multiplicitous and complex histories. The figures and concepts I introduce therefore hopefully allow for multiplicitious storytelling instead of being top-down concepts to be applied to a particular context.

**Genres of Man and the coloniality of gender**

Before turning to what I dub the *civilizational figure of the Child*, I explain what I mean by *developmental genre of Man*. For this, I will draw on Wynter’s work, Lugones’ framework of coloniality of gender (Lugones 2007; 2010; 2020) and McClintock’s intersectional analysis of the interrelated logics of race, gender and class in British colonial discourse (McClintock 1995). The language of “genres” of the human is borrowed from Wynter’s work, which will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4. There, I will show some reservations and disagreements about specific features within her comprehensive theory of the human, which encompasses a philosophical anthropology philosophy of history. Here, I build on the features from of her framework that I find helpful for developing a language and an orientation for the rest of the dissertation.

For Wynter, to be human is inseparable from the stories or myths that humans tell themselves about who they themselves are, why they are there, what

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31 In short: although I find her framework and vocabulary an immensely helpful, generative and interrupting Eurocentric presuppositions of humanity and nature, I disagree with her interpretation of the neurobiological mechanisms that would underpin it, the divide between the human (as biological and symbolic) and the animal (as “merely” biological), and the traces of linear-progressive approaches to history in her theory of overcoming the limitations of Euromodern Man. See chapter 4.

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the world is made of and what place they occupy in the world. With her definition of the human as *homo narrans*, Wynter is less interested in the particular stories of individuals but is concerned with the narratives of a group or larger collective that are constitutive of being human, making it possible for an individual to enact their humanity within this collective definition of what it means to be human. This means that, as symbolic meaning-making creatures, it is impossible to be a human in isolation: every individual self-definition is premised upon a preceding collective self-definition of a “we.” Wynter calls such a grounding self-definition the “descriptive statement of the human,” which is generative for the performance (in the Butlerian sense) or constituting praxis of being human (Wynter 2003; 2015). These narratives constitutive of any group include cosmogenic myths about the origin of the world (e.g. God, gods or Nature), what it means to be human and what is right and wrong.

This constituting praxis of enacting humanity based on a descriptive statement is what she calls a *genre* of the human. These collective grounding self-definitions (the *descriptive statements*) and the enactment of what it means to be human (the *genres*) are historically and culturally variant. Wynter traces how the white male bourgeois genre of the human (Man) since 1492 has colonized and largely replaced other genres of the human. Colonization thus affects not only politics and economics but the very meaning and praxis of being human by imposing a universal definition of humanity and the subjugation of a multiplicity of genres of the human. Since this Eurocentric/Euromodern genre of the human is a patriarchal and androcentric model, Wynter dubs this the European “genre of Man,” to emphasize its exclusionary character and to work towards an overthrowing of this hegemonic Man towards an all-inclusive new liberatory genre of the human, not based on virility and the subjugation of racialized human others and other earthlings: “Towards the human, after Man” (Wynter 2003).

Here I cross-read Wynter’s framework with Lugones’ framework of coloniality of gender (or “colonial/modern gender system”). I read Lugones’ analysis of the colonial/modern gender-system that has been imposed in terms of Wynter’s theory of the Euromodern genres of Man. By looking at the convergences and differences between Wynter and Lugones, and by introducing McClintock as a third interlocutor, I will develop my notion of the developmental genre of Man.32 Both Wynter and Lugones agree on the

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32 For convenience, I will refer to Wynter’s Man also in discussions of Lugones and McClintock, even though they do not employ Wynter’s vocabulary. In the subsequent chapters on Lugones, Wynter, Judith Butler and Friedrich Nietzsche, I argue against Wynter’s quasi-universalization of the dehumanizing othering-mechanism as necessary for human self-definition, and propose to understand such
pervasiveness of colonial violence (or coloniality), which, embedded in histories of genocide and economic subjugation, are enduring structures that operate not only at the level of politics and economics but are also pervasive at the level of self-understanding/self-definition and communal relations, i.e., the praxis of being human. Wynter and Lugones also highlight the role of strict binaries in European colonial self-definition and how the latter relies on racialized dehumanization: “A conception of humanity was consolidated according to which the world’s population was differentiated in two groups: superior and inferior, rational and irrational, primitive and civilized, traditional and modern” (Lugones 2007, 192). Before turning to McClintock to interpret the binary-system of Man as a developmental logic, I wish to highlight three differences between Wynter and Lugones, in ways that are complementary and mutually affirming. Firstly, whereas in Wynter’s theory of the human, it is common to all genres hitherto that they rely on a form of othering, Lugones is interested in the specificity of colonial violent binary othering-systems. This is historically experienced as an imposition that undermines other modalities of communal relations that do not require such fixed and hierarchizing binaries. Here, Lugones introduces a philosophical and political important nuance to Wynter’s expansive theory of the human: although binary and hierarchical systems and ways of othering are certainly not unique to European colonialism, it is essential not to universalize the structures of coloniality as being already latent in the very structure of what it means to be human.33 Secondly, whereas Wynter proposes the primacy of race over gender and class in the importance of the self-definition of Euromodern Man (Wynter and Scott 2000), Lugones highlights the constitutive dimensions of gender and sexuality in the racialized conception of Euromodern Man. On Lugones’ reading, the dehumanization through racialization under coloniality also involved the denial of gender to the colonized. The differentiation between (natural) sex and (cultural) gender must be read in racialized and civilizational terms: as the Other belongs to Nature, they lack gender and only have biological sex.34 So within the colonial/modern

othering in terms of Nietzsche’s terms of reactivity and reactive ressentiment and Lugones’ terms of fragmented selves, as psycho-existential dimensions and effects of socio-political conditions that nevertheless do not exhaust the possibility of relating and responding otherwise.

33 This might be considered a controversial reading of Wynter, which I will substantiate in the next chapter. This argument about the specificity of hierarchical othering based on a fragmentary-reactive logic runs through the entire dissertation.

34 One difficulty in this formulation is that the colonial discourses of animalization and gender, though genealogically connected, do not necessarily correspond to the more recent history of the terminological distinction between sex/gender. For a reading that resonates with Lugones’ main insight of how gender works according to a civilizational binary of unruly savagery and heterosexual binary humanity, and traces carefully the emergence of the concept of “gender,” see Gill-Peterson (2018).
gender system, white people on the “light side” of the colonial/modern gender system have gender (woman or man), whereas colonized and racialized people on the “dark side” have a sex (male, female or a monstrous aberration thereof) (Lugones 2007). Lugones unfolds a double critique of gender as claiming that on the one hand gender refers exclusively to white bourgeois men and women only in civilizational-colonial discourse, and on the other hand arguing that the attribution of gender-labels to groups of people with a different episteme or cosmology (a different genre), is itself a violent colonial imposition that universalizes a colonial/modern episteme and erases differences. By extension, hegemonic feminism would continue the violence of colonial erasure and categorization by framing debates in terms of (the inherently colonial category of) gender.

A final significant difference is the method of historicizing genres of Man. Lugones turns to the genocidal and gendered violence and brutal subjugation of non-Europeans in the early colonial encounter between the Spaniards and Indigenous people in Abya Yala as foundational for the contemporary colonial order—what Mignolo calls the “colonial matrix of power” (Mignolo and Walsh 2018). Within certain strands of decolonial thought (Lugones 2007, Mignolo and Walsh 2018, Vázquez 2020), it seems that this historical period fixed a certain hierarchical order in the world that referred to as the colonial matrix of power. On my reading, it then becomes unclear or difficult to theorize the different genealogies or historical transformations and differences across time and space. As a single colonial/modern universal(izing) system, though historical, it seems to play a trans-historical role in that decolonial strategies seek to “delink” from a single universal system governed by the colonial matrix of power rather than intervene in and transform its contemporary multiplicitous manifestations. To some extent, these differences are due to different orientations in research, ethics and politics, not as ultimate truth but epistemic and political strategy: Lugones approaches gender in gender (the meta-theorizing of gender as itself a racialized colonial/modern category) in a way that Maldonado-Torres calls a “de-colonial reduction” (Maldonado-Torres 2008,15). The strategic reduction opens up an epistemic space to think

35 The latter usually in reference to Oyèròníkè Oyèwùmí’s The Invention of Women (1997).

36 Although there are some references to the work of Hortense Spillers in Lugones (2020), I have not found an engagement with Spillers’ concept of ungendering in relation to Lugones’ claim that the colonized did not have gender because they were considered less-than-human according to the colonizers. Bringing Spillers into the conversation of decolonial feminism might alleviate some of the difficulties of potentially reproducing the binary-logic in the attempt at delinking from it – in Spillers, there is no opportunity to “delink” but nevertheless modes of critical transformation and resistance, thereby exiting and escaping whilst remaining in the thick of the murderous systems of dehumanization.
the multiplicity and differences in organization of interpersonal, communal (gender) relations in Indigenous communities in both precolonial and transculturated modalities that are irreducible to hegemonic, Euromodern understandings of gender.

As epistemic opening for attuning to the pluriversal otherwise/elsewhen, this reduction might suffice. However, as an account of historical reality it might produce its own totalization and closure, leaving little room for variations in historical context and possibly preventing the development of other intersectional genealogies that always turn out to be more complex and less stable. In this regard, Wynter helpfully continues to historicize the European genres, distinguishing between Man1 (ratio-centric Renaissance Man) and Man2 (bio-economic Man after the Darwinian paradigm-shift). Wynter argues that the genre of Renaissance Man was organized around the symbolic binary of Reason and Unreason. The mode of othening was based on a lack of a rational soul. This symbolic order of the Rational Self and the Sub-rational Other was rooted in a Christian cosmology of God as creator of a hierarchical order of Nature. With the Darwinian paradigm-shift, Wynter argues, the principle of the extrahuman agency that ordains the hierarchical order of things changes: it is not God but the principle of Nature itself that (selects White Man to be at the top of the hierarchy. With the 19th century evolutionary and capitalist paradigm of the human (Wynter calls it biocentric or bio-economic), the mode of othening becomes based on a linear understanding of evolutionary time: the “civilized races” are the most advanced and at the forefront of history (“naturally selected”), whereas non-Europeans got stuck at some previous more backward stage of evolutionary development (“naturally dysselected”). Hence the genocidal imperial politics of the 19th and 20th century were explained away by contemporary Western scientists as necessary and inevitable, sometimes with colonial melancholic regret or embraced as

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37 The formulation seems to oscillate between the ontologically weaker claim that the colonial/modern gender-system is one way of organizing gender and it has been falsely universalized and erased other ways of organizing gender; and the ontologically stronger claim that the category of gender itself is inherently colonial. Although both might be true, I personally find it impossible to keep in view the multiplicity of gender-systems outside of Euromodernity or coloniality and fear an even greater erasure when “gender” is altogether dropped as a lens. My temporary solution in describing Lugones is to visibly cross out gender to avoid a continuation of “ungendering” (Spillers) of Indigenous and Black people, whilst emphasizing a multiplicity that exceeds and resists particular hegemonic Euromodern definitions of gender.

38 For example, for queer strategies of resistance it is important to trace how and when the discourses of compulsory heterosexuality and the imposition of rigid gender-binaries as markers of civilization partly morph into discourses of homonationalism, pinkwashing and measuring how “modern” a state is based on their views with regard to LGBTQI+ (Alqaisiya 2018).
scientically inevitable, as the unstoppable movement of progress itself (Wynter 2003; Lindqvist 2012). I am less interested in clearly delineating Man1 from Man2, or to argue for where to locate its historical rupture, but I take it as an important invitation to further historicize and leave open the differential logics in different historical contexts.

How to understand the binaries that both Wynter and Lugones argue for as irreducible in Euromodernity? As Ofelia Schutte points out, there seems to be a shift in register in Lugones’ earlier feminist work in *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes* and the later decolonial feminist perspective: whereas the former resists categorial thinking as fragmenting and oppressive, the latter seems to adopt a schematic categorical model that cleanly distinguishes between the colonizer/humanity on the one hand and the colonized/dehumanized/resisters on the other hand. What is more, the systematicity of the colonial/modern (gender) system prioritizes “one historical event happening over five hundred years ago (... ) over and above any other analysis of race and gender,” which, Schutte worries, “may paradoxically feel to others like a narrowing, not a broadening of theoretical opportunities and critical perspectives” (Schutte 2020, 104). Schutte proposes to read Lugones not as a critical addition or transformation of Quijano’s or Mignolo’s framework but in relation to her earlier work on impurity, multiplicity and mestizaje (Schutte 2020, 107). I find this hermeneutical key helpful in resisting the aspects of coloniality of gender that become too totalizing and are at risk of the fragmented categorial logic that Lugones in earlier works resists by demonstrating the impurity, complexity and multiplicity that the fragmented lenses render invisible. How to avoid the danger of entrenching the binary mode of thinking (the difference between the fully human vs the sub-human) in the very attempt at “delinking” from it—ossifying the binary structure of the world of the colonizer and the alternative worlds of the colonized? I hope that the framing of the developmental genre helps not to erase differences but allow for multiplicitious, complex and relational storytelling from differently situated—subjugated, subjected and subjectivized—subject-positions. The developmental model equally starts from the irreducibility of the “color-line” (Du Bois 2005; Wynter 2001) and the “zone of non-being” (Fanon 2008; Maldonado-Torres 2008) in Euromodernity but rather than starting from the fixity of an overdetermining binary system, I prefer to approach it as unstable, context-specific processes or projects of dehumanization and humanization that are never complete in its attempted fixation and fragmentation (i.e., no one is ever fully dehumanized nor achieves full human status) (Gordon 1999; Gordon 2021). The instability of the discourse does lead to contamination of the very categories that it tries to erect as bounded, pure categories. What effects this has on differently positioned subjects (by which I mean to include those whose subject-status is denied, stripped away or structurally debilitated) cannot be grasped in any single theory but requires the open-endedness of multiplicitous
situated storytelling and a non-categorial ethics of situated listening (i.e., as opposed to the pigeon-holing of the storyteller/story based on their subject-position only), from which our relation to the plural past can be reshuffled for ways of becoming human beyond the strictures of Man.

Coloniality of gender and Developmental Man(2): Freud’s primitive-clitoris argument

With the help of McClintock and Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, I propose to understand the hierarchical binary-logic of Man as a developmental logic that is always unstable and risks regression towards a prior qua inferior stage. Most clearly, it can be seen in what Wynter calls biocentric Man2 and the 19th century interpretation of linear-progressive evolutionary temporality. The influential recapitulation theory holds that the development of the individual (ontogeny) mimics the development of the species (phylogeny) (Jackson 2020). As McClintock and Jackson show, the developmental logic of the white bourgeois genre of Man measures human history and the human population against the normative development of the white male child. This means that the white male infant is in a way analogous to the natural, animal, savage Other, and requires disciplinary civilizing to properly develop into cultivated humanity in order to mature and avoid getting stuck, regressing or going awry in the aberrations of undeveloped and infantile savagery. The metaphor that all women and most ethnicities and “races” were to some degree like children and their legal status as immature, in need of civilized, paternal governance roughly fit the different stages of development of the normative child who through patriarchal governance moves from animal savagery to civilized manhood. As McClintock points out:

>The scope of the discourse was enormous. A host of “inferior” groups could now be mapped, measured and ranked against the “universal standard” of the white male child (…) If the white male child was an atavistic throwback to a more primitive adult ancestor, he could be scientifically compared with other living races and groups to rank their level of evolutionary inferiority. (McClintock 1995, 50–51)39

39 Jackson cites many examples: “Herbert Spencer claimed that ‘the intellectual traits of the uncivilized’ recur in ‘the children of the civilized.’ Lord Avebury (John Lubbock), the English leader of child study, compared ‘[m]odern savage mentality to that of a child,’ stating, ‘As we all know, the lowest races of mankind stand in close proximity to the animal world. The same is true for infants of civilized races’ (…) Benjamin Kidd contended; ‘the evolution in character which the race has undergone has been northwards from the tropics. The first step to the solution of the problem before us is simply to acquire the principle that [we are] dealing with
The maternal body serves as one site of the discourse of developmentalism, as the “anachronistic space” (McClintock 1995) of Nature that is inseminated with the male seeds of civilization and progress. The teleology of the savage and the civilized, of the infantile and the mature, are not straightforwardly translated into the dichotomy of paternal/maternal or man/woman; it allows for a host of dichotomous differentiations, including between “savage” and “civilized” women. In the late 18th, European scientists moved away from a longer tradition that attributed unruly appetite and sexual excess to women, and argued that (civilized) women differed fundamentally from men. Instead of being an incomplete or deformed version of the male as the model for the human itself, men and women were defined in terms of complementary sexual difference, focusing on binaries like passive/active, submissive/dominant, etc. (Laqueur 1992). This must be understood in its racialized grammar: the defining features of civil femininity—sexual constraint, gracefulness, sentimentality, morality—found coherence in contrast to the supposed lack of constraint and excessive sexual appetite and agency of the savage Other. In his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (which, in Kant’s system, does not refer to the empirical study of other cultures but sketches the features of humanity in its ideal, fully developed civil form), Kant espouses such a view: Men and women have complementary qualities, where in each domain one must be subservient (*unterworfen*) to the other. This is a civilizational achievement of gender-equality: wives are governed by their husbands in public and intellectual matters, whereas husbands accept the dominance of women in domestic matters.40 This is the civil achievement of monogamous marriage, which differs from the barbaric one—Kant conjures up an Orientalist image of the harem—and from the “raw state of nature” (*im rohen Naturzustande*), where the female is subjected to the tyrannical will of the male and treated as “domestic animal” (*Haustier*). (Kant 2006, 205 [303]).

It is in this light that McClintock understands Freud’s argument that “clitoral” pleasure is primitive and immature, which in the healthy/normal development of the girl must lead to mature “vaginal” orgasm. McClintock links the “primitive-clitoris” argument to European scientists’ obsession with African women’s genitalia and female sexuality: they represent the childish stage of peoples who represent the same stage in the history of the development of the race that the child does in the history of the development of the individual” (…) Friedrich Schillert (...): “the discoveries which our European sailors have made in foreign seas (…) show us that different people are distributed around us (…) just as children of different ages may surround a grown-up man” (Jackson 2020, 174–175). McClintock cites Sir Rider Haggard: “In all essentials the savage and the child of civilization are identical” (cited in McClintock 1995, 51).

40 For more detailed analysis of Kant’s view on the alleged equal and complementary nature of the sexes, see Kleingeld (1993).
clitoral sexuality that must give way to civilized vaginal sexuality: “As a historical anachronism, the ‘immature’ clitoris must be disciplined and subordinated within a linear narrative of heterosexual, reproductive progress—the vaginal task of bearing a child with the same name as the father” (McClintock 1995, 43). Just as the healthy normative development of the civilized individual leads to this patriarchal order of things, human history had to emerge out of its pre-patriarchal infancy and control the pleasure-principle to progress. As I will show below, ensuring the righteous path of development of the normative white male bourgeois Child toward civility by subjecting him to patriarchal discipline or guidance, has its logical racialized counterpart in the arguments that punishment and even slavery aids the “immature” non-European to reach higher levels of maturity/civility. Importantly, and in concurrence with Lugones’ analysis, this shows that the gender-binary and compulsory heterosexuality is a civilizational achievement and performs the task of dividing between who is properly civilized and modern as opposed to savage, barbaric or premodern. As a way of “developing” the savage or barbaric Other, alternative modalities of gendered sociality and non-monogamous or extra-marital sexuality must be subjected to Christian or civilizational patriarchal discipline, law and custom. As McClintock shows, there is always the threat of regression and slippage back into pre-civilized savagery so that the status of civil humanity is never secure (e.g. a bourgeois woman’s anxiety around “clitoral orgasm” as proof of regression or lack of femininity). As Castañeda argues, “normal development is not guaranteed by the developmental process itself, the outcome of any given developmental process is always in question” (Castañeda 2002, 26). This also plays out significantly in terms of Victorian class-politics in England: working-class women in England were represented as ambiguous in terms of both race and gender and provoked a deep anxiety around the self-identification as the most civilized. Victorian concerns were not directed at exploitative labor, but the ambiguating effects of “degrading” women to be workers, thereby crossing the civilizational binary of the domestic and the public, regressing to a more infantile stage of development. Dirty work in mines was represented as having a racialized “blackening” effect onto working women, who were likened to “coolies.” Next to this dangerous race-ambiguity, working class women also troubled the civilizational gender-boundary: “By far the greatest outrage was directed at the ‘unsexing’ of the women. (…) The fact that women and men worked together was ‘too barbarous to be tolerated” (McClintock 1995, 116). The threat of “atavistic throwbacks” (McClintock 1995, 43) lurk everywhere and subjects everyone in different ways to disciplinary regimes whilst also trying to fixate entire populations and groups of

41 This is McClintock’s term; she does not engage with Spillers’ work on “ungendering” (Spillers 2003).
people according to the fragmenting-hierarchical categories of developmental Man.

*Coloniality of gender and Developmental Man(1)*

How does this argument, rooted in the linear-evolutionary thinking of biocentric Man2 relate to Lugones’ articulation of coloniality of gender based on the 16th century colonial encounter that would fall under Wynter’s category of Man1? In developing her understanding of the coloniality of gender, Lugones employs McClintock’s analysis of Johannes Stradanus’ 16th century visual representation of the “discovery” of America by Amerigo Vespucci. Lugones cites McClintock:

Roused from her sensual languor by the epic newcomer, the Indigenous woman extends an inviting hand, insinuating sex and submission. (…) Vespucci, the godlike arrival, is destined to inseminate her with his male seeds of civilization, fructify the wilderness and quell the riotous scenes of cannibalism in the background (…) The cannibals appear to be female and are spit roasting a human leg. (cited in Lugones 2007, 205)

Lugones highlights that it is not just the attribution of binary gender (man/woman) vs. binary sex (male/female) that is at stake in the settler’s “hetero-conquest,”42 but that people not conforming to a strict gender-binary or compulsory heterosexuality were considered abominable and “monstrous” by the colonizer.43 A historical scene commented upon by M. Jacqui Alexander illustrates this in a disturbing way. She narrates the violent conquest of Vasco Núñez de Balboa in the Panamanian village of Quarequa to illustrate the relation between imperial rule and the violent implementation of white heteropatriarchy: after murdering six hundred warriors, Balboa rounded up forty extra people because they, as a contemporary source describes, were dressed in “women’s apparel.” Because of this “most abominable and unnatural lechery” the forty

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42 The term “hetero-conquest” is Walaa Alqaisiya’s in relation to Palestine, which she uses to describe the settler colonial settler’s mythology of conquest as a fructification of the fertile virgin land (Alqaisiya 2023), akin to the analyses of McClintock, Lugones and Alexander mentioned here.

43 Lugones cites McClintock to emphasize the absolute command and confidence of Christian-Discoverer Man vis-à-vis the feminized and racialized “virgin land.” McClintock however continues her analysis by suggesting that there is simultaneous male anxiety for the loss of mastery in being “engulfed” by this dangerous feminized monstrous space, through the figures of savage female cannibals. I think this difference in emphasis is telling for subsequent analyses: Lugones’ focusing on the brutality of the colonial system through the fixity of categories, McClintock emphasizing the instability inherent to the system, which constantly requires reassertion of domination and subjection to maintain/achieve the civilized patriarchal order.
persons were murdered by being “given for a pray to his dogges” (cited in Alexander 2005, 196–197). Alexander comments:

The threat of contamination (…) ultimately justifies its evisceration (…) the power of heterosexuality, which operates without definition, is asserted through this act of carnage, which weds imperial and heterosexual interests together. In the course of only five lines of text, the horror of this act is further normativized by being positioned as the only civilized response to the scene (…) there is a great deal that is being inaugurated in this narrative economy. (Alexander 2005, 197)

Turning “homosexuality [or gender-performance deviant from the Christian-European binary gender] into violent spectacle”, these few lines naturalize a “racialized right to European heterosexual rule (…) It is not only that the colony is not worth having unless it can be made heterosexual, it is also that the violent assertion of white citizenship reserves personhood for white masculinity alone” (Alexander 2005, 198). This case of foundational physical and genocidal violence of disrupting other modes of sociality to impose a uni-versal model of civilizational based on hierarchical and rigid binaries would seem to suggest Lugones’ interpretation that “[t]he sexual difference of the colonized was not socializable; rather, it was understood as raw, animal biology, outside civil society” (Lugones 2020, 33). However, many missions had the explicit aim at prohibiting gender-performance and sexuality outside of heteronormativity and outside of monogamous marriage as a way of precisely Christianizing or civilizing (Leacock 2008, Simpson 2017). The point is not that colonized people were considered either fundamentally socializable/civilizable/savable or they were not, but that the forms of dehumanization are multiplicitous and lead to different strategies, theories, justifications, ideologies, and modes of governance ranging from explicit genocidal aims to paternalistic “civilizing” modes of governance often with equal genocidal impact. Such an open-ended approach to the framework of coloniality of gender allows for multiplicity of genealogies and interrelated storytelling, and resists pressing reality into a single picture of the world.44

On what Lugones calls the “light” side of modernity, we also find the logic of subjection to patriarchal rule and civilization to prevent feminized monstrosity and unruly femaleness that corrupts the hierarchical order of God-ordained Nature. This is captured, for example, in Boticelli’s Primavera, according to Lilian Zirpolo’s feminist reading (1991). The piece was commissioned for the wedding of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici and Semiramide Appiano. Zirpolo argues that the painting should be read as containing certain “lessons for the bride,” namely on chastity, submission, and

44 I do not think that this is Lugones’ intent, and the resources for countering such an interpretation are within Lugones’ work itself (Lugones 2006).
The scene depicts the myth of the rape of the nymph Chloris by the wind-god Zephyrus. As described by Ovid, Chloris then transforms into Flora. Chloris is the only figure whose body is not elegant and composed, radiating the tranquility of reason, but instead is fleshly and corporeal, representing untamed unruly female nature. Zirpolo suggests that we should read her transformation after the rape scene as an ideological statement: the woman, as disruptive and irrational, needs to be civilized through being subjected to male sexual violence in order to become the graceful and subservient wife who thus ceases to be a threat of disruption and becomes part of the rational patriarchal order. This reverberates the popular myth of the Sabine women who were raped in order to ensure the survival of Romulus’ settlement. Analogously, “submission to the male by the Quattrocento female was necessary to guarantee a stable society and the perpetuation of the species” (Zirpolo 1991, 26). Through the subjection of female unruliness to patriarchal sexual violence, she can metamorphose into civilized woman in the harmonious hierarchical order of Nature ordained by God in a submissive role where she is ensured to contain her threatening female nature that would disrupt and pervert the hierarchical order of nature. This analysis shows that the role of subjection to (hetero)patriarchal rule within the developmental logic to attain gendered identity is not absent from the so-called light side of modernity, though it manifests in different ways. The serviceable figures of Blackness often serve as a stabilizing factor for white gendered identity, ensuring the proper gendered identity as sign of (white) humanity through the symbolic and physical violence of ungendering.

Margrit Shildrick analyzes how the category of monstrosity features within logocentric discourse as a disruptive category evoked in attempts at mastering aberration for the maintenance of a proper, phallocentric order that can distinguish between Normal and Abnormal, Natural and Unnatural, Rational Order and Bodily Chaos. The discourse of monstrosity connects normalcy to a moral standing. Noting the long shadow of Aristotle’s legacy, she writes: “insofar as Aristotle marked excess and deficiency more generally as conditions of moral failing, the traditional characterization of monstrosity in terms of excess, deficiency or displacement suggests not only bodily imperfection, but an improper being” (Shildrick 2002, 32). The reference to Aristotle’s legacy also reveals how from the outset the category of the monstrous has particular affinity with femaleness and foreignness. As Emanuela Bianchi argues, we must understand the role of the female in Aristotle (and Aristotle’s legacy) not solely in terms of the passivity of matter but as an unruly, disruptive category that disrupts the male order of nature. Bianchi turns to Aristotle’s solution to the following paradox of procreation he creates: if the male seed is responsible for the form of the offspring, and the female only contributes matter, then how is female offspring possible? Bianchi summarizes Aristotle’s solution and draws far-reaching conclusions:
a female is the result of a disruption in the process, an error in the matter due to insufficient heat (…) The female, then, is characterized less by passive materiality than by matter’s irrepressible unruliness (…) Instead of being identified with nature, then, the female is the result of forces that act against nature as a constant interruption in the natural unfolding of motion toward what is best. (Bianchi 2012, 38)

It is easy to see how the Aristotelian framework can harmoniously be grafted onto Christian dogma: the creation of Nature is orderly, rational and good due to its proper paternal origins (literally patri-archal), which gets interrupted by the fall through the female sinner, dooming the rest of humanity. God’s orderly patriarchal universe is constantly threatened by female unruliness or monstrosity and must therefore be subjected to the proper categorical order of things. In (Renaissance) Man I this logic also unfolds with the monstrous being projected onto the racial Other (often feminized, as in the depiction of female cannibals).45 “Monstrosity” and “unruliness” certainly stick more to some bodies than others, and often “overdetermine” and debilitate human responsivity, as many of these examples already indicate. Nevertheless, Shildrick argues that the threat of unruly monstrosity is at work in all bodies:

It is not that some bodies are reducible to the same while others figure as the absolute other, but rather that all resist full or final expression. The security of categories – whether of self or non-self – is undone by a radical undecidability. (…) In short, what is at stake is not simply the status of those bodies which might be termed monstrous, but the being in the body of us all. (Shildrick 2002, 2–3)

Shildrick works on a conception of embodiment as fundamentally vulnerable, a vulnerability that the phallocentric project of European philosophy fundamentally disavows in the attempted erection of the full sovereignty of the subject. The theme of vulnerability and feminist ethics will be picked up especially in chapter 7, but I already flag up Shildrick’s argument to emphasize that a feminist ethics of vulnerability and response-ability through a deconstruction of the sovereign subject, is a shared aim of many feminist, queer and decolonial critiques. My hope is that this allows for more complementary and coalitional approaches to the coloniality of gender and is not taken as a refutation or erasure/relativization of racialization and colonization.

45 In the shift from Man I to Man II, I believe that there is a change from the notion of patri-archy as origin (God the Father) to patri-archy as achievement, an overriding of the raw material of nature and cultivating humanity and progress. In whatever incarnation, the important shared features are the necessity for the female, the unruly, and the racial Other to be subjected to civilized patriarchy as a way to maintain order or initiate progress of the world.
The civilizational figure of the Child in Enlightenment philosophy

Whereas the examples above fall squarely within Wynter’s categorization of Man1 and Man2, we can see how the developmental logic solidifies in Enlightenment attempts at developing a fully “natural” account of humanity and history, prior to the advent of evolutionary biological theory. In other words, this makes it difficult within my framework to distinguish neatly between Man1 and Man2. Instead, I propose to refer to the developmental genre of Man whilst leaving open the question of origins and overlap, it as a multiplicitous logic that morphs and expresses itself in different ways and in different contexts while remaining at the root of a differentially shared and unequally shouldered intellectual and embodied Euromodern inheritance. From this broad-strokes approach to the developmental genre of Man read through Lugones’ coloniality of gender, I will now turn to early attempts at scientific pedagogy in the Enlightenment thinkers Locke, Rousseau and Kant to introduce the civilizational figure of the Child as central to Developmental Man. The texts under consideration here are instrumental to the philosophical underpinnings and early documents of the rise of the pedagogical sciences and disciplinary institutions (Foucault 1991). Their importance for the newly emerging genre of Man is inseparable from the context of the colonial encounter, transitions to capitalism and formations of nation-state and empire (Wynter 1995; 2003; Federici 2004). I will sketch the figures of the Child and the tropes of im/maturity through terminology that will become the premises for the remainder of the dissertation for the movement of unlearning and relearning ethics of vulnerability and response-ability. These are: (i) the inheritance of stupidity, (ii) natural asociality, (iii) tyrants and slaves, or hierarchical self-other relation, (iv) denial of vulnerability, and (v) severance from the social-maternal-ancestral. These themes are thoroughly interrelated and can only partially be separated in the following discussion.

(i) Inheritance of stupidity

(Im)maturity and childhood become key metaphors for Enlightenment philosophy. Descartes links the progression of knowledge by proposing a radical break with all the “prejudices” that come from the ignorance of our childhood. He opens his Principles of Philosophy with the following:

Because we came into the world as children, and passed various judgements on sensible things before we had the full use of our reason, we are diverted from the knowledge of the truth by many prejudices. From these it seems that we can be released only if, once in our life, we make an effort to doubt everything in which we shall find even the slightest suspicion of uncertainty. (Descartes 2015, 137)

The prejudices arise because “in childhood our mind was so immersed in the body” (Descartes 2015, 152). In order to “liberate ourselves” from the
prejudices derived from the body and its passions, Descartes encourages us to “concentrate on regulating his passions” to acquire “absolute command” of the bodily passions (Descartes 2015, 218). Kant’s definition of Enlightenment echoes Descartes’ imperative of overcoming the bodily animal passions—stupidity and crudity inherited from humanity’s infancy—in order to strive towards the essence of humanity in history: “Enlightenment is man’s emergence from his self-incurred (selbst verschuldeten) immaturity (Unmündigkeit)” (Kant 2013a, 54). Those who remain immature are themselves at fault. Kant tells us (see Maldonado-Torres’ reading of Kant’s Enlightenment essay: Maldonado-Torres 2008, 199–200). At the same time, Kant’s racial/racist theories define and essentialize the limited capacities of other “races” so that culture and morality is unattainable to nonwhites (Lu-Adler 2022). Women and servants also are perpetual minors (Kant 1907), sharing in the same human essence, but due to their immaturity, they are incapable of fully cultivating the germs of humanity.

More so than in Descartes, we see how the developmental logic—including its child-race constellation—of the maturity-trope comes to the fore. Kant agrees that the source of error, superstition and stupidity lies in humanity’s infancy, a metaphor that simultaneously refers to the collective human past and the development of the (modern, white, male, educated) individual. Kant positions himself as legitimate heir to a masculine tradition of reason and science that originates with Thales in Ancient Greece and is maturing in the Newtonian age of science (Kant 1999). This coming of age of the mind is not simply pitted against the Other who lacks reason, but the Others of Reason who endanger the soundness of judgement in otherwise respectable and wise men of reason and science. He warns that “midwife tales” of mothers, women in general, children and rural “commoners” (das gemeine Landvolk) can even lead enlightened men astray in believing superstitious nonsense, jeopardizing scientific progress (Kant 2015).

46 Perhaps not completely incidental, Descartes is one of the few major modern European philosophers who is categorical in the distinction between the human and nonhuman without differentiating between degrees of humanity according to race or ability—which was one of the reasons his critics attacked him (see Smith 2015, 67–68).

47 In his pre-critical text Dreams of a Spirit-Seer, Illustrated by Dreams of Metaphysics (1766), Kant makes similar claims about the passage from illusion to knowledge or from unreason to reason. In this quaint Enlightenment text, Kant faces the question of whether one can make any meaningful metaphysical statements about the (non-)existence of ghosts. Kant’s interest (or perhaps frustration) was sparked by the encounter with the work of ghost-seer Swedenborg, which troubled Kant’s intellectual convictions and moral hopes. Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772) was
emerging Enlightenment genre of pedagogy, concerned with the methods of turning the Child into a Man: warding off the bad influence of women (mothers, nurses) and servants that would thwart the development of the Child into Man.

Kant refers to this in passing as a “natural inheritance of stupidity” (ein natürliches Erbstück der Dummheit; Kant 2015, 969). Admittedly, I am taking this phrase slightly out of context, but it sums up the developmental logic that runs through Kant’s text and that we will encounter time and again. It resonates with David Graeber and David Wengrow’s suggestion that we should not blame Rousseau for the myth of the noble savage but for the myth of the stupid savage, i.e., as if Indigenous people unreflexively enact a state of nature rather than being reflexive agents that experiment with and dialogically negotiate on their political systems (Graeber and Wengrow 2021). This constitutive idea of an inheritance of stupidity in humanity’s infancy that always threaten to resurface within civilizational humanity and progress will become the bedrock for psychoanalysis, that likens the psychological stages of development in the civilized individual to the psychological stages of historical humanity in Totem and Taboo (Freud 1950).

(ii) Natural asociality, sociality as civilizational achievement

Often Enlightenment philosophy is portrayed as containing two opposing views on human nature: Hobbesian and Rousseauian. In Hobbes, human nature is selfish, violent and hostile. Without the absolute subjection to a powerful state that claims the monopoly on violence there would only be bellum omnium contra omnes (Hobbes 2008, 84). Rousseau supposedly provides the alternative: a vision of human nature that is fundamentally peaceful and good. What both Hobbes and Rousseau have in common—and this seems to me to point to the limit of European Enlightenment bourgeois thought—is the conception of the human as fundamentally solitary and asocial: In both the Hobbesian and Rousseauian versions, this fundamental asociality or atomism is an unquestioned and shared premise. Hobbes and Rousseau both claim that the

a rich scientist who became a mystical theologian, claiming to communicate with the souls of the dead. With his scientific and societal credentials, Swedenborg divided the scientific community on the question of spirits, having both fervent defenders and derisive critics. Kant uneasily finds himself in-between these two camps. On the one hand, Kant acknowledges his investment in a belief in the immortality of the soul and wishes to maintain the possibility of the existence of a spiritual realm. On the other hand, Kant’s investment in metaphysical rigour and scientific progress makes him ill at ease with the rhapsodies (Schwärmereien) of Swedenborg. The title condenses much of the argument: Kant shows a skeptical but not dismissive attitude towards the fanciful dreamworld of ghost-seers and subdues the unbounded dreamworld with a rationally and morally legitimate dream of an immortal soul. The latter is based not on metaphysical proof but on moral hope (Kant 2015; Troostwijk 2005).
state of nature was a state of solitude. Hobbes: “In such condition, there is no (...) society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” (Hobbes 2008, 84). Rousseau:

As soon as [children] were strong enough to go in search of their own food, they forsook [their mother] (...) they soon became quite incapable of recognizing one another when they happened to meet again (...) the number of languages would be equal to that of the individuals speaking them. (Rousseau 1961, 175)

In this sense, the Hobbes/Rousseau debate seems like a secular version of the Christian double inheritance that wavers between positing the natural innocence and a natural depravity of children. It is the individual soul that is in need of redemption from its own individuated “Fallen Flesh” (Wynter 2003), which requires the disciplining of the temptations of the flesh (embodied by women) to cultivate the Christian soul. Luther, who preached corporal punishment against children, both affirmed children’s innocence during the first five years—calling them “God’s little fools”—whilst at the same time claiming that children are prone to “adultery, fornication, idol worship, belief in magic, quarreling, passion, murder, drunkenness, gluttony” (cited in Heywood 2013, 60). The affirmation of children’s innocence does therefore not mean that they do not need corporal punishment or other forms of discipline: the innocent Fool is equally in need of discipline to become reasonable, moral and mature.  

In Enlightenment philosophy there is a secularized version of this, where human nature is understood as antisocial and pre-social Animal-Savage, which needs to be subjected to patriarchal discipline to become Human or to develop the potential of the human that lurks within the still crude animalistic form. Sociality becomes an achievement based on the overcoming of our dangerous asocial selfish animality (Burman 2008, 47–48). The way to achieve this socialization is through establishing patriarchal authority and through discipline and punishment.

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48 In Kant, we also find (now in the half-secularized form) the compatibility of the Hobbesian and the Rousseauean conception: “The history of nature begins with goodness, because it is the work of God; the history of freedom begins with evil, for it is the work of man” (Kant 2013b, 115). Humanity before the dawning of freedom is innocent in the sense that it is not yet conscious of lawful and regular order of things and can therefore not transgress it. Kant’s Hobbesian view on the animalistic savagery that is outside of the history of human freedom is therefore compatible with Rousseau: the advent of culture is the alienation from nature and the cause of human misery. But it is also the beginnings of everything good, moral, rational in accordance with the dignity of humanity.
The goal of pedagogy for Kant is this development and progress out of childhood, first through discipline to counter their animal bodily passions and their concurrent “rawness” and stupidity:

Discipline prevents the human being from deviating by means of his animal impulses from his destiny: humanity. (...) Savage nations [maintain] a certain raw state [where] the animal in this case has so to speak not yet developed the humanity inside itself. Therefore the human being must be accustomed early to subject himself to the precepts of reason. If he is allowed to have his own way and is in no way opposed in his youth, then he will retain a certain savagery throughout his life. (Kant 2007, 438)

Boys of a certain class and “race” are able to mature out of the animal-like stage of the body through proper education whereas other “races” are perpetually stuck in animal “rawness.” Without “lawful constraint” children “remain children throughout their entire lives, just like the inhabitants of Tahiti” (Kant 2007, 448).

Huaping Lu-Adler demonstrates the consistency in Kant’s thought that combines a universal destiny of humanity and his hierarchical classification of “races.” The debate on Kant’s racism has mostly been between whether Kant is an “inconsistent universalist” or a “consistent inegalitarian.” But, as Lu-Adler shows, there is a consistent inegalitarian universalism in Kant that can be understood through the maturity-model of the human that maps the development of the individual to the development/progress of humanity as a whole in history (Lu-Adler 2022). Kant classifies four different “races” that due to different climates developed differently from a single shared human “phylum”: white, black, yellow and red. Although all four races share the same essence of humanity, only the white race is able to develop this essence. The other races are ranked hierarchically according to the stage they are in or can achieve. Kant’s “red” race is stuck in the perpetual laziness and lawlessness of savagery, unsusceptible to the “taming of savagery” through discipline. Kant’s “black” race is one rank higher and is able through discipline to attain some “culture,” which for Kant means the ability to follow “instruction and teaching” through discipline and punishment, but it is unable to achieve the next level of “civilization” (Kant 2007, 444). So unlike the “red” race, “the Negro race [acquires] culture, but only a culture of slaves; that is, they allow themselves to be trained [abrichten] (...) as they are sensitive, afraid of beatings” (cited in Lu-Adler 2022, 267). The only “improvement” possible, out of the “lawless freedom” and propensity to laziness, is through “training.” The word “training” (abrichten) is the word used for animals: “The human being can either be merely trained, conditioned, mechanically taught, or actually enlightened. One trains dogs and horses, and one can also train human beings” (Kant 2007, 444). Taken together with the final sentence of Kant’s Enlightenment-essay, which proclaims that humanity is now “more than a machine” who may by future enlightened rulers be treated “in a manner appropriate to his [man’s] dignity” (Kant 2013a, 60), we can see that Kant’s view of humanity, Enlightenment, freedom, progress and universal morality is thus completely consistent with his endorsement of subjugating and disciplining Black(ened) people as an elevation from a level of purported savagery to the cultural
The maturity-model requires the disciplining of the mechanical, animal, bodily passions, in order to develop the germs of humanity: “a polishing of his crudity is necessary” (Kant 2007, 438). The conception of the necessity of “polishing” animalistic “crudity” is maintained in the Dutch word for civilization, *beschaving*, which means to make something refined by working on some otherwise rough material. A similar notion is in Locke’s usage of the “gentle-man” the “humanity” of the human is not something shared with all humans but a mark of distinction that proves the “superiority” and “authority” of the gentleman over “the lower ranks of men” (Locke 1968, 93).

Just as Descartes urges us to govern the passions of our animal bodies, Locke argues that the goal of education is to “teach him to get a mastery over his inclinations, and submit his appetite to reason” (Locke 1968, 168). These formulations secularize a Christian-Aristotelian inheritance that distinguish the animal from the human through the “property to command” (Aquinas 1977, 688). The latter teleologically follows the Chain of Being with those unable to “command” their own bodies (animals, children, women) are subservient to the higher (Christian man), whose image is modeled after the absolute power of God the Father.

Because children enter without sociality, reason or morality, full of “unruly and disorderly appetites” that are not properly governed by reason, the “brutish fury” has to be kept in check (Locke 1968, 32), socialized through hierarchical authority and disciplinary violence. Locke argues that one should treat children as rational creatures as much as possible. Further, Locke argues against excessive use of physical punishment and argues for socialization through shaming children instead. However, Locke’s warnings against excessive punishment are premised on a necessary foundational violence: the closer to nature and animality the Child is (i.e., the younger they are), the more force it needs to regulate the Child’s unbridled passions and “brutish fury.” The “gentler” and more humane it becomes, the less it requires violent correction and the more the child can be met with respect and reason:

The younger they are, the less (…) are their unruly and disorderly appetites to be comply’d with; and the less reason they have of their own, the more are they to be under the absolute power and restraint of those in whose hands they are.

(Locke 1968, 32)

In order “to govern” children, parents must “settle their authority” through “fear and awe” which “ought to give you the first power over their minds” (Locke 1968, 32). To make a Man out of the Child thus requires patriarchal authority:

level of regulated servitude. Whereas (white, male, wealthy) children need a good beating to develop their potential for enlightenment, Black people cannot partake in human dignity except as a “trained” (that is, beaten with a split bamboo stick) animal that transforms savagery into regulated lawfulness. See also Krogh (2022).
“look that they perfectly comply with the will of their parents (…) be sure then to establish the authority of a father as soon as he is capable of submission, and can understand in whose power he is” (Locke 1968, 33). Kant also speaks of the necessity to begin with obedience:

To the character of a child, especially of a pupil, there belongs above all things obedience. (…) obedience to the absolute will of a leader, but also (…) obedience to the will of a leader who is recognized to be reasonable and good. Obedience can be derived from constraint, and then it is absolute; or it can be derived from confidence, and then it is (…) voluntary obedience (…) the former is also extremely necessary, for it prepares the child for the fulfillment of such laws as it will in the future have to fulfill as a citizen. (Kant 2007, 469)

For Kant, the most important vocation of man is that he becomes moral, which is based on following universal maxims based on one’s own free will and not because of external pressure or fear of punishment. In his pedagogy, Kant attempts to reconcile the need for external discipline and correction and the cultivation of internal principles of freedom. Important for our discussion is that prior to the moralization that Kant aspires to there must be absolute obedience to the “absolute will of a leader” (Kant 2007, 469). Similarly to Locke, the cultivation of the mind, individuality and reason is preceded by and premised upon the disciplining of the body, the subjection of the will and the taming of the drives.

Rousseau’s Emile

Because of this fundamental premise of the asociality of human nature, Rousseau’s alternative of an education based on nature and freedom proves to be in concordance with the patriarchal discipline of pedagogy that Locke and Kant envisioned. In other words, it allows for understanding the shared coordinates of their “descriptive statement of the human” rather than seeing them as radical alternatives.

50 Rousseau is explicit in stating that the pedagogy of freedom is reserved for boys only: “Girls should early be accustomed to restraint. This misfortune, if such it be, is inherent in their sex, and they will never escape from it unless to endure more cruel sufferings. All their life long, they will have to submit to the strictest and most enduring restraints, those of propriety. They must be trained to bear the yoke from the first, so that they may not feel it, to master their own caprices and to submit themselves to the will of others. (…) Their childish faults, unchecked and unheeded, may easily lead to dissipation, frivolity, and inconstancy. To guard against this, teach them above all things self-control. (…) This habitual restraint produces a docility which woman requires all her life long, for she will always be in subjection to a man, or to man’s judgment, and she will never be free to set her own opinion above his. What is most wanted in a woman is gentleness; formed to obey a creature so imperfect as man, a creature often vicious and always faulty, she should early learn to submit to injustice and to suffer the wrongs inflicted on her by her husband without complaint” (Rousseau 1961, 333).
Rousseau inverses nature and culture: it is not natural savagery of the Child that needs to be civilized to become social, rational and moral, but it is the moral nature of the Child that must be preserved and safeguarded from the corruption of society. The culprit of thwarting the development from Child to Man, however, remains the same: women. Instead of being agents that prevent the cultivation of manhood from nature’s infancy, women are here blamed for corrupting the Child’s nature through their sociality. The course of nature would be non-social: “With the age of reason the child becomes the slave of the community (...) a yoke which nature had not laid upon it (...) Before the age of reason it is impossible to form any idea of moral beings or social relations (...) let him only see the physical world around him” (Rousseau 1961, 53).

We do what he wants or we make him do what we want, we submit to his whims or subject him to our own. There is no middle course; he must rule or obey. Thus his earliest ideas are those of the tyrant or the slave. He commands before he can speak, he obeys before he can act (...) the seeds of evil passions sown in his young heart. At a later day these are attributed to nature, and when we have taken pains to make him bad we lament his badness (...) In this way the child passes six or seven years in the hands of women, the victim of his own caprices or theirs (...) this infant, slave and tyrant (...) is flung upon this world, and his helplessness, his pride, and [when] his other vices are displayed, we begin to lament the wretchedness and perversity of mankind. We are wrong; this is the creature of our fantasy; the natural man is cast in another mould. Would you keep him as nature made him? Watch over him from his birth. Take possession of him as soon as he comes into the world and keep him till he is a man. (Rousseau 1961, 15–16)

Nature is the remedy to the cultural corruption at the hands of women. The way to follow nature’s course, is through a severing of social ties as much as possible (they are the sources of cultural corruption) and the guidance to a (male) tutor who oversees the process of the Child’s “natural” development. The Child gradually turns into a righteous and moral Man because he is submitted not to the caprices of his or women’s wills, but submitted to the “necessity of nature.” Rousseau ensures to incorporate the “natural” function of women whilst preventing them from spoiling the Child: “Women have ceased to be mothers, they do not and will not return to their duty (...) the sweet task imposed on them by nature” (Rousseau 1961, 14). Rousseau the educator must have full control over child and the mother (or nurse) alike: “Emile (...) must obey me. That is my first and only condition” (Rousseau 1961, 20); “her instructions will be given her in writing” and should “follow the master’s wishes” (Rousseau 1961, 24). In the name of nature, Rousseau can simultaneously shame women for corrupting the youth and not heeding to their natural duty, whilst maintaining patriarchal control, which assures that nature follows its proper course.
Hierarchy: Tyrants and slaves or benign paternal rule

The long quote above also points to another consequence of the postulate of the asociality of nature constitutive of the developmental genre of Man: relation can only be thought of in terms of conflict and hierarchy. Relation premised on an atomistic ontology of pre-social selfish individuals naturalizes hierarchy (tyrants and slaves) and war (Maldonado-Torres 2008), reducing it to a battle between two wills. Since Man knows what is best for the Child—and all groups of people labeled immature—the subjection of the will of the Other is a necessary foundation for the cultivation of humanity. There is a logical consistency in Hegel’s seemingly paradoxical views on slavery as being essentially evil (because the essence of humanity is freedom) but necessarily advantageous for the maturation and humanization of the African who would otherwise be lost to their own erratic immature will (Hegel 1956). As we already saw, this is how coloniality of gender is at work in Kant: the achievement of civilized gender-relations has overcome the natural state of subjugation of women (as slaves) to men (as tyrants).

Because the Child is taken as an asocial creature, the relation between caregiver and child is taken to be an antagonistic clashing of wills. The willful, obstinate Child (Ahmed 2017, 66–85) tries to dominate the other and get what he wants. In order for the Child not to be “spoiled,” he must submit to the authoritative will of the parent (spare the rod, spoil the child). With the rise of pedagogy manuals and books in the 18th and 19th century, the emphasis is often on the “breaking of the will” of the Child (Miller 2002). With our canonical philosophers, however, they explicitly state that

the will of children must not be broken but merely directed (...) it is unnatural that the child should command by its crying, and that the strong should obey a weak one, one must therefore never comply with the crying of children, even in their first years, and allow them to extort something by this means (...) Children are spoiled if one complies with their wills. (Kant 2007, 467)

Locke equally warns against the “obstinacy” and “willfulness” of the Child. One “spoils” the Child when one gives in to their will: “stubbornness, and an obstinate disobedience, must be master’d with force and blows; for this there is no other remedy” (Locke 1668, 61); “He had the will of his maid before he could speak or go; he had the mastery of his parents ever since he could prattle” (Locke 1668, 30). “[B]y a gentle application of the hand” (Locke 1668, 25) the malleable minds of Children are directed and their wills “suppled.” By introducing this difference between breaking the will and instead “directing” or

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51 A similar quotation: “Parents usually speak a great deal about breaking the will of children. One must not break their will, unless one has not first spoiled it. The first spoiling occurs when one complies with the despotical will of children by having them get everything by their cries” (Kant 2007, 452).
“suppling” it, Kant and Locke believe that they can separate the necessity of submission to an external benign authority from an internalized self-discipline of acting according to reason: "He that is not us'd to submit his will to the reason of others when he is young, will scarce hearken to submit to his own reason where he is of an age to make use of it" (Locke 1968, 30).52

The battle of wills leads to a brutish hierarchy of one will over the other: one becomes a slave or a tyrant. The proper solution to this brutish hierarchy of tyranny/slavery is to submit the Child to the benign, rational, paternal authority instead of the caprice of the law of the strongest. Through submission to patriarchal authority (the Father or the new pedagogy based on masculine science) the boy turns into a Gentleman (Locke) or is on his way to Enlightenment (Kant). Note that the colonial, white supremacist argument shared by these Enlightenment thinkers follows the same logic: the submission to benign, civilized despotism is necessary and preferable over the tyranny that savages and barbarians inflict on themselves.

The developmental paradigm delimits how to think about, arrange and affirm relationality, positing sociality as an achievement that has transcended a natural state of hierarchy, war and slavery, which nevertheless remains premised upon its constant enforcement. This leads me to the next tenet of Developmental Man, the denial of vulnerability. In the next chapters, my drawing on feminist ethics of response-ability and vulnerability seek to reclaim other modes of relationality that have been disavowed and made invisible under Developmental Man, whilst remaining situated as a spectral heir both of Developmental Man and the relationality it disavows and seeks to govern.

(iv) Denial of vulnerability

I already noted above how the enlightened pedagogues warned against the influence of mothers, nurses and servants. The irrational influences make the Child susceptible to the inheritance of stupidity, mired in superstition and irrationality, unable to understand precepts of reason and science; indulging the

52 What the difference between the two are, however, is unclear to me. Locke shares an anecdote of “a prudent and kind mother” who whipped her disobedient daughter eight times to the point that she “could master her stubbornness, and obtain a compliance in a very easy and indifferent matter. If she had left off sooner, and stopp’d at the seventh whipping, she had spoil’d the child for ever, and, by her unprefailing blows, only confirm’d her refractoriness, very hardly afterwards to be cur’d: but wisely persisting till she had bent her mind, and suppl’d her will, the only end of correction and chastisement, she establish’d her authority thoroughly (…) and had ever after a very ready compliance and obedience in all things from her daughter” (Locke 1968, 62).
Child’s “obstinate will,” the latter will grow to be a tyrant. But there is also a third reason, namely, that the states of neediness, dependency and vulnerability sit uncomfortably with the ideals of Developmental Man to be bounded, rational and autonomous (Shildrick 2002; Cavarero 2016). What makes children so unacceptable to enlightened men like Kant is that it showcases exactly what one needs to overcome to become a civilized human being: inclinations and dependencies (Cavarero 2016, 26). Cavarero continues:

Infancy, understood as a state of immaturity and dependency, is measured and, so to speak, crushed by the Kantian paradigm of a self who is autonomous, free, and rational—who controls his own inclinations and does not need others to incline lovingly toward him. This framework allows us to understand Kant’s anguish over the maternal complacency that risks slowing down the self’s development toward the adult state of rationality and autonomy. (…) In essence, Kant condemns children not only because they are not yet adults, but also because they do not seem to be in any hurry to grow up. (Cavarero 2016, 26)

Cavarero quirs that Kant wishes to forget that he himself once was a dependent infant (and that he continues to be dependent on others). The figures of the Mother and the Child, come to embody what he seeks to disavow in himself. This recalls Shildrick: “vulnerability must be managed, covered over in the self, and repositioned as a quality of the other” (Shildrick 2002, 68). Here I do not yet distinguish between dependency, helplessness or powerlessness, and vulnerability. Within the paradigm of Developmental Man, the problem is precisely that the state of dependency, helplessness and vulnerability are conflated and considered as something negative (“blameworthy” even, to return to Kant’s definition of Enlightenment). In chapter 7, I turn to Butler who tries to reclaim vulnerability as the basis of a shared ethico-political horizon, yet continues to associate vulnerability primarily with features of dependency and helplessness. For now, I still want to draw the attention to how the maturity-trope of developmental Man simultaneously denies the constitutive vulnerability of everyone and also posits an ideal of able-bodied strength. Here is Rousseau:

If you take the care of a sickly, unhealthy child, you are a sick nurse, not a tutor. To preserve a useless life you are wasting the time which should be spent in increasing its value, you risk the sight of a despairing mother reproaching you for the death of her child, who ought to have died long ago. I would not undertake the care of a feeble, sickly child, should he live to four score years. I want no pupil who is useless alike to himself and others, one whose sole

53 The reasoning differs slightly: Rousseau believes that the capricious battle of women’s wills and the Child’s leads to the spoiling of nature that creates slaves and tyrants. Kant blames women for spoiling children according to the latter’s natural propensity to tyranny and they are therefore in need of patriarchal authority.
business is to keep himself alive, one whose body is always a hindrance to the training of his mind. If I vainly lavish my care upon him, what can I do but double the loss to society by robbing it of two men, instead of one? Let another tend this weakling for me. (Rousseau 1961, 21)

Whereas Kant argues that the proper place of a weaker creature (the Child) is in submission to a to a superior one (the parent), Rousseau does not waste his time on any form of “weakness” at all and lets Nature differentiate between the Strong and the Weak. The disavowal of vulnerability easily slips into a disavowal of human interdependency and a disdain for weakness. In light of the civilizational developmental logic that only values a state of being that has matured out of the state of depraved animality or savagery, I wish to add another conclusion from this discussion: life is not to be respected unless it is in concordance with standards of civilization. Respect and dignity are to be earned by performing civilized subjectivity that has successfully conquered the inner animal. As an “undeveloped” or “insufficiently” developed creature in one’s sheer actuality, life has no worth. The foundational disrespect for life and assigning of respect and dignity as premised upon the maturity-trope also runs through Kant’s thinking. In an ironic rebuttal of Herder’s philosophy of history that posited that different nations create their own meaning and sense, Kant asks: “Does the author really mean that, if the happy inhabitants of Tahiti, never visited by more civilized nations, were destined to live in their peaceful indolence for thousands of centuries, it would be possible to give a satisfactory answer to the question why they should exist at all?” (Kant 2013c, 219–220)

So far, I focused on some early Enlightenment pedagogical texts that systematize the trajectory of Developmental Man through the civilizational figure of the Child. Although there have been many paradigm-shifts, notably in developmental psychology through attachment theory (which reiterated patriarchal gender-roles of the institution of isolated motherhood through the universal figure of the “natural mother-child dyad”), the figure of the obstinate

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54 In the 1960s, pedagogical and psychological expertise shifted from the disciplinary approach to child-rearing. A new paradigm emerged that focused on the infants’ needs for emotional attachment and relational responsivity and charting the psychic effects when emotional needs are not met. Considered the “founding father” of attachment theory (Irigarayan irony aside), John Bowlby’s work became hugely influential not only in psychology but in middle-class households in the Global North as well. In social philosophy, the work of psychologist Donald Winnicott had a similar influence, especially through the work of Axel Honneth, who reads Winnicott’s work on the mother-child dyad as providing a universal natural backdrop for the social histories of the struggle for recognition. Bowlby approached developmental psychology from an evolutionary perspective rather than the previously prevailing behavioral models. Anthropologists, colonial politicians and
Child with its tyrannical will remains a conservative trope and continues to inform psychology books and pedagogical practice. In Jordan Peterson’s bestseller 12 Rules for Life, one finds this universal, severed Child, as an unsophisticated savage-animal whose lawless freedom, unbridled passions and tyrannical will must be disciplined in order to mature and achieve sociality, moral responsibility. Peterson also draws on the analogy of development in human history and the development of a human individual. He argues that patriarchy was necessary to grow out of the brutish, nasty and short life of natural savagery: “the primary moral issue confronting society was control of violent, impulsive selfishness and the mindless greed and brutality that accompanies it” (Peterson 2018, 58). This way, humanity started to emancipate itself from “permanent human infantilism and absolute uselessness” (Peterson 2018, 47). This “infantilism” and “uselessness” of irresponsible humanity is transposed on infants and children: just as humanity had to grow out of its state of nature, so must the individual. Starting from a natural state (or inheritance) of stupidity, parents—one mother and one father, no other constellations allowed!—must ensure the child’s adjustment to societal rules and norms: “we

social workers had for many decades actively condemned and systemically disrupted indigenous child-rearing practices that did not conform to the model of the bourgeois family for spoiling children and lacking discipline. Now, Bowlby turns to indigenous as a window to understand the “original” and “natural” way that children were raised at the dawn of human evolution. But the Indigenous Other as original human first had to undergo a bourgeois make-over and fit the Euromodern assumptions about gender-roles and motherhood: central to Bowlby’s theory is the presumption that the infant’s attachment is primarily (if not exclusively) to the mother. The psychological development of the individual thus gets connected to the levels of successful attachment, i.e., based on the emotional responsivity of the mother to her infant. The attachment-paradigm displaces some of the main features described above as constitutive of Developmental Man, especially the denial of vulnerability and the atomistic social ontology. But, as many feminists have pointed out, attachment-theory put extra burdens and expectations on isolated mothers who were supposed to live up to the “natural” state of constant emotional availability (e.g. d’Ancona et al. 1989). The subjection to patriarchal arrangements of childrearing and gender-roles, with isolated motherhood as social destiny, become naturalized in the picture of the originary and timeless mother-infant bond. Within the division of disciplinary knowledge, the psychological theories stand apart from power and history (in a word, sociogeny) and can draw on the non-coeval Indigenous Other as data to turn it into a body of progressive knowledge. (For example, on the cover of the 1969 paperback version of Bowlby’s book Attachment, reproduced in Sarah Blaffer Hrdy’s Mothers and Others (2009) a young bare-breasted Amazonian indigenous mother carrying an infant is shown, emphasizing the mother-infant nexus (Hrdy 2009, 85), continuing a porno-tropic (Weheliye 2014) availability of racialized otherness in bourgeois homes. By stabilizing the connection between the contemporary ideal of the white bourgeois family with isolated motherhood as women’s destiny and an originary state of nature, it perpetuates the normativity of the white family that continues to be weaponized against minoritized groups (Spillers 2003; Davis 1981).
need to learn, because we’re stupid” (Peterson 2018, 141). The task of childrearing is to ensure that children cease to be useless, tyrannical and dislikable and to become socially acceptable: “Every child should also be taught to comply gracefully with the expectations of civil society” (Peterson 2018, 134). This disciplining into social conformity is a prerequisite for attaining individual character, which is an achievement of maturation and sophistication premised on this prior discipline and punishment:

It is the primary duty of parents to make their children socially desirable. That will provide the child with opportunity, self-regard, and security. It’s more important even than fostering individual identity. That Holy Grail can only be pursued, in any case, after a high degree of social sophistication has been established. (Peterson 2018, 143)

As with our Enlightenment pedagogues, Peterson reads children’s vulnerability and emotional needs as an attempt at subjecting others to their tyrannical will. Child-rearing is a battle between wills, and to prevent spoiling the child, the authority of the parents must be forcefully established. Peterson literally uses the language of war to describe a scene in which he “disciplined” his son as a toddler, who was, unlike his daughter, not so easily “paralyze[d] into immobility with an evil glance” (Peterson 2018, 126). He describes how he force-fed his toddler son who refused to eat as a successful and witty story of disciplining. The starting point on the journey to (unachievable) responsible mature individuality is a fundamental disrespect of the Other (as a monster who is unsophisticated, tyrannical, stupid, useless). Through this disciplining, natural inclinations towards laziness, addiction, criminality may be safeguarded and the “useless” immature creature might become a useful and moral subject (Peterson 2018, 126). The maturity-trope runs throughout Peterson’s entire philosophy: “perhaps, you are just whiny and immature? (…) Just exactly how immature might you be? There’s a potentially bottomless pit” (Peterson 2018, 279). After shaming his readers for being whiny and immature he conjures up images of ego-ideal to escape this state of shameful immaturity: “Toughen up, you weasel!” (Peterson 2018, 327). The developmental trajectory from the ego-ideal of maturity is never to be achieved, always enacted in a perennial attempt at self-mastery to overcome one’s shamefulness. The poles of this drama of the maturity-trope, between “the chaos of immaturity and responsible freedom” (Peterson 2018, 119), is coated in his Jungian language of gendered archetypes: chaos is feminine, and order (responsibility, freedom) is masculine. The Enlightenment and Victorian language of achievement of masculine individuality out of the maternal anachronistic space of unruly chaos, continues.

(v) **Severance from the social-maternal-ancestral**
The rationality of the patriarchal pedagogy of Developmental Man outlined above—inheritance of stupidity, subjection to patri-arche, an atomistic social
ontology, sociality as civilizational achievement, and denial of vulnerability—is premised on what I propose to call the severance from the social-maternal-ancestral. In this move of instigating patri-arche through severance, what is severed has often been defined and fixed as natural, maternal, savage, irrational, Chaos—“anachronistic space” (McClintock). The linking of social and maternal responds to the Euromodern civilizational fixing of the maternal to the natural: the maternal-natural that needs to be overridden by male principles of civilization for it to emerge out of a state of nature. It is an attempt at the feminist conundrum of critiquing phallogocentric discourse: how to avoid reiterating the same patriarchal binary value-system in trying to reclaim what has been othered, degraded and defined by that very system? As I tried to show, underneath the maternal-natural nexus there lies an atomistic social ontology that starts from the absence of sociality in nature (Hobbes, Rousseau, et al.) and where sociality becomes a civilizational achievement. As such, sociality has a normative dimension that arranges what the appropriate place of mothers, fathers, pedagogical experts, servants—all understood in a racializing grammar—are in serving the development of the Child and the progress of Man. From Indigenous scholarship and resistance to Euromodern Man, one of the most wide-spread and far-reaching differences is by starting not from a relation of primal hostility as a pre-social state of nature, but a relationality that is always-already a sociality, including with nonhuman plant-nations and animal-nations (Simpson 2017; Estes 2019). By understanding relationality as sociality (and the encounter with entities that are “outside” of the anthropocentric symbolic, begs the question how to turn the relation into a social one), it turns relationality into a contextual question of how to enter into a responsive and response-able relation. In other words, sociality does not prescribe a “proper” way of relating but it does mean an ethical interpellation and implication that requires a figuring out how to approach the relation from a perspective of response-ability that exceeds an instrumental relation. On my reading, the inscription of the maternal as an always-already social category avoids its fixation and overdetermination in a discourse on nature, which chains maternity to particular bodies, roles and identities. Instead, the maternal is inherently embedded in a sociality that remains open-ended and must always be negotiated in how it takes shape. In other words, not only does it seek to unhinge the maternal from the natural, and from fixing it to particular bodies or identities, but also avoids a normative or prescriptive dimension to what the ideal form of sociality is (a problematic we will return to shortly in the discussion of attachment theory), acknowledging an undefined and collective response-ability and implication in child-rearing without erasing maternity in our explorations of ethics, subjectivity and sociality. Here I am indebted to Alexis Pauline Gumbs’ separation of the (more-than-individual) practices of mothering from the normative figure of motherhood (Gumbs 2016). She starts with what Spillers called the American Grammar Book, which pathologizes Black women, motherhood and family as
by definition an aberration from the legitimate kinship ties and the North American definition of Woman as reproducer of legitimate heirs for the white family and race. Gumbs holds that Black mothering has always been a queer practice that eludes the normative identity-categories of womanhood and motherhood. As a more-than-individual social name for the queer(ing) practices of care, Gumbs argues that mothering is “older than feminism; it is older and more futuristic than the category ‘woman’” (Gumbs 2016a, 9). This points to ancestral traces older than any form of Euromodern subjugation and to historical and ongoing resistant sociality that continues to remake queer futurity despite the hold. This dimension is the passing on of an inheritance necessary for survival and thriving, whose temporality I will explore later through the ancestral in social-maternal-ancestral. Here I introduce the figuration of social-maternal-ancestral negatively, i.e., as critique, but in chapter 9 I will develop the figuration in positive terms by engaging with the work of Gumbs, M. Jacqui Alexander, Audre Lorde and Cynthia Willett among others, elaborating on the connection to the “ancestral.” I would like to strategically leave open the precise definition of severance to allow for multiple associations and relations with other related concepts that emerge from different situations and questions. I have shown the path through which I arrived at the term, through the civilizational figure of the Child and the genre of Developmental Man. I have attempted to show the patri-archal violence inherent to this genre of Man through an idea(l) of normative, civilized humanity inseparable from racialization, gendered violence and ableism. At the same time, this figuration is also indebted to work in Black studies that faced the question of the severing of all kinship ties in brutal subjugation to systems of settler-colonialism and chattel slavery. The argument has been constructed from within hegemonic Enlightenment discourse, not as some foundational discourse, but as one possible entry-point in approaching Euromodernity’s multi-faceted violence.

Conclusion

I started this chapter with a look at Haarer’s Nazi-pedagogy. Instead of seeing this as an aberration in history and as fundamentally at odds with science, progress and reason, I have shown how Nazi-pedagogy shares many features with the Enlightenment philosophers who sought to turn pedagogy into a masculine science away from the influence of women and the working class: the inheritance of stupidity, the need for subjection to discipline and punishment, the social atomistic model based on a fundamental selfish and brutish individuals that can only rule or obey, and the denial of vulnerability. My claim is that these features are constitutive of the Euromodern (i.e., hegemonic Euro-

55 Especially Saidiya Hartman, Spillers, Gumbs, Édouard Glissant and Christina Sharpe.
American civilizational model that colonized most of the world) genre of Man, drawing on and adding to the frameworks of Wynter, Lugones and McClintock. From this sketch of what I have called Developmental Man and the civilizational figure of the Child, premised on a foundational violence of severance from the social-maternal-ancestral, I will pursue two directions to continue to unlearn and undo Developmental Man and relearn and recreate feminist and decolonial worlding-practices: the question of temporality (the linear-developmental-progressivist model) and relationality (outside of the atomistic social ontology). I will approach the question of temporality from the figurations of the social-maternal-ancestral and spectral inheritance; and the questions of relationality from the rich feminist philosophical resources on rethinking vulnerability and response-ability.
Jules Gill-Peterson tells the story of the invention of gender in the 1950s and the violence against intersex and gender-nonconforming children it was based on. She argues that “although gender has come to be associated with cultural malleability and feminist political projects, as far as its conditions of emergence are concerned it is better described as a medical device mobilized to face the potential conceptual collapse of binary sex” (Gill-Peterson 2018, 98). As medical knowledge did not fit the desired framework of binary sex, “the concept of gender was able to stabilize the crisis in the concept of binary sex” (Gill-Peterson 2018, 100). Gender promulgated a binary form as a developmental destiny to be achieved through the correction of unruly sexed bodies: “a developmental framework that made gender identity the endpoint of a teleology of growth out of plasticity” (Gill-Peterson 2018, 100). The way to achieve this when bodies’ growth did not correspond to the desired development into binary form was through enforced surgery. The infants and children did not give their consent—the very definition of abuse, as Audre Lorde and James Baldwin remind us. Medicine’s task “became to normalize the development of intersex or gender nonconforming children so that they would grow up to be either a woman or a man, and nothing else” (Gill-Peterson 2018, 119). In the name of development and “improvement” of the ideal binary human form, nonsensical surgery was branded as a humane endeavor. She recounts Dr. John Money’s reports of his medical crimes. One of his medical reports features a 3-year old identifying as a boy, whose gender-attribution at birth was advised to be a boy, but later subjected to a “corrective” surgery toward femaleness and girlhood. Dr. Money’s 3-year old victim bears witness to the violence and reproaches him: “the nurse cut my wee-wee (...) Got to call my Mommy” (cited in Gill-Peterson 2018, 124). With astonishing self-righteousness, Dr. Money defends his crimes by appealing to the lack of sophistication and immaturity of his victim: “I was left wondering whether the child has some kind of cerebral defect (...) in a typically childish way, he had grossly misconstrued his surgical experiences to signify that his penis was being mutilated (...) in an older person, this kind of reiterated illogical thinking would be identified as delusional and psychopathological” (cited in Gill-Peterson 2018, 125; emphasis Gill-Peterson’s). The witness and survivor who talks back is silenced on account of his immature lack of sound reason and appreciation of medical and social achievement of binary gender. The archive of violence bears the traces of the witnesses and victims, their heavy testimonies and messages demanding a future of liberation based on their (almost) silenced past of defiant, unruly and wayward bodies, spirits and minds that refuse the developmental regulation and governance of Man.
Chapter 4: Sylvia Wynter and Sociogeny Revisited: Toward a Spectral Inheritance of Man and Child

Liberation is to leave the prison (deny the denied) and affirm the history that was anterior and exterior to the prison (the history of the prisoner before being put into jail and the history that was lived as personal biography in prison).

—ENRIQUE DUSSEL

[T]here was one great difference between that sordid block in Harlem and the rest of New York City, to say nothing of the rest of the country. The difference may sound mystical but it was this: if a girl had a baby and she wasn’t married, she wasn’t stoned to death, and we took care of the baby. The morals didn’t matter (...) But she mattered! And the baby mattered! It is intolerable to me, to imagine, for just one moment, that I would exchange that standard for the standards of this republic.

—JAMES BALDWIN

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I built on Sylvia Wynter’s framework of the genres of Man and María Lugones’ coloniality of gender, arguing that the logic of this genre is best understood through its developmentalism, with the figure of the Child that emerges in the Enlightenment as central to the world of Euromodern hierarchies that we differentially inherit and inhabit. In the next two chapters, I move from the sketch of what we inherit to the following: how is the developmental genre of Man enacted, inhabited and transmitted across generations? In this chapter, I turn to Wynter’s answer to this question, which she develops through a reworking of Frantz Fanon’s concept of sociogeny. In the next chapter, I turn to Nietzsche’s answer by tracing his genealogical argument and the Foucauldian-Butlerian theory of subjectivation it suggests.56

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56 Before turning to Wynter and Nietzsche, however, one clarification is necessary to avoid possible misunderstandings. Their answers to the how of inheritance focus on the connection between identity and morality rather than political and economic structures. Although both are in their own ways resolutely materialist thinkers, they emphasize the symbolic and psycho-existential dimensions of human existence respectively. My approach to Wynter and Nietzsche for the question of the how of the inheritance of Developmental Man and the Child is informed by the Spinozist question of why we are invested in our own oppression as if it were our liberation. I do not engage sufficiently with the material underpinnings and institutional
Wynter maps the structural racialization and other forms of dehumanization constitutive of Euromodern Man onto binary neurobiological systems of reward/punishment. She further suggests that every genre of the human hitherto has worked according to a binary understanding of us/them (identity) and good/bad (morality). I argue that her project to move beyond Man thus maintains a progressivist temporality, overcoming being “imprisoned” (Wynter 1999, 31) by a parochial self-definition based on binary othering (i.e., growing out of an inheritance of stupidity toward self-conscious inclusive humanity). This dissertation proposes a different reading arguing, by combining sociogeny with genealogy, for the emergence of such binary notions of identity and morality through the exposure to response-debilitating worlds of Developmental Man, characterized by hierarchical subjection of infantilized children as blueprint for relationality, the denial of vulnerability, the fundamental disrespect and the severance from the social-maternal-ancestral (see previous chapter). Despite Euromodern (and other) legacies of response-debilitating violence, we maintain the resources and memory of a constitutive responsive relationality that is “more ancient and futuristic” (Gumbs 2016a, 9) than the forces that push us towards reactive binary understandings and enactments of (pure) identity and (transcendental) morality. The glimpses of such a constitutive relationality based on responsivity are gleaned from Darcia Narvaez’ Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality (2014). In it, she argues for how childhood experiences can be conducive to either more open-ended relational modes of identity and morality or to more binary modes of self-definition (us/them thinking) and a defensive morality based on more rigid definitions of good and bad. However, I critique the underlying notions of nature, indigeneity and temporality inherent to this paradigm of developmental psychology, through the sociogenic and genealogical tools of Fanon, Wynter and Nietzsche. A reworked sociogenic hermeneutic does not claim the laws of structures here, but requires the abolition and transformation of these material and institutional structures (Roberts 2022; Mohageb 2023; Lewis 2022). Although I do not sufficiently engage with this and stay with Wynter’s focus on the theory of the human, I will move towards a more Fanonian sociogenic approach that highlights the need for interruption of response-debilitating structures and systems and the (re)creation of breathable response-enabling ones. Wynter’s argument is in part a critical conversation with the dominance of Marxist frameworks in the revolutionary movements of her youth (Wynter and Scott 2000). She is close to suggesting that the motor of world-historical change is primarily driven by the governing genre of the human (Wynter 1995; see also Henry 2000, 139–143 for a critical discussion thereof). I engage with her theory of the human, without wanting to claim that this should take methodological or ontological priority over more materialist or institutional approaches to questions of oppression. In other words, a better theory of the human will not be sufficient to challenge political domination, economic exploitation and planetary crises, though it would be an integral part of such a challenge.
othering and symbolic closure of an us vs. them structure as ontological givens but can ask about the social conditions that produce certain systems of identity and morality as opposed to others. Wynter’s analysis of Man1 and Man2 are, then, not variations on the same quasi-transcendental structure of a universally enclosed parochial human self-definition but are themselves historical genres of Man: in other words, the binary structure of the sociogenic codes themselves need a sociogenic interpretation.

First, I introduce Wynter’s overall project of liberation through a rearticulation of what it means to be human (the reader familiar with Wynter is invited to skip this section). Then, I turn to Wynter’s texts on the “sociogenic principle” to examine the neurobiological foundations of her understanding of the universal binary structures of identity (self/Other) and morality (good/evil). Thirdly, I turn to Narvaez’ developmentalist theory that can either lead to strong binary understandings of identity and morality or allow for more relational approaches to the self and ethics. Finally, I use sociogeny to point out the colonial presuppositions and structures of the developmental argument based on the categories of ontogeny/phylogeny. The combination of Wynter and Narvaez allows for an understanding of how the hierarchical violence of Euromodern developmental Man and the figure of the Child gets embodied and transmitted, which, however, never usurps an-other inheritance of constitutive relationality based on responsivity, care (Gumbs’ mothering) and vulnerability.

Sylvia Wynter’s project

Wynter’s multi-disciplinary project emerges out of the liberatory movements from the 1950s and 1960s (Wynter and Scott 2000). It seeks to push forward the unfinished work and promise of decolonization: political decolonization is not completed without a radical redefinition of what it means to be human, breaking with the constitutive antiblackness of the hegemonic Western bourgeois androcentric genre of Man. From her many sources, Wynter develops this project in relation to Fanon’s category of sociogeny (Fanon 2008) in “Towards the Sociogenic Principle” (1999; 2001),57 which will be the focus of this chapter. She finds in Fanon’s sociogeny the key for bringing to fruition the unfinished project of the decolonization and liberation movements of the 1950s and 1960s at the level of the redefinition of what it means to be human. Black Studies, as a critique of Western civilization, emerged as precisely this revolutionary shift, able to undermine the epistemic order and the racist biocentric genre of Man it

57 Two versions of Sylvia Wynter’s essay “Towards the Sociogenic Principle” are circulating: a longer earlier version from 1999 that is freely available online, and a shortened, edited version that is published as a book-chapter from 2001. The contents are nearly identical though the precise wording might vary – I will cite from both (1999 and 2001).
is premised upon. However, Black Studies’ radical promise of the subversion of the liberal universality to “exoticize” Western thought (Baraka cited in Wynter 2005, 107) was rendered harmless by the liberal order of knowledge’s incorporation of Black Studies as a particular difference that only underscored the validity of liberalism’s alleged universality (Wynter 2005). It is this radical promise of Black studies, undermined by the liberal order of knowledge, that Wynter devotes her intellectual work to, “beyond Man, towards the human” (Wynter 2003).

Wynter is clear in defining the stakes of her intellectual project of redefining the human, which range from “the small humiliations of everyday life, to vast deprivations of hunger and poverty as well as to the large-scale genocide that has now become characteristic of the twentieth century” (Wynter 2001, 64). A new definition of the human is needed to overcome the murderous othering and the disposability of massive categories of people—the subhuman racialized others, the undeserving poor (the capitalist version of the colonial lazy savage trope)—that can be swallowed up and sacrificed for the functioning of racial capitalism, rendered expendable during the ongoing unfolding of a global ecological catastrophe (Wynter 2015). Her argument is grounded not only in a reading of history, but she also takes recourse to the natural sciences for grounding her sociogenic science that seeks to incorporate both nature and history.

Wynter defines the human as homo narrans, a hybrid of bios and logos: as storytelling animals, cosmogenic narratives or foundational myths are central to the meaning and enactment of humanity (Wynter and McKittrick 2015, 25–33). Humans “performatively enact” their narratively constructed mode of humanity or what Wynter calls “descriptive statements of the human” (Wynter 2015). From this conception of the human, she reads Euromodern history not only as the political domination and economic exploitation of the world by European imperial powers, but as the global imposition of a hegemonic Eurocentric descriptive statement of the human. Central to Wynter’s structuralist conception of human self-definition, the “sociogenic codes of symbolic life and death” that make up every “descriptive statement of the human,” is the binary construction of self-definition pitted against its symbolic Other. She argues that the same functional binarisms of parochial over-representation of one’s own descriptive statement (symbolic life) in contrast to otherness (symbolic death) are a universal structure of all human narratives prior the Fanonian discovery of sociogeny. Wynter divides two different historical

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58 Jacques Derrida described this liberal claim to universal humanity in a different context as “the enclosure of Western collocution (…) mak[ing] an effort to interiorize (…) difference, to master it (…) by affecting itself with it” (Derrida 1982, 113).
genres of Euromodern Man, which she names (ratio-centric or ratio-secular) Man1 and (biocentric or bio-economic) Man2 (Wynter 2003). For Man1, a ratio-centric conception of the human defines itself over and against a sub-rational Other, which inherits but crucially modifies a Christian conception of the saved Christian self and the damned Other, beginning a process of secularization or “degodding” (Wynter 1995). Wynter reads the Darwinian revolution as continuing the “degodding” process of human self-definition by proposing a purely biocentric definition of the human: Man2. This is, according to Wynter, a unique event in world-history that breaks with the religiosity of every prior descriptive statement of the human. Despite this secularizing event, Man2 nevertheless unknowingly draws from its monotheistic inheritance by positing what she calls a *monohumanism*, i.e., the necessary belief in the universal validity of one’s own particular definition of the human as if it were representing humanity as such. In this way, the Western bourgeois masculine definition of the human colonizes and erases the world’s multiplicity of descriptive statements. The self-definition of Man2 is premised on a racial notion of a naturally selected (“eugenic”) human who belongs to the world-historical present and the future, as opposed to a naturally “dysselected” (or “dysgenic”) inferior human who are remnants from the past and cannot lay claim to the historical present or future (Wynter 2003; 2015). It is in this sense that, within the symbolic codes of Man2, the “denial of co-evalness” is concomitant with the “denial of co-humanity” (Wynter 2015, 215). Importantly, according to Wynter, this monohumanism or parochial “overrepresentation” of one’s own genre of the human as if it were the human as such, is inherent to the religiosity of all cosmogenic narratives and sociogenic systems, and not historically specific to European, Christian or monotheistic sociogenic symbolic codes.

From the world-historical event of a global imposition and overrepresentation of the Western bourgeois male genres of Man premised on a mode of othering in terms of racial dehumanization and ratiocentric/biocentric supremacy also emerges a world-historical *opportunity* for another revolution: an “embattled humanism” (Wynter and Scott 2000, 154) based on a new definition of the human that no longer requires its constitutive Other as the symbolic code of death, which animated each human self-definition hitherto. The possibility of this dialectical overcoming of human parochialism lies in the experience, analysis and actions undertaken by those who live under the mark of abjection and expulsion, the “demonic grounds” of the symbolic codes of life and death from which a potentiated “double consciousness” (Du Bois 2005) can emerge. Katherine McKittrick explains the usage of “demonic grounds:” Wynter’s reading of modernity/coloniality demonstrates, in a way that Foucault’s historicizing of Man in *The Order of Things* did not (see also Ferreira Da Silva 2015), how “subaltern lives are not marginal/other to regulatory classificatory systems, but instead integral to them” (McKittrick 2006, xxv). But their lives are “demonic” because they are the unpredictable elements who
escape the symbolic structures and strictures of Western Man. From the experience, analysis and action emerging from these demonic grounds lie the possibility of the revolutionary re-definition of the human.

Thus, Wynter’s multi-disciplinary project, borne of existential necessity and political commitment, can be called transdisciplinary in Lewis Gordon’s sense: working through disciplines in order to answer fundamental questions (what it means to be human; the meaning of human liberation), instead of producing knowledge within and for a discipline according to its particular methodological prescriptions and predefined horizon (Gordon 2011). This Fanonian inheritance—Fanon having had to implode psychoanalysis, psychiatry and philosophy in order to say what he had to say—outside of disciplinary decadence (Gordon 2011) or academic apartheid (Sandoval 2000) leads to one of the most original, coherent and far-reaching redefinitions of humanity and, world-history, configuring a horizon of shared emancipation.

Towards the sociogenic principle

Wynter’s argument

In “Towards the Sociogenic Principle: Fanon, the Puzzle of Conscious Experience, of ’Identity’ and What it’s Like to be ‘Black’” (Wynter 1999; 2001), Wynter develops her theory of the human as a nature-culture hybrid and homo narrans, which is the cornerstone to her theory of world-history, coloniality and the possibility of a new epistemic order that breaks with the antiblack Euromodern epistemic order of biocentric Man. Here, Wynter draws on analytical philosophy of consciousness, neurobiology and Fanon’s intervention in Black Skin, White Masks, transcending the limitation of the former biocentric conception of the human. Fanon introduces the term sociogeny to argue for the insufficiency of the ontogenic (Freudian, individual) and the phylogenetic (Darwinian, species-level) perspectives to account for the psychic effects and experiences of racism.

The human species, as homo narrans, presents a break with “purely organic life” by introducing symbolic narratives that govern behavior. These symbolic narratives are the sociogenetic codes that are performatively enacted, which is why Wynter defines the human as a praxis (Wynter and McKittrick 2015). Because the symbolic narratives differ, there is a multiplicity of human genres and ways of inhabiting the human. According to Wynter, these different genres of the human all work “in exactly the same way” (Wynter 1995, 17), driven by their cosmogenic narratives and according to binary systems that she calls the “symbolic codes of life and death,” which determine the definition of the good self as opposed to the bad Other. For Wynter, the question of identity is therefore necessarily entwined with morality or “ethico-behavioral systems.”
Wynter’s definition of the human as praxis involves this performative enactment of these symbolic systems.

Wynter’s sociogenic principle is an intervention in and answer to the question of consciousness posed by analytic philosophers like David Chalmers and Thomas Nagel. Wynter introduces Fanon as the key to a new model that responds to Chalmers’ search for a new theory of human consciousness that unlocks “fundamental psychophysical laws” and Nagel’s quest for an “objective phenomenology” (Wynter 2001). Wynter argues that Chalmers and Nagel remain locked into their own biocentric conception or “descriptive statement of the human,” which Fanon is able to name and pry open because of his lived experience and analysis thereof working through the contradictions of having a dark skin in an antiblack society: simultaneously inhabiting and being abjected from the normative white descriptive statement of the human; his skin becomes the mark of subhumanity. Whereas Chalmers and Nagel pose their question of consciousness from within the norm of the Euromodern genre of the human, they are blind to “the always socialized nature of our modes of being human and thereby of our experiencing what it is like to be human” (Wynter 1999, 12). Fanon definitively shows that the question of the human requires a “sociodiagnostic” (Fanon 2008), which challenges the epistemic order of biocentric Man2, which takes the natural sciences as its bedrock.

Paradoxically, Wynter interprets Fanon’s fundamental break with the biocentric order of knowledge in an emphatically biocentric way. Wynter’s taking up of the sociogenic principle is by way of analogy with nature, as “the analogue, at the level of human identity, of the genomic principle, at the level of purely organic forms of life” (Wynter 1999, 6). Wynter draws from evolutionary theory and neuroscience to stage Fanon’s intervention of sociogeny: she follows Gerald Edelman’s neuroscientific theories, which in turn rely on Dawkins’ selfish gene-theory, which argues that an organism “must know and classify its world adaptively, this in spite of the fact that the way it knows the world is not necessarily concordant with what that world veridically is, outside the terms of its own viewpoint” (Wynter 1999, 25). These adaptive advantages produce the “stable reproduction of the genes” where the organism is the vehicle rather than the driving agent. Analogically, just as the “purely organic forms of life” must know and interpret the world adaptively according to their natural environments, human life—as homo narrans—must know the world adaptively according to the symbolic narratives of what it means to be human, i.e., adaptively to each culture’s “descriptive statement of the human” (Wynter 1999, 25). Wynter then turns to neurobiologist Avram Goldstein’s book Addiction: From Biology to Drug Policy to outline how humans replicate the sociogenic codes of human identity in terms of a “natural opioid system (…)
These reward systems “drive adaptive behaviors” (Wynter 1999, 26): “It is therefore this objectively structured biochemical system that determines the way in which each organism will perceive, classify and categorize the world in the adaptive terms needed for its own survival and reproductive realization as such an organism” (Wynter 1999, 26). This biological truth functions differently for humans not in terms of structure but in terms of its contents, i.e., what counts as adaptively successful and is experienced as rewarding. The contents are the sociogenic principle’s symbolic codes of life/death, good/bad and us/Them that connect the individual’s sense of self to a larger identity-group we (breaking with liberal purely individualism atomistic and ontogenic presuppositions). This subjective experience of reward and punishment shows the convergence at the phenomenological level of morality and identity: to enact what it means to be human according to the sociogenic code of one’s particular genre of the human is experienced as a positive reward experience; and in reverse, the biochemistry of the experience of punishment lies in being outside the social codes of the genre of the human. To the extent that Euromodernity has imposed the Western bourgeois definition of Man as the only possible human, the damnés embody the contradiction of being human according to a definition that excludes them from humanity, i.e., as white.

Significantly, Wynter emphasizes that Fanon could only realize this as soon as he entered white-majority society in France. Whilst growing up in Martinique, Fanon replicates the Martinique middle-class self-identification according to the white bourgeois definition of Man. Unconsciously, Fanon’s sociogenic symbolic system was white: “the French bourgeois sense of self also structures the sense of self of the colonized French Caribbean middle class Negro [which] serves as the internalized sanction system which motivates his/her behaviors” (Wynter 2001, 34). Fanon describes the Martinique bourgeois’ unconscious identification with white French consciousness as “distrust[ing] what is black in me” (Fanon 2008, 168). When a young Fanon displayed undesirable behavior, he was told not to “act like a N—” (Fanon 2008, 168). Just as in Toni Morrison’s The Bluest Eye (McKittrick and Wynter 2015, 60), Black experience within the antiblack genre of Man seeks to avoid Blackness and orient toward whiteness according to a reward/punishment system: if one acts as white, then one counts as human, as good; If one acts like a N—, one is subhuman, bad. Fanon’s identity was unconsciously defined by a notion of being a good white subject and to avoid bad behavior that would make

59 I believe that it is significant that Wynter draws from Goldstein’s Addiction: From Biology to Drug Policy, which, based on evolutionary psychology, offers a conservative argument against the legalization of drugs, as opposed to a more contextual, trauma-informed psycho-bio-social approach to addiction (e.g. Maté 2009).
him the “N— Other” (Wynter 2001, 34), the symbolic negation of the colonial white terms of self/good/life. Only in France, when he is confronted with the structural contradiction of dehumanizing racism (reduced to object-status) and his white self-definition of the human (the subjective experience of being human) can Fanon step outside of the blind replication of the symbolic system which he internalized and enacted. Suddenly, Fanon’s credentials as a liberation fighter on the French side in World War 2, his French education, and overall behavior cease to be of any significance as he gets interpellated by white French society: “Look mom, a Negro!” (Fanon 2008, 89). His being gets frozen and fixated by the objectifying gaze of the Other: no longer able to act freely, he is “overdetermined from the outside” (Fanon 2008, 95) through his skin-color that places him in the “zone of non-being,” the negative flipside of symbolic codes of the good/life/self.

According to Wynter, the structure of this enactment of the “sociogenic replicator codes of symbolic life and death” (Wynter 2015, 198) or of morality and identity are universal whereas the contents of the sociogenic codes are culturally particular. Wynter argues that all human behavior is structured according to these symbolic codes but remain operative at an unconscious level through a neurobiologically wired reward/punishment that moves between the symbolic codes of the good/life/self and the bad/death/Other. The imperial expansion of Euromodernity has led not only to the onto-epistemic violence of negating other genres of the human by imposing the Western bourgeois definition of Man, but also to a new situation where the damnés have come to experience the contradictions of being human qua subhuman, as the abject category necessary for the definition the human (qua white) self. The colonial situation produces a contradiction between the subjective experience based on the colonial symbolic codes/descriptive statement and the overdetermination by one’s appearance that locks whole populations in the symbolic code of bad/death/Other (Fanon’s zone of non-being). But this contradiction also leads to an awakening of self-consciousness about these sociogenic codes of life and death. The traumatic experience of Fanon in France also allows him to discover, according to Wynter, the irreducible factor of sociality in human psychology. From this double consciousness, a new possibility emerges: to break out of the prison of each particular genre of the human for a new transcultural universal humanism. It is this possibility that is realized in Fanon’s intervention in Black Skin, White Masks by introducing sociogeny. In her 2015 essay, “The Ceremony Found,” Wynter brings this possibility to further fruition by proposing her “embattled humanism” to enact a new human that transcends particularisms based on a subhuman Other.

Wynter shares with Walter Mignolo (2000, 2015) the view that each culture’s definition of what it means to be human is isomorphic. Both rely on biologist Huberto Maturana’s theory of self-enclosed autopoiesis/self-governing world-making, which holds that “living systems produce themselves
within their closed dynamics (…) this system is open to the input of matter but closed with regard to the dynamics of the relations that generate it” (Maturana and Pörksen 2004, 98). Questioning objectivity in biology, Maturana shifts the focus from investigating external reality to the self-organizing systems of the observer. Wynter’s and Mignolo’s epistemologies both argue for a symbolic equivalent to such closed autopoietic systems. But unlike Mignolo’s position of the relativity of local cultures, Wynter’s analysis does not lead to cultural relativism. Instead, Wynter accepts as a historical event the breaking free of religious truth in order to access a more objective truth of nature. “[A]lthough a ‘local culture’ Western culture was to become one unique in human history, by reason of its epochal degodding or secularization of our human modes of identity (…) [detaching] human modes of being from their millennial and transculturally universal anchoring in the religious ‘space of otherness’” (Wynter 1999, 4; emphasis added). But for Wynter, this event is not yet objective enough, precisely because of its blindness to and disavowal of the irreducibility of subjective experience for what it means to be human. Fanon’s sociogeny opens up to a theory of the human that affirms the primacy of symbolic narratives of what it means to be human: “if the mind is what the brain does, what the brain does, is itself culturally determined through the mediation of the socialized sense of self, as well of the ‘social’ situation in which this self is placed” (Wynter 1999, 17). In such a way, Fanon shows the impossibility of Chalmers’ and Nagel’s attempt at a “transculturally applicable” theory of human consciousness. Wynter believes that Fanon holds the key to such a “transculturally applicable” theory, which remained necessarily impossible for humans who enact their humanity within the norm of their genre of the human. The new sociogenic theory of consciousness as an “objective phenomenology” does not sidestep the always-already socialized nature of human consciousness, but takes the symbolic contents of subjective experience and its structures as the locus of its analysis. The failure of universal Western science to do so has necessitated the replication of the Darwinian secular version of the “space of otherness” inhabited by what Fanon called the damnés, the abjection of Blackness in biologicist-racial terms and the expulsion of the poor and the jobless in economic terms. The transcultural sociogenic theory of the human would finally enact a transcendence from the parochialism of each particular definition of what it means to be human, opening up to a true new humanism that is not defined by its Other but grounded in the shared planetary conditions that humanity faces together for the first time in world-history.

The Problem

Wynter’s original and critical transdisciplinary synthesis has been foundational and generative for an understanding of world-history and human praxis that puts
racialization and colonization at the heart of modernity, breaking with Euromodern imaginaries and the Eurocentrism of disciplinary knowledge. But the problem I see with Wynter’s strong ontological claims are twofold: first, the mechanistic understanding of sociogeny, which allegedly is a closed, self-replicating system based on “monohumanism” or “overrepresentation” of one’s own descriptive statement based on an essential synchronicity between self/Other (identity) and good/evil (morality) binaries. Second, her idea of temporality and history, which leads to a quasi-Hegelian dialectics that moves from unconscious religiosity (inheritance of stupidity, imprisonment) to full self-knowledge and liberation.

Wynter takes the argument of closed systems very far leading to a quasi-transcendental behaviorism driven by symbolic forms of reward/punishment, arguing that in “lawlike” fashion “each cosmogenically chartered sociogenic replicator code’s system of positive/negative, symbolic life/death meanings with the biochemical or opiate reward/punishment (i.e., placebo/nocebo) behavior motivating/demotivating system of the brain (…) must necessarily be cognitively, epistemologically, aesthetically, and psycho-affectively closed” (Wynter 2015, 211; italics original). Ethico-politically, Wynter’s argument runs into problems both historically and existentially. Historically, I doubt that the sociogenic principle should have a privileged status for a hermeneutics of history, which in “1492: A New World Order” (1995) leads to claims not only of the equation of Aztec and Columbus’ motivation, but also to a reductive view that Columbus was driven by metaphysical goals (Wynter 1995, 17). Existentially, Wynter’s argument leads to an ontologization of exclusion and othering as the normal mode of human behavior, one that can only be challenged from double consciousness/demonic grounds. Dehumanization, in this view, is a blind replication of a sociogenic code, which is both an analytically narrow and ethico-politically dangerous view of how dehumanization works.

In this move, I believe that Wynter’s insights in the functioning of the Euromodern genres of Man according to the binary system of self/Other, life/death and good/evil fall back on themselves by giving them a universal, trans-historical status, thereby naturalizing precisely the tenets that her theory seemed to historicize in order to question the epistemic order based on biocentric Man. Wynter’s argument that even biocentric Darwinian sciences remain monohumanist loses its historical specificity because of Wynter’s universalization of this structure, implying the exclusivity of every descriptive statement of the human: all of human behavior, outside of the proposed break

60 Henry criticizes this view from a Marxist materialist perspective, arguing that Wynter takes the superstructural as the engine of history (Henry 2000, 139–143).
61 For alternatives see for example Gordon’s psycho-existential explanation in Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism (1999).
from demonic grounds and potentiated double consciousness would by necessity be monohumanist. The positing of symbolic life vs. symbolic death as central to human functioning seems to me to overstate a monotheistic/monohumanist inheritance that does not take into account the many ways of worlding that do not take life and death as an oppositional binary but are symbolically integrated. Crucially, Wynter reinstates the fundamental binary of self/Other, in-group/out-group as a natural law, which seems to function as the untouchable cornerstone of the contemporary biocentric worldview and sciences.

All of humanity—before the Fanonian or Du Boisian revolutionary break with this overrepresentation—are considered “imprisoned” by their descriptive statement, “[p]risoners, that is, of the self-evidence of the order of consciousness (…) of each culture’s sociogenic principle” (Wynter 1999, 31). The problem of symbolic enclosure is epistemic and ethico-political. In “1492: A New World Order,” the epistemic problem comes to the fore by equating Columbus’ mission and Aztec response: “Columbus was to be no less governed in his actions by a mode of ‘subjective understanding’ [what Wynter later calls ‘sociogenic replicator codes’] than were the Aztecs” (Wynter 1995, 15). Wynter argues that both the Aztecs and Columbus were driven by their metaphysical systems “in exactly the same way” (Wynter 1995, 17; emphasis added). She claims that this world-historical encounter also gave rise to an unprecedented new historical possibility of a shared symbolic code that no longer has the symbolic enclosure, opening up to a transcultural human understanding. Liberation thus involves the overturning of “laws which have hitherto functioned outside our conscious awareness; thereby, outside any possibility, hitherto, of our fully realized autonomy of agency” (Wynter 2007, 77).

A familiar teleology of development and progress emerges: from human origins of “imprisonment” to our descriptive statements steeped in unscientific religiosity, modernity is able to break with this inheritance of stupidity: the futural project is to complete this rupture to liberate the human from our former imprisonment. From narrowly bounded parochial cultures stuck in their own symbolic prisons, a (violent) modernity stretches out beyond these confines and for the first time connects otherwise bounded parochial cultures in a universal, globally interconnected world. Thus, the first enclosure (of imprisoned cultures) is opened up through colonization; but the second closure (the imposition of Man onto all/most other cultures) still needs overcoming for futural liberation. Does this argument, of a world-historical event that opens up the unprecedented possibility of a transcendence from the previously symbolically enclosed and parochial exclusionary definition of the human not (at least to some extent)

engage in an enchantment with modernity and a repetition of its linear developmental temporality rather than its dismantling? Does this view of human nature not undercut the question of an alternative ethico-political horizon based on a different temporality and relationality? As long as this can only be drawn from the future, does this not re-entrench hierarchical divisions between parties who lay claim on a truth separate from those classes of people who remain “stuck” in the inheritance of stupidity, of humanity’s not yet achieved full maturity?

Against this mechanistic understanding of the human and quasi-teleological view of history, I employ sociogeny as a way of understanding why certain genres of the human produce such relative psycho-affective closure and entrench the binary thinking of morality (good/evil) and identity (self/Other), as well as the inheritances that allow us to respond to and reconfigure these genres, thereby working on its open-ended transformative worlding. Here it is important to note that Wynter’s sociogenic principle differs significantly from Fanon’s (Tembo forthcoming; Mariott 2011). Josias Tembo has convincingly argued from a Fanonian perspective against the view that “all humans are prisoners of sociogenic principles of one kind or another, except those in the marginal spaces forming the ‘demonic grounds’” (Tembo forthcoming). The enclosures are specific to the various socio-political conditions of historically specific genres of the human: “[S]uch enclosure (…) is not a precondition for sociogeny, but rather a consequence of the interactions of social forces” (Tembo forthcoming). Fanonian sociogeny offers precisely a “sociodiagnostic” of how such enclosures of human subjectivity occur, and all the means necessary to overthrow and transform such enclosure. From such a Fanonian imperative to a “sociodiagnostic,” which explores how the genres of Man are premised on imprisonment instead of universalizing a structure imprisonment to any descriptive statement, I here turn to an alternative view of neurobiology to challenge Wynter’s neurobiological argument for such imprisonment. Often, the neurobiological dimension of Wynter’s argument is left by wayside in order to draw on the more critical and fruitful resources of her argument (e.g. Weheliye 2014, 29). And I agree: Wynter’s theory does not need to fall back on such mechanistic scientific (perhaps scientistic) grounds for it to have critical import. Nevertheless, engaging with the neurobiological tenets acknowledges the importance and challenge of Wynter’s trans- and multidisciplinary work. Wynter is able to effectively undercut the Euromodern order of knowledge

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63 In one way, there is more historicity in Wynter’s account than in for example Mignolo’s version of modernity/coloniality. I do not want to suggest that the alternative to Wynter’s temporality would lead to Mignolo’s ahistorical cultural relativism, but one that can still take into account a hermeneutic of relational and creolized world-history as well as posit a shared pluriversal decolonial horizon for emancipatory struggle, cf. Gordon 2021; Tlostanova 2021; Fry and Tlostanova 2021.
through which the sciences implicitly or explicitly maintain the hegemonic configuration of the human (the conflation of Man with the human). To shy away from biology and focus on her more successful historical, literary, philosophical and socio-political investigations, would re-entrench this order of knowledge, which Black studies in general and Wynter’s oeuvre in particular continue to dismantle. Although the humbling of biology is vital for the toppling of our biocentric descriptive statement, i.e., biology does not serve as the deepest truth or foundation of other dimensions of human life (as if it were separated from the symbolic order, narratives and *mythos*), this does not mean that we must avoid biology altogether. Within the current scientific disciplines, it gives one perspective and dimension of a much larger story that we avoid at our own peril. Ironically, I will frame my argument for deflating the naturalistic basis of Wynter’s theory by proposing a different interpretation of neurobiological development. My engagement with the neurobiological tenets of Wynter’s argument does not aim to replicate Wynter’s tendency to ground her sociogenic science in biology. I wish to take up Wynter’s trans-disciplinary project differently, not by taking the natural sciences as the primary authority that would need a socio-cultural addition, but, rather, to draw on the natural sciences as one of the many possible entry-points to questions that transcend any disciplinary framing and are part of an ageless story that we first have to receive and retell according to our situatedness. Additionally, Wynter is a highly systematic thinker, which means that this mechanistic understanding will resurface in many other places of her thought as well. There are some theoretical and political implications in this understanding. In order to make use of and to critically affirm Wynter’s work it is better to work through all of these dimensions rather than ignore them. Here, I suggest that neurobiology can still be employed for such a critical sociogenic analysis but not in a mechanistic-deterministic understanding and without mistaking it for the foundation of humanity. To do so, I make selective use of Narvaez’ theory of neurobiological development and its relation to different morality-systems. At the same time, this developmental view shares many of the features I have criticized in the previous chapter: the simultaneous universalization and individualization of human psychology, a naturalizing of the maternal, the ontogeny/phylogeny-framework, and the ableist normativity surrounding the human self and the role of the mother that is often implied, and the colonial structure of drawing on indigeneity as resource and model of nature for aiding science and a Western bourgeois readership.

There is a tension between cognitive, epistemic, aesthetic, psycho-affective openness and relation on the one hand, and imposition and closure on the other. The former I explore in this dissertation (with Lugones and Nietzsche) as impure ethics and plural selves, and the latter as transcendental morality and pure identities. My affirmative criticism of Wynter’s sociogenic principle seeks to develop a sociogenic mode of interpretation that allows for a differentiated analysis of these dynamics rather than taking them as the given baseline for
human praxis that needs to be transcended. The point is not to posit an inherent openness and creativity of humanity over and against quasi-biological definitions of psycho-affective closure, but to take up Wynter’s transdisciplinary invitation and the vision of a sociogenic science and to ask different questions from the sociogenic principle, allowing for developing a critique of Euromodern Man as producing relative psycho-affective closure of reactive symbolic binary systems of defining the self/good/life over and against the Other/bad/death. In the remainder of this chapter, I turn to a selective reading of Narvaez’ Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality (2014) as a double critique, using Narvaez to critically situate Wynter and vice versa: on one hand, Narvaez helps to argue against Wynter’s mechanistic understanding of the necessary closure of binary symbolic systems of identity and morality. On the other, I employ sociogeny to counter Narvaez’ ontogenic/phylogenic framework. I will first present Narvaez’ theory on her own terms, before I present the necessary criticisms and adjustments for a situated sociogenic interpretation that always-already breaks with the monohumanism of Man.

**Introducing Narvaez’ neurobiological developmental model and its implication for ethics**

*Engagement ethics and safety/self-protective ethics based on chronic stress and/or trauma*

Narvaez makes a normative argument, claiming that optimal ontogenic development relies on phylogenic (evolutionary) inheritance. Since humanity evolved in small-band hunter-gatherers (SBHG), the optimal development for an individual’s development would correspond to the conditions and caregiving strategies that are prevalent in SBHG. However, neurobiological development of the individual (ontogenic) in other environments with other norms and child-rearing styles than those they have phylogenetically inherited lead to unfavorable brain development. Narvaez names different types of morality corresponding to these different ways of child-rearing, one in tune with humanity’s phylogenetic inheritance, and the other out of sync. The former Narvaez calls an engagement ethic and the latter a safety or self-protective ethic. The difference lies in the role of stressors in ontogenic development. When an infant’s and child’s needs and expectations (hard-wired as phylogenetic inheritances) of love, care, respect, responsivity are met, there is an “optimal” brain development that reserves the hard-wired stress-systems for situations of acute danger, whereas early life experiences of chronic stress and/or trauma lead to the stress-systems taking over in ontogenic development leading to personality types prone to a “safety” or “self-protective” ethic: “Early life sets up neuronal value systems—that is, which emotion systems will dominate
personality and social interaction. Will it be relational attunement or self-protection?” (Narvaez 2014, 64)

The stress-argument is based on the distinction of “healthy homeostasis (aka eustasis)” as opposed to “cacostasis (defective homeostasis or distress)” (Narvaez 2014, 129). Stress responses have evolved evolutionarily as reactions to situations of acute stress. In human societies where child-rearing environments and styles do not correspond to humanity’s “developmental niche” based on SBHG societies, stress can become chronic instead of short-term reactions to sporadic external stressors: “Biological reactions to stress evolved to be helpful in times of acute threat. But if they are wired to be easily triggered, as when the hypothalamus-pituitary-adrenal axis is sensitized, these usually protective mechanisms become harmful” (Narvaez 2014, 144). The result of early life experiences where needs are not optimally attended to leads to the development of “compromised physiological systems that are more likely to respond cacostatically (too much or too little) than homeostatically” (Narvaez 2014, 144): “Early experience can misshape [sic] our stress response and misdevelop [sic] our social capacities. When brains are undercared for, they become more stress-reactive and subject to dominance by our survival systems—fear, panic, and rage” (Narvaez 2014, 9). This will lead to types of ethics based on these reactive systems of self-protection instead of one of communal attunement and engagement. It is Narvaez’ contention that “when a child does not experience the evolved developmental niche [responsivity, respect, loving care, community], it causes excessive stress” (Narvaez 2014, 133).

Small-Band Hunter-Gatherer (SBHG) child-rearing and engagement ethics

Based on her surveying of anthropological literature, Narvaez concludes that discipline and punishment were and are virtually absent in SBHG child-rearing styles. Instead, the principles of child-rearing are based on community, care, high levels of responsivity, understood as unconditional respect: “Adults from SBHG societies respond quickly to infant needs, attending to gestures rather than waiting for crying (...) Alleviating a baby’s distress is a form of responsiveness” (Narvaez 2014, 46). High responsivity to a child’s needs leads to a relational attunement that allows the child to learn from their relational experience that from a ground base of caring safety, can connect to others and their environment. From this an engagement ethic emerges: “Fostered by experiences of social engagement and relational attunement, engagement is about connecting and bonding in the moment, right now, on an equal basis, person to person, entity to entity” (Narvaez 2014, 94). One key reason for little chronic stress is “high levels of allomaternal care” or, in other words, communal
support in child-rearing.64 Child-rearing in isolation is stressful for the caregiver and the stress is experienced and absorbed by the child. In the ideal scenario according to our phylogenic inheritance, development and learning occurs relationally through responsivity. The dopamine released through the affirmative response to/as the child’s relational learning teaches the child that stress is temporary and will lead to response and security. From this attunement they learn to trust their own affects in learning to navigate the social and ecological environment.

Chronic stress and safety ethics
In a key chapter, “The Morality that Stress Promotes: Self-protective Ethics,” Narvaez describes the various possible effects of growing up with chronic stress and/or abuse on the development of identity and morality: “when early experience is neglectful, abusive, or traumatic, the primitive emotion systems can become dominant in social relations” (Narvaez 2014, 52). Recall that the threshold for what counts as traumatic is low: non-responsive or sub-optimal responsive care is already experienced as a stressful environment. With responsive parenting, a child learns the relativity of stress and is able to restore homeostasis successfully. This allows for learning based on one’s own embodied, relational experience. Through relational responsivity a child learns that learning happens from experience, from a situated self in relation to their environment. With non-responsive parenting, on the other hand, “the child learned to dissociate from the body’s needs (…) [They learn] to act toward others with coolness and little affective signaling” (Narvaez 2014, 74). Because a child is hardwired for attachment (their survival depends on it), they repress the other needs like relational play and self-expression when this is met with negligence or punishment. In this way, “the child has learned to distrust her own affect” (Narvaez 2014, 74).

When neurobiological development occurs under chronic stress, the self-protective systems take over instead of being reserved for sporadic episodes. Further, a child learns to orient in the world not according to their own attunement and learning, but oriented towards an external standard—the caregiver as authority-figure—who has to be pleased in order for the child to maintain their attachment relation: “the child inhibits personal desires in order to comply with what is demanded of her” (Narvaez 2014, 74). The early lesson is the conditionality of attachment or lovability, which translates into self-doubt and self-blame.65 From this insecure sense of self prone to stress-reactions, a set of behaviors and attitudes emerges that is not based on relation, respect and

64 For the evolutionary argument that humans evolved through “allo-mothers” or communal child-rearing, see (Hrdy 2009).
65 This is reminiscent of Nietzsche’s discussion of “bad conscience” (see next chapter).
community, but instead aims at providing a feeling of safety through reactive self-protective systems:

In a well-functioning [sic] brain, nearly every social experience is new and keeps the right hemisphere active whereas in a poorly-functioning [sic] brain social interactions are dominated by stereotyping. The intellect imposes a structure on reality, not really perceiving what is present except as members of preconceived categories. (Narvaez 2014, 168)

Out of sync with one’s own embodied affect and relation to others, a defensive-reactive approach to one’s environment drives the insecure self in order to feel safe and secure in an environment perceived as hostile: “for the stress response to be activated, it doesn’t matter what the source of the stressor is. It can even be imaginary—any perception of threat will do” (Narvaez 2014, 154). Based on rage, fear or panic, stress-reactive ethics are particularly prone to stereotyping and othering as a mechanism: “It’s as if an ‘us versus them’ filter is employed before the information is processed” (Narvaez 2014, 176; emphasis added). Significantly, this challenges the usual evolutionary argument of a natural in-group/out-group as foundational to forms of othering, dehumanization and racism, including Wynter’s variation of inherently exclusionary systems based on sociogenic codes. It means having to differentiate between a response and interpretation of a new situation based on embodied judgement and orientation in the world, as opposed to habituated stress-based reactions of imposing a categorial mindset to define the situation in terms of the familiar narratives and division of the world. Forms of othering and dehumanization would then be based less on a blind replication of a sociogenic code of what it means to be self and Other, and a more neurobiologically differentiated reality of stress-reactive ethics that are prone to “defensive or reactive aggression, that is, self-preservational externalizing” (Narvaez 2014, 162), which “project[s] everything evil onto the selected adversary” (Narvaez 2014, 164).

Critiquing Narvaez: the coloniality of developmental psychology and a sociogenic transformation

Narvaez helps to nuance Wynter’s framework by attending to environmental factors that are conducive for more/less responsive and more/less reactive ways of being in the world. This would suggest, contra Wynter, that people are not governed “in exactly the same way” by their metaphysical systems, i.e., that its neurobiological embeddedness is not a single universal mechanistic binary system. From my analysis of the figure of the Child, one can conclude that the tendencies towards reactive binary systems of identity and morality are structurally exacerbated. Narvaez’ framework is helpful to counter the neurobiological basis for Wynter’s universalizing structure of binary morality and identity-systems. Yet, it does contain many features that reproduce the biocentric and developmental tenets of Man, in particular the colonial
temporality at work and the ableist normativity it suggests. These are features that precisely need “sociogenic” and “genealogical” intervention.

**Sociogeny (and genealogy) instead of ontogeny/phylogeny**

As discussed in the previous chapter, developmental psychology’s simultaneous universalizing and individualizing approach entrenches a certain norm of an optimal development and the appropriate human subject, pitted against its various aberrations, disfunctions and abnormality. The biocentric appeal to the “natural state” is inevitably intertwined with strong normative claims inseparable from ableist undertones or overtones. It is this ontogeny/phylogeny-framework that Fanon interrupted through the category of sociogeny. Tellingly, there is little to no reference to colonial histories in Narvaez; indigeneity simply emerges as a timeless and originary source of wisdom outside of history, from which the assumed reader can draw inspiration—the familiar temporal colonial tropes (Fabian 2014). The evocation of SBHG Other as natural origin of human wisdom that “we,” an assumed Western bourgeois readership, can learn from to better “ourselves” and “our” ways of child-rearing.

The biocentric onto/phylogeny individualizing/universalizing framework also provides the grounds for naturalizing the mother-child dyad, which, as I argue throughout this dissertation (especially chapters 3 and 9), requires sociogenic interruption through shifting the frame to the broader sociality and communal response-ability of social and attachment relations.

Narvaez writes that “every human system begins with the mother-child dyad and from there iteratively builds the roots of individual and cultural virtue” (Narvaez 2014, 8). As I argued in the previous chapter, the mother-child dyad is politically dangerous and analytically misleading, insofar as it tends to be isolated from larger communities of relation and is presented as the primal natural bond. Unlike Bowlby’s earlier projection of an ideal nuclear family onto human nature by isolating the mother-child dyad, Narvaez’ argument precisely insists on multigenerational communal child-rearing with “high levels of allo-maternal care” (Narvaez 2014, 213) against the stress of mothering in isolation as an evolutionary key to the human species development (Hrdy 2009). But Narvaez maintains a language that isolates the mother-child bond as the natural bedrock.

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66 To avoid both the re-inscription of the mother-child dyad as natural trans-cultural origin of humanity separate from broader structures of sociality, and the opposite direction of leaving maternity out of the picture (Irigaray’s “murder of the mother” as foundation for any theory of the subject; Irigaray 1988, 47). The figuration of the social-maternal-ancestral, which emphasizes the indebtedness to that which precedes and/as the maternal as always embedded in and inseparable from larger
Put crudely, Narvaez and Wynter offer the two modalities of Man’s imperial timeline: the return to (natural) origins (Narvaez) and the movement towards historical transcendence of nature (Wynter). Sociogeny and genealogy (can) counter both of these tendencies, and allow for a critical understanding of the inheritances of response-debilitating and response-enabling histories as constitutive, i.e., inheritance as a long series of “accidents” (Foucault 2003; Puar 2017). Johanna Hedva cites and comments on Ann Cvetkovich to articulate such a view that shifts from the ontogenic to the sociogenic (although these are not terms that Hedva uses):

Cvetkovich writes: “What if depression, in the Americas at least, could be traced to histories of colonialism, genocide, slavery, legal exclusion, and everyday segregation and isolation that haunt all of our lives, rather than to be biochemical imbalances?” I’d like to change the word “depression” here to be all mental illnesses. (Hedva 2016, 3)

A sociogenic and genealogical approach would turn to histories as productive and constitutive rather than an aberration or historical “accident” that throws an original state off course (Foucault 2003; Puar 2017); it would/could/should turn to the histories of colonization and imperialism that have deliberately broken forms of sociality and child-rearing for the sake of labor extraction and assimilation; pay attention to biopolitical and necropolitical regimes of war and work that debilitate different groups differentially (Puar 2017); and focus on transgenerational legacies for communal transformation and working through of trauma (Duran 2006). This does not imply abandoning evolutionary frameworks but wresting them away from normative and normalizing readings that are taken as base for all truth and knowledge. In other words, one can construct an argument that something is response-debilitating based on a neurobiological inheritance, but not that there is a primordial state that contains the key to normal and optimal development.

Responsivity and sociogeny

Narvaez makes a neurobiological and psychological argument for the need for relational structures with high responsivity to individuals’ needs. But what is the meaning of responsivity and relationality here? In the positing of a norm, in the structures of sociality, placing the response-ability collectively with the different social arrangements rather than suggesting an image of the supposedly natural way of childrearing.

This is not how Wynter is usually read; often other tendencies in her writing are emphasized to show how it also maintains resources to undermine such modernist temporality and mono-directionality (Thiele 2021; Azoulay 2019). As Thiele puts it, “[t]o read Wynter is to always be pulled in more than one direction. And holding on to this more-than-mono-directionality is what methodologically constitutes her critical intervention” (Thiele 2021, 26).
sense of *normal, healthy and optimal*, normativity comes to the fore. Critical disability scholars have criticized the “norm of normalcy” (Bloem 2021). Undergirding such developmental accounts. Although I am committed to the language of responsivity and relationality, it needs to be firmly separated from any notion of the *proper, normal or desired* type of responsivity and relationality. As vulnerable creatures, everyone is in need of relational and responsive care, but what that looks like should not be measured by the “norm of normalcy” but based on an alterity-approach that maintains everyone’s “right to opacity” (Glissant 1997) and “multiplicity” (Lugones 2003).

For example, there is a whole body of literature that stipulates the “normal” development of sociality and intersubjectivity between a child and their caregiver(s) focusing on features like eye-contact or manifestations of “empathy.” An autistic person for whom the “normal” level of eye-contact is socially and sensorily overwhelming would then be at fault for failing the desired outcome of normative intersubjective reciprocity, instead of approaching the question of responsive relationality from the point of view of different people’s needs and comfort (Bloem 2021). Sarah Bloem gives the helpful illustration of “parallel play” for a neurodiversity-approach to relationality and responsivity that entails a critique of the normative developmentalist frames that postulate the normal/desirable modes of relationality. Parallel play is used in developmental psychology literature to indicate an early stage or a preceding stage of sociality among children, something that children grow out of through increasing social interaction culminating in cooperative play. From this teleology of normative development (positing an ideal and normal trajectory of types of sociality), autistic people would seem to fail at the supposedly more advanced modes of sociality and would remain stuck at this early stage of pre-sociality. Bloem questions this developmental teleology and assumed norms of the right type of sociality, opening it to a multiplicity of modes of sociality that do not suggest a universal standard:

Parallel play can be described as two or more individuals engaging in separate activities in the same space. Autistic people engage in parallel play relatively frequently, but this is rarely ever interpreted as truly being *social* interaction. Arguably, because (...) it is not what social interaction is “supposed” to look like. Nevertheless, when two people choose to engage in separate hobbies together, in some cases even initiate to do so in coordination, this is still a form of social interaction. From a non-autistic perspective (...) it might be perceived as a refusal to interact if an autistic child chooses to engage in a similar but separate activity in the same room. However, this can be interpreted as a child still wanting to be near them or hanging out, and supporting that each has their own interests, but engaging in a way that is not overstimulating. (Bloem 2021, 28)
Whereas the developmentalist approach to parallel play posits a norm of the right kind of responsive sociality that some individuals achieve and others deviate from, Bloem’s recasting helps to undo the term responsivity and sociality from this straitjacketed normativity: one can make universal claims about (the need for) sociality and responsivity, whilst staying committed to neurodiversity, difference, multiplicity and opacity. Instead of positing a norm of relationality and responsivity (which implies the category of the abnormal, pathological, deviant, defective, etc.), one can maintain an ethical commitment to strong networks of relationality and everyone’s need of responsivity. The question then becomes: what constitute response-enabling structures and practices for everyone (in their multiplicity, differences and with their right to opacity) to flourish? Hence the sociogenic principle that displaces the universal/individual model: instead of placing some people outside the norm of what it means to be human/responsive/relational/social, etc., it probes the various structures that debilitate and enable the capacity of world-building unchained from any prior norm but with a critical commitment to human—and nonhuman—flourishing and becoming.

Again, displacing a natural state that life can be measured against, there is still room for critique of response-debilitating structures and practices. I choose the word response-debilitating partly in dialogue with Jasbir Puar’s category of debility and debilitation (Puar 2017). Puar introduces the term debility as a third pole to interrupt the binary frames of Foucauldian biopolitics and Membre’s necropolitics that focus on the management of life on the one hand and the production of death on the other. Instead, Puar argues that debilitation, or the right to maim, is a sovereign power that manifests itself in imperial and capitalist structures. Just as in Fanonian and Foucauldian frames of sociogeny and genealogy, Puar’s Deleuzo-Guattarian approach treats history as multiplicitous, productive and constitutive rather than a trajectory that can be measured against an original model of natural development. Puar illustrates how this queers normativity by not departing from a natural state of wholeness that gets interrupted through the accidents of history, but the constitutive violence of history in producing populations that are differentially maimable, exploitable, killable, or normatively livable and protected. In a section called “working and

68 Nonhuman flourishing is mostly absent in Fanon, but arguably present in Wynter (2015) and is inevitably necessary component for all critical theory and politics.

69 There is certainly a risk in my inflation of this usage of debilitation in “response-debilitating” that would dilute the differences between bio/necropolitical regimes of the right to maim in for example Palestine, and say, child-rearing practices in the Global North. I try to avoid this by reserving the use of “debility” and “debilitation” for bio/necropolitical contexts only, whilst using “response-enabling” and “response-debilitating” flexibly and across various contexts. The flexibility of the concepts of response-enabling/debilitating is to me the appeal of the concepts.
warring,” Puar cites Deleuze and Guattari on the relation between state, capital and mutilation: “Mutilation is a consequence of war, but it is a necessary condition, a presupposition of the State apparatus and the organization of work” (Deleuze and Guattari cited in Puar 2017, 63). Puar continues:

Mutilation and amputation are thus no accident but are part of the biopolitical scripting of populations available for injury, whether through laboring or through warring or both: laboring in the service of war that mutilates both national bodies and foreign entities denoted as enemies; or laboring as an inverted form of warfare against a disposable population ensnared as laborers-consigned-to-having-an-accident. (…) Work and war as debilitating activities foreground U.S. imperialism, global injustice, exploitative labor conditions, the industry of incarceration, and environmental toxicity. (Puar 2017, 64)

In the context of Narvaez’ framework, this challenges the view that the “accident” of modern history throws a natural balance off course. Fighting for worlds that are breathable and aspirational for everyone, against the unbreathable spaces of violence, exploitation, toxicity and different forms of “weathering” (Sharpe 2016), cannot proceed from an ideal state of nature but must start from interrupting constitutive response-debilitating structures and transform them into response-enabling ones. This is a question of socio-political response-ability for plural becomings, rather than trying to restore damaged people by the accident of history. This is significant for critique in order to avoid any fetishization of an Other imagined outside of the constitutive violence of history, or to repeat the violence of the imperial timeline (Azoulay 2019) by placing people as the damaged victims of history that either have to be saved in relation to the norm posited, or are lost to history.

Embedding the question of responsivity within the response-enabling/response-debilitating conditions, provides a different approach to sociogeny, one that does not take these biocentric premises and its imperial developmentalist modality of time as the ground for its argument, but that turns them into a question mark. This follows Tembo’s more Fanonian approach to sociogeny where “enclosure (…) is not a precondition for sociogeny, but rather a consequence of the interactions of social forces (…) congealment is not a result of the intrinsic condition of human sociability as such, but it is a consequence of certain forces in human societies” (Tembo forthcoming). For Fanon, the analysis of the social, political, cultural and psychological structures that produce the psycho-affective closure and imprison human’s otherwise open-ended futural capabilities, is directly linked to the dismantling and transforming of those conditions—through violence if necessary—for a breathable and dignified human life that builds social worlds undefined by its previous response-debilitating structures and strictures (Fanon 2008; 2004; Tembo forthcoming; Gordon 2015; Bulhan 1985; Al-Saji 2023). Such a view on sociogeny is thus tied to abolitionist approaches, which insists on the abolition and transformation of material and institutional structures as well as
the daily work of response-enabling care-practices (Roberts 2022; Mohageb 2023; Hartman 2016; Gumbs 2016). Fanon’s sociogenic intervention precisely began with the refusal to treat people to adjust to a social norm when the norm itself was premised on dehumanization. To make alienated people functional within the social norm is to paradoxically lock them into their alienation and prevent socio-political transformation. To sum it up, in a welcomingly queered fashion: “You don’t need to be fixed, my queens—it’s the world that needs the fixing” (Hedva 2016, 9). This “fixing” is a creative and recreative process that has no recourse to a normative model written in the past or future, but taps into the response-enabling inheritances to counter the response-debilitating structures to transform them into response-enabling ones. Starting from sociogeny rather than nature embraces the constitutive forces of history and places its analysis in the midst of a fight for futurity (Fanonian struggle to break the deadlock of reactive, alienated colonial worlds) or the embrace of differential becomings (in Deleuzo-Guattarian or Foucauldian terms). This understanding of futurity is inseparable from a necessary engagement with our individual and collective response-enabling and response-debilitating inheritances.

Conclusion

Wynter argues that humans performatively enact “sociogenic replicator codes” that are (i) structured according to a binarism of us vs. them mapped onto codes of symbolic life and death; and (ii) based on a closure of the symbolic codes of each “descriptive statement of the human.” In her view, these features constitute “fundamental psychophysical laws” (Wynter 1999, 33) of identity and morality. Only those who live and act from double consciousness have the possibility to break through the lawlike mechanism of this structure. I argue against Wynter’s mechanistic interpretation of sociogeny by arguing that the binarism of the self/Other based on the binarism of symbolic life/death system is not universal but in need of historicization, i.e., not only the symbolic contents but also the underlying structure requires a sociogenic interpretation. Secondly, I agree with the more Fanonian approaches to sociogeny that do not claim an inherent closure of symbolic systems but investigate the social factors involved in creating fixity and closure based on binarisms (Tembo forthcoming). The stakes of this argument with and against Wynter are whether or not human self-definition (outside of an alleged new world-historical possibility from double consciousness or demonic grounds) is inherently premised on a binary mechanism of othering and dehumanization, suggesting that humans (outside of demonic grounds) are by necessity “prisoners” to their descriptive statement (Wynter 2001). Wynter models her lawlike mechanistic interpretation of sociogeny after reductionistic interpretation of evolution, evolutionary psychology and a behavioristic neurobiological model that maps the binary of
symbolic life/self vs. death/Other onto the biochemical system of reward/punishment. Through a selective reading of Narvaez’ alternative developmental model of neurobiology and its implications for ethical systems, I argue that what Wynter uncovers are not universal “fundamental psychophysical laws” whose structure is universal and identical where only the particular cosmogenic contents differ, but historically specific sociogenic binary codes based on self-defensive reactivity as opposed to non-binary relation and responsive response-ability. This counters the claim that all of human symbolic systems or sociogenic codes are closed binary systems that throughout human history have imprisoned humanity. Instead of liberation as an overcoming of the inheritance of stupidity, I employed Narvaez’ theory to suggest that certain environmental factors (particularly those fundamental to Developmental Man—social isolation, hierarchy, discipline, punishment, fragmentation, severance, denial of vulnerability) produce the closure of psycho-affective systems, leading to reactivity rather than responsivity. I employ the terms responsivity and reactivity as two tendencies and recast them as response-enabling and response-debilitating inheritances. The neurobiological propensity to rely on binary classificatory systems that define self-identity in reaction to the Other are not the fundamental psychophysical laws of human ethico-behavioral systems (the lawlike replication of identity and morality) but are developed in particular contexts of chronic stress and/or abuse where the neurobiological self-protective systems take center stage in the development of a sense of self and morality. This is to be understood, in conjunction with the arguments in chapter 3, that a society built on (heteropatriarchal) principles of hierarchy, fragmentation and severance—rather than responsive relation and unconditional respect—creates an environment that is physiologically and discursively prone to the relative closure of binary classificatory systems where the good self comes to be defined in reaction to a bad/evil Other in the service of self-protection and self-preservation.

This allowed me to start formulating the framework of how we inherit not only the legacies of severance and fragmentation in the wake of Developmental Man, but also how we inherit the resources of resisting and reinventing modes of sociality. Rather than fixed categories of responsive relationality and reactivity, we are the heirs of both response-enabling and response-debilitating legacies, which are always-already co-constitutive and inseparable. In the chapters to come, I will develop this framework of the double/plural response-enabling and response-debilitating inheritance. I propose that reading Wynter’s genres of Man, and more particularly what I have called Developmental Man, in Nietzschean and Lugonesian terms allows for a different sociogenic principle that does not uncover universal psychophysical

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70 Recall that these conceptual pairs have to be understood as impure impurities.
laws but historicizes the construction of the modern subject in terms of morality and identity. With Nietzsche: there is a genealogically traceable link between bodily violence, morality and identity, which produces a “reactionary type” following the logic of ressentiment (see next chapter). With Lugones: the construction of the modern subject as unified self is premised on the fragmentation of others according to identity-categories, overriding, disrespecting and wounding the underlying non-identitarian plurality of the self (Lugones 2003). This opens the space to introduce Deleuze’s distinction between (transcendental) morality and (immanent) ethics (Deleuze 1988, 23): Contrary to the (relative) closure of the Euromodern genres of Man, which function according to dehumanizing binarisms to procure its morality and identity, there is an ethic of (non-binary/non-reactive) relation and responsability and a non-identitarian pluralism. Such an earthly ethics does not return to an origin, but inherits critically and creatively: unhinging becoming from an origin, not a mechanical repetition but producing difference in its repetition (Deleuze 2014), allows for a reconfiguring of the inherited past for different futures that are foreclosed by the hierarchical and pure systems of morality and identity. Narvaez gives a clue to intimate the other side of reactivity: rather than Nietzsche’s phallogocentric fantasy of the warrior and the motherless Child as the model of activity, there is the category of responsivity for a multiple earth-based response-enabling relational becoming.
Chapter 5: Nietzsche’s Genealogy Revisited: Activity, Reactivity and Responsivity

We have been raised to fear the “yes” within ourselves.
– AUDRE LORDE

What is Nietzsche if not an apology for the human conqueror and warrior?
– ENRIQUE DUSSEL

Introduction

Genealogy of identity and morality: roots in oppression (powerlessness)

Wynter’s sociogenic theory of the genres of the human argues for the universality of binary systems of identity and morality, with Fanon paving the way for an unprecedented overthrow and revolutionary redefinition of what it means to be human. Nietzsche provides a different answer to the co-formation of identity and morality: Nietzsche’s Genealogy opens a path to understand the connection between transcendental morality-systems and investment in (pure) identity-categories as reactive psychological mechanisms stemming from a traumatic encounter of historical violence branded onto an earthly animal-body. Reactive morality (Good and Evil as opposed to good and bad) and identity (pure single being instead of impure multiplicitous becomings) originate in an experience of powerlessness (Ohnmacht). As Wendy Brown highlights, Nietzsche’s diagnosis of ressentiment concerns “not only moral systems but identities themselves take their bearings in this reaction” (Brown 1993, 402). Judith Butler mobilizes a psychoanalytic reading of the Genealogy to understand the ambivalent processes of identity-formation or “subjectivation” in childhood. On their reading, Nietzsche shows that “the internalization of punishment is the very production of the self (…) there is no formation of the subject without a passionate attachment to subjection” (Butler 1997, 75; 67). The genealogy of morality can in this sense also be read in terms of a genealogy of (pure) identity, providing a compelling argument to counter Wynter’s claims about the alleged universal functioning of morality and identity as mechanical replication.71

71 In chapter 6, I turn to María Lugones’ theory of the logic of purity (Lugones 2003) at work in self-identification and reactive othering. Importantly, this criticism of “pure identities” does leave room for more complex and “impure” forms of identity and identity politics (Carastathis 2019). In chapter 7, I deal with the question of (false)
Despite his persuasive account of reactive psychology emerging from the experience of powerlessness, Nietzsche does not turn his insights into a theory of forces of oppression that have to be undone and remade for the unleashing of the affirmative powers lurking within human animals. Instead, Nietzsche valorizes the play of power and powerlessness as forces of nature itself, understanding nature to be predatory and hierarchical. Nietzsche’s project of revaluation of all values is a project of establishing the hierarchy (Rangordnung) of values: the philosopher must solve “the problem of value” and determine “the hierarchy of values” (die Rangordnung der Werthe) (Nietzsche 2008, 38). Nietzsche takes the “propensity to establish hierarchies” to be an inheritance of the “nobility of the race” (Nietzsche 2008, 70). Nietzsche’s highly perceptive analytical eye somehow must translate its observations into hierarchical difference. Reading his genealogy sociogenically, suggests that the investment in (pure) identity and (transcendental) morality are themselves sociogenic outcomes of hierarchical and response-debilitating structures: reactive psychology and subjection to hierarchical power co-emerge through sociogeny, not as a natural law of might is right where reactive psychology is proof of the weakness of the subjugated.

Multiple inheritances: beyond subjection and imprisonment

As Kelly Oliver (2001) notes, there is an important difference between Nietzsche on the one hand, and Foucault and Butler on the other: the latter argue for only the inheritance of different modes of subjection and its immanent subversion, whereas Nietzsche posits a different inheritance, one of an embodied, earthly animal-energy that is creative and life-affirming. Importantly, this other inheritance, is both an opening and a closure: it opens a critical space beyond Butler’s theory of subjectivation (with its subversive reiteration of the norms and rules one is subjected to as only critical horizon, see chapter 7); and it opens a space beyond the alleged enclosure or imprisonment of every genre of the human until today. This aspect is picked up in Gillies Deleuze’s and Rosi Braidotti’s Spinozist reading of Nietzsche through Spinoza’s potentia/potestas distinction. But it is also where the content of Nietzsche’s thought seems the most closed, the most reactive, reiterating the worst tenets of Euromodern Man in its hierarchical understanding of nature, misogyny, racism in general and antiblackness in particular. Here, Fanon’s and Wynter’s sociogeny helps bring in view and unlearn these dimensions of Nietzsche’s thought. Nietzsche argues for the open-endedness of multiple inheritances, which he names active and

universality in relation to Butler’s joint method of genealogy and feminist psychoanalysis, arguing that in their reliance on Freudian and Kleinian psychoanalysis the sociogenic nature gets eclipsed and they participate in an “overrepresentation of Man” (Wynter 2003).
reactive, master and slave. With Fanon and Wynter’s sociogeny, these names can be read as a Euromodern inheritance. In the following, I recast the inheritance of master-morality’s activity (that Deleuze and Braidotti pick up as potentia) as responsivity tapping into the inheritance of the social-maternal-ancestral through Lorde’s notion of the erotic (see chapter 9).

Nietzsche on temporality and the will: unlearning the spirit of revenge

Nietzsche is concerned with the question of affirmation: how to affirm one’s own becoming free of resentment, revenge and regret over what has been? Returning to the queer disability critique of normative development, and read through the Spinozist lens of Deleuze, Nietzschean genealogy launches a critique of the universalizing tropes of developmental potentiality, ridding the framework of evolution from its implicit teleology in favor of unchartered becomings. The embodied inheritance of the violent making of history is not a misstep that is to be regretted or corrected, but must be fully affirmed in a critical and creative way. This poietic critique for an earthly, immanent ethics based on a creative affirmation and transformation of one’s inheritances, continues to be inspiring for marginalized subjectivities critically and creatively navigating multiple oppressions (e.g. Anzaldúa 2012; Schutte 1999; Fanon 2008; Duran 2006).

Despite Nietzsche’s own hierarchical and reactionary politics, he has influenced many liberation movements, including feminist and decolonial ones (Brennan 2021). The relation between Nietzsche and decolonial philosophy might not be directly obvious, but one can find a direct influence on Fanon’s thinking on overcoming alienation within a colonial and racialized situation (Opperman, n.d.; Young 2018). From Fanon’s library, it becomes clear that he paid particular attention to Nietzsche’s Genealogy and to Karl Jaspers’ interpretation of Nietzsche. Fanon underlined the following passage from Jaspers’ Nietzsche and Christianity: “It is Nietzsche who discovered, in the domain of psychology, that the resentiment aroused by powerlessness, under the action of the will to power even in impotence, can become creative, engender values, ideals, interpretations” (cited in Young 2021, 47–48). Although the case for influences and traces should not be overstated or given too much importance, for my purposes in this dissertation it is relevant to point to the link between critical and creative transformative affirmation from induced states of powerlessness. In particular, I want to highlight the intersecting interests of Nietzsche’s psychological explorations of reactivity and activity and Fanon’s ethico-political and psycho-existential task of challenging the closures of reactive psychology in the colonial situation for humanity to become creative and critical, or open-endedly “actional.” Fanon states: “Yes to life. Yes to love. Yes to generosity. But man is also a negation. No to man’s contempt. No to the indignity of man. To the exploitation of man. To the massacre of what is most human in man: freedom. Man’s behavior is not only reactional. And there is always resentment in reaction. Nietzsche had already said it in The Will to Power. To induce man to be actional, by maintaining in his circularity the respect of the fundamental values that make the world human, that is the task of utmost urgency for he who, after careful reflection, prepares to act” (Fanon 2008, 197).
For Nietzsche, the question of overcoming Man towards the Overman is a question of temporality and will. Humans are a “sick” animal due to their relationship to time: instead of a healthy animal forgetting of past suffering, human memory clings on to past sufferings that persist in the present. Not only does previous pain linger, this social memory branded violently onto the body and the recoil through bad conscience is the non-substantial substance of the subject or soul itself. Nietzsche’s analysis of ressentiment and reactivity concerns the “sickness” of the human animal that has to be overcome:

This, yes, this alone is revenge itself: the will’s antipathy towards time and time’s “It was” (…) The spirit of revenge: my friends, that, up to now, has been mankind’s chief concern; and where there was suffering, there was always supposed to be punishment. “Punishment” is what revenge calls itself: it feigns a good conscience for itself with a lie. (Nietzsche 2003, 162)

The past weighs heavily on the human animal: Nietzsche’s ethic of amor fati seeks to “[unlearn] the spirit of revenge” (Nietzsche 2003, 163) through even affirming the unbearable weight of the past and thereby overcoming it: “To redeem the past and to transform every ‘It was’ into an ‘I wanted it thus!’—that alone do I call redemption!” (Nietzsche 2003, 161). I mobilize this project of unlearning the spirit of revenge precisely as unlearning the reactive binarisms of transcendental morality (Good/Evil) and pure identity (self/Other), stemming from transgenerational histories of violence onto the body. Unlearning is a process of response-ability to and reconfiguration of the past (that is, spectral inheritance), rather than a historically unprecedented breaking out of imprisonment of a universally closed sociogenic replicators of Self/Other and Good/Evil binaries, as Wynter alleges. At the same time, Nietzsche’s own hierarchical and biocentric thinking must be taken to the test through the tools of sociogeny. Nietzsche’s voluntarist answer to the overcoming the affective weight of the past has been taken up in the Deleuzian and posthuman feminist interpretations of Nietzsche (Deleuze 1983; Braidotti 2011; Grosz 2004). It is also the “voluntarism” that has been the target of critique from antiracist perspectives (Ahmed 2000; Broeck 2019): if certain subjects can unburden themselves of the weight of the past through a sheer act of will, does that not participate in distributing the weight unevenly to different demographics? Is it not in his voluntarism that the elitism of an ontology of the strong and the weak resurfaces? Does the Nietzschean gospel for “only the strongest—that is, the bravest, the most singular, the least nostalgic, the least absorbed in the past, the least reliant on pregiven values” (Grosz 2004, 148) not return to an individualism at the expense of collective response-ability? Later in this chapter, I turn to Nietzsche’s own attempt at affirming his inheritances in the self-narrativizing strategies in his autobiography Ecce Homo, showing Nietzsche doubling down on attempts at segregating the strong from the weak and the pure from the impure, perhaps leading to his own collapse, as Jean Graybeal suggests...
The question posed here is what type of affirmation does it affirm one’s unwelcome inheritances as a spectral heir to embrace becoming through a different response-able relation to the past? Or is it the affirmation of a legitimate heir, who seeks to draw substance to oneself, dreaming of a legitimate identity through distinguishing himself (gender intended) from the impure elements of the Other?

Similarities and differences in the projects of Wynter and Nietzsche

There are significant similarities between Wynter’s approach, which asks how did we get here (the historical formation of subjectivity) and where to go from here (the question of what comes “after Man”). Wynter inherits and affirms Fanon’s call to “introduce invention into existence” (Fanon 2008; Wynter 2003; Mariott 2011). Nietzsche similarly proposes a Janus-faced approach: in Human all too Human, he declared the death of the metaphysical subject and instead proposes a “historical philosophizing” (Nietzsche 1996) that does not treat humanity as an eternal essence, but instead traces the historical becoming of human subjects. The aim of his philosophical project is to move beyond the erroneous and toxic postulates of the universal subject Man toward the innocent and inventive creativity of the Child. Nietzsche’s historical philosophizing thus has two directionalities: a past-oriented genealogical project that asks how did we get here, and a futural one, the space for the creator of new values, no longer burdened by the past, a yes-sayer to both past and future becomings with a newly discovered animal-like innocence: the project of the Overman or becoming Child (Nietzsche 2003).

That said, their positionality, political commitments and contents of this project of tracing our historical becoming toward an overcoming of Man could not be farther apart: Nietzsche’s genealogical method, perhaps helpful in unlearning some tenets of Developmental Man, remains intricately entangled with Euromodernity’s biocentrism including its racial and antiblack logic that Wynter calls our attention to. Whereas Wynter sees the hierarchies of Man as that which is to be overcome, Nietzsche’s vision of the Overman is strictly hierarchical and based on enslaved castes who serve the higher Overman. A reading of his sexism, antiblackness, views on slavery and racism, suggest that the references to slave-morality and master-morality are neither merely historical referents nor philosophical metaphors, but reveal his philosophical project to be based on a biopolitics of “racialized breeding” (Bernasconi 2017), which includes enslavement or extinction of classes of humans and forced marriages to create a higher class beyond Man (Holub 1998; Bernasconi 2017; Broeck 2019). Whereas Wynter sees how the Christian God held together the hierarchies of Man, Nietzsche focuses on Christianity’s gospel of equality, which is secularized in liberal, socialist and anarchist movements of his day that he despised. In my (sociogenic) reading of Nietzsche’s antiblackness, I show
how the eclipsing of hierarchical, racial and gendered violence, through its displacement in a non-coeval time outside of modernity, sustains Nietzsche’s judgements of the alleged soft and feminized values of his white contemporaries.

Essay 1: From ethics to morality and back: Activity, Reactivity, Responsivity

In the first essay of Genealogy, Nietzsche introduces his conceptual pair master-morality and slave-morality and their opposing value-systems: good/bad and Good/Evil respectively. Nietzsche believes that ancient cultures were based on a caste-system, in which the naturally strong and powerful ruled over the naturally weak and powerless. The noble master-race did not depend on the Other for their sense of self but sovereignly created their own values. The noble masters are a primal force of nature who say yes to life by violently expanding and imposing their will, with little regard for others. In Deleuze’s interpretation, Nietzsche is proposing a radical anti-Hegelian non-dialectical notion of the master and the slave where the former’s consciousness is independent from the latter (Deleuze 1983). This “healthy” animal-innocence and aristocratic self-expression does not need the slave for self-consciousness (as in Hegel) but looks down at the “weak” not as a source of self-identification through othering, but as a contrast with their own self-evident power, vigor and “healthy” love of self/life. This psychological independence of the self-other dialectic Nietzsche calls a “pathos of distance” (Nietzsche 2008, 12). For the master-race, the weak are an afterthought and the enemy is not an object of hatred, but an object of respect. A worthy enemy is respected in their power and values and life is the battleground for these different wills to power that try to assert dominance and expand at the expense of the Other against whom he (gender intended) measures his will and power.

Slaves-morality, on the other hand, is not an active force of nature (yes-saying) but a reactive force (no-saying) that derives its sense of self in (reactive) relation to the Other. Here, Nietzsche introduces ressentiment as the driving force of morality. It is the revenge of the weak against the powerful that is the basis for the moral distinction between good and evil: “the impotent failure to retaliate is to be transformed into ‘goodness’” (Nietzsche 2008, 30). The revenge of the powerless is to label the powerful evil, and thereby find psychological satisfaction and justification of one’s suffering existence by claiming it as goodness. In contradistinction with the spontaneous “yes” to self and world of the aristocratic mode of valuation, slave-morality “says from the outset no to an ‘outside’, to an ‘other,’ to a ‘non-self’” (Nietzsche 2008, 22). Slave-morality takes vengeance on the healthy expression of the will to power and “demand[s] of strength that it should not express itself as strength”
Christian love is nothing but hatred against earthly life in disguise.

In sum, the master says “I am good therefore you are bad” whereas the slave says “You are evil therefore I am good.” Deleuze calls this the difference between the master’s aggression and the slave’s ressentiment (Deleuze 1983, 119). The violent expansion of the “bird of prey” is a healthy expression of natural aggression, whereas the “lamb” seeks relief from its own weakness through a (spiritual, moral) revenge onto the powerful. Deleuze further points out that the distinction between activity and reactivity is not absolute; and, therefore, reactivity is not equivalent to ressentiment. Within the active type, reaction has its place, but it is subordinate to the active, life-affirming forces: negativity and negation are an epiphenomenon encompassed by positivity and affirmation. In other words, even within what is deemed healthy animal self-expression, there is space for moments of reaction, but their becoming is not exhausted by or reducible to the moments of reaction. With the reactive type, the order is reversed: its peculiar form of creating of values is nihilistic in that it depends on a “no from the outset” (Nietzsche 2008, 22). Here reaction becomes ressentiment-driven and a primary motivation at the expense of affirmation.

**Ethics and morality**

Deleuze, building on Spinoza and Nietzsche, introduces a distinction between (immanent, earthly- and life-affirming) ethics and (transcendental, anti-earthy) morality, analogous to the master-morality and slave-morality. Deleuze declares (the in-citation quote is Nietzsche’s):

> There is no Good or Evil, but there is good and bad. “Beyond Good and Evil, at least this does not mean: beyond good and bad.” The good is when a body directly compounds its relation with ours, and, with all or part of its power, increases ours. A food, for example. For us, the bad is when a body decomposes our body’s relation, although it still combines with our parts, but in ways that do not correspond to our essence, as when a poison breaks down the blood.

(Deleuze 1988, 22)

Deleuze argues for this distinction by reading Spinoza’s challenge to Christianity and its recourse to transcendental values in terms of Nietzsche’s distinction of Good/Evil (morality) and good/bad (ethics): when Adam<sup>73</sup> ate from the tree, he was not guilty for disobeying a Law laid down from above (Judgment), but he had an immanent (earthly) encounter with something poisonous. What is transcendently labelled Evil is in fact a bad toxic encounter

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<sup>73</sup> Eve is absent from this text: whereas usually she is judged for being the downfall of humanity within the dominant Christian system of morality, it seems that she must be absent from the scene where the notions of evil and sin are radically undermined to redeem an earthly immanent ethics.
that diminished his power to act. It is the lack of knowledge about the causes of this diminishing of power that leads to the mistaken interpretation that it is a punishment and a judgment, not something bad but something Evil. Deleuze concludes:

In this way, Ethics, which is to say, a typology of immanent modes of existence, replaces Morality, which always refers existence to transcendent values. Morality is the judgment of God, the system of Judgment. But Ethics overthrows the system of judgement. The opposition of values (Good-Evil) is supplanted by the qualitative difference of modes of existence (good-bad). (Deleuze 1988, 23)

This allows for helpful distinctions of how genres of the human can be differently inhabited and inherited—as immanent earthly relational ethics or as the creation of moral subjects through the subjection to transcendent moral judgment. The figures of Child and Man and the structures of severance and fragmentation that most of humanity has been subjected to in different ways for the past hundreds of years thus produces subjects in the image of Man and his hierarchical order of pure identity and morality. Different genres of the human, or the different praxes that constitute being-human, need not be rooted in transcendent systems of morality that produce subjects through shame and sin. It is particular sociogenic structures that strengthen the nexus of morality (Good/Evil) and pure identity (hierarchical self/Other), whilst always open for a reclaiming and reconfiguration on immanent, ethical terms. Although Nietzsche and Deleuze can be employed as critical genealogists for understanding the specificity of Euromodern Man (steeped in Christian legacies), their celebration of wild animality is less convincing and reveals investments in masculinist notions of virile activity. Deleuze approvingly cites Nietzsche’s celebration of the “bird of prey” (Nietzsche 2008, 29) as the model for an ethics of activity (master-morality) based on a newly discovered innocence of nature; the opposite of re-action and re-sentiment is the “attack” (Deleuze 1983, 3); and both celebrate the figure of the master as a non-dialectical, non-relational force of life who is joyfully forgetful, lacking the vengeful self-consciousness of the slave that drives the Hegelian master-slave dialectic. Here is Deleuze’s summary of Nietzsche’s master, a somewhat silly dream of auto-homoeroticism: “the one who says I am good does not wait to be called good. He refers to himself in this way, he names himself and describes himself thus to the extent that he acts, affirms, and enjoys” (Deleuze 1983, 119). Although both Nietzsche and Deleuze have broken down the metaphysical unitary subject, making fictions of the subject dissolve into the multiplicity play of drives and forces, phallocentric figures of subjectivity easily resurface in both of their discussions. What is more, the turning away from the subject in favor of the affirmation of earthly multiplicity is grafted onto the same model of wild and predatory activity. This might even be true for the figure of the rhizome: the
rhizome-figure is “nonhierarchical” and an-archical, in the double sense that it has neither a “General” nor a beginning: “It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overspills” (Deleuze and Guattari 2016, 22). It is a flat playing field of heterogeneous multiplicities with neither a beginning nor an end, with every point able to connect to another point. But even though the figure has been productive for analyzing unchartered becomings and decentralized interconnections, it nevertheless privileges the Nietzschean masculinist understanding of self-expressive force that shoots and sprouts from its own activity: “The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots” (Deleuze and Guattari 2016, 22). A critique of the Nietzschean-Deleuzian category of activity need not lead us straight back to Hegelian dialectics (although dialectics remains in some ways inevitable), but can lead to the relational understanding of subjectivity as emerging from a relationality that precedes it (Oliver 2001; Gumbs 2016; Vázquez 2017; 2020).

The expressive activity is embedded and enabled by a relational responsivity through which one can become active, or, rather, response-able. Outside the fiction of non-relational activity, activity is better understood as embedded, situated responsive self-expression. The fantasy of a noble activity severed from constitutive sociality is as much a part of the reactive type as the “man of resentment” who either vents their hatred outwards or internalizes it through guilt. Nietzsche actively forgets and needs to disavow the vulnerability of co-constitutive responsive sociality in order to cling on to the historical fantasy of the lone warrior of solitary savagery that influences his conception of his futural project of the Overman.

The recent posthuman interest in mushrooms offers a different figure, more relational-responsive, that of the mycelium network: mushrooms emerge from and remain embedded in and connected to an underground web of relations. Individuation emerges in and through connection, within a relational web that recycles life and death; the latter continues to nourish the relational

74 To what extent does Nietzsche think of relation as reactive? Is there a mode of positive relationality that is constitutive of aristocratic self-expression? The aristocratic code of respect for the superior strength would be the world of might is right. This type of relation can be brought back to separate individuals with their will to power. Although Nietzsche worked out a complicated theory of what he calls “drives” that undermines the notion of a unitary or substantive self, the bounded atomistic individual resurfaces in his understanding of the noble intersubjective relation or the subject-world relation. Nietzsche’s examples of an enemy worthy of respect or a friend who requires a hard bed (rather than a hug) are all parts of a Nietzschean ethic trying to keep at bay the alleged weakness of interdependency. Nietzschean respect is compatible with a respect for the opacity of the other where one does not feed on the other’s substance for one’s sense of self; however, I have not found many traces of a positive co-constitutive sociality of the creative warrior/Child/Overman in Nietzsche’s writing.
web as it continues to nourish relational life. The mycelium network, which is not separable from the rhizome, might thus nevertheless be a preferable figure of emphasis, privileging the thick web of relations through which subjectivity emerges responsively (creatively and unpredictably), rather than celebrating self-driving activity that seeks to expand, conquer and colonize.\textsuperscript{75}

**Essay 2: Reactivity and childhood subjection**

Following Butler, I suggest reading the second essay on the genesis of bad conscience through the experience of powerlessness through violence inscribed onto the body as scenes of childhood subjection and the multigenerational effects thereof. Whereas Butler interprets this as a general blueprint of a psychic structure produced by structures of power, the socio-genealogical embedding suggests that they are particular to patri-archal structures based on hierarchy, powerlessness and severance.

In the second essay, Nietzsche argues that the genesis of bad conscience is a morally meaningless but fascinating world-historical experiment of an animal whose drives are no longer vented outside but “internalized” (Nietzsche 2008, 72). Nietzsche speculates on a long history of violence that turned the human animal “sick,” tracing the movement from prehistorical inscription of a “social memory” onto the previously forgetful animal body, to the emergence of reactive \textit{resentiment} where hatred and self-abnegation become the reactive sources of the creation of moral values leading to modern effeminate weak sentimentality.

Before Nietzsche describes his mythical scene of this world-historical violent transition from savagery to the origins of civilization, Nietzsche offers his views on prehistoric humanity. As we will see, this is circumscribed by the Euromodern figures of animality and antiblackness of biocentric or Developmental of Man.\textsuperscript{76} From a Darwinian view of nature red in tooth and claw, Nietzsche envisions early human society as a festival of pain, where the individual animal’s aggressive drives have to be made “calculable” and conform in exchange for the security of belonging to a tribe and protection from being an outcast in the savage wilderness (Nietzsche 2008, 40). This is a very early form of taming or domesticating the human animal as a violent branding of a social memory onto an individual animal-body in order to reduce unruly capriciousness: “it was by means of the morality of custom and the social strait-

\textsuperscript{75} If this metaphor feels too “rooted,” see also the figures that Tlostanova introduces to attest to the political and existential condition of \textit{unsettlement}, like the bird without legs (Tlostanova 2021; Tlostanova 2023).

\textsuperscript{76} From Wynter’s sociogenic perspective, the whole question of the passage from nature to culture emerges as an always-already racialized question that presupposes a “racialized time” (Al-Saji 2021) that distinguishes between the modern and the primitive (Lugones 2010).
jacket that man was really made calculable” (Nietzsche 2008, 40). This is the origin of the “morality of custom” through which animal forgetfulness is gradually transformed into human (social, conforming) memory. The violent imprint of a social memory onto the animal-body, however, did not yet give rise to bad conscience. The genesis of bad conscience in the human animal, Nietzsche speculates, springs not from a gradual change but from a traumatic break, a “violent separation from his [sic] animal past” (Nietzsche 2008, 65). It is the moment when a “predatory, blond race of warriors” imposes its will and organization onto a less organized, weaker group of people. The violence with which this predatory race imposes its will onto others is rendered by Nietzsche both as terrifying (for those who are at its merciless mercy) and as a fundamentally amoral animalistic artistic drive of expansion and imposition of a joyful and innocent pursuit of a creative, ruthless artistic will (for the aggressor race). Bad conscience does not arise with the life-affirmative violence of this “superior” race’s will to power, but as the psychic effects of their overwhelming terror on the conquered group. Nietzsche describes this imposition of a stately order as the traumatic break from humanity’s prior animal innocence with which they could vent their aggressive energies: “I take bad conscience to be the deep sickness to which man was obliged to succumb under the pressure of that most fundamental of all changes—when he found himself definitively locked in the spell of society and peace” (Nietzsche 2008, 64). Nietzsche calls this traumatic break with the animal past the process of “internalization” (Nietzsche 2008, 65) where the animal energies no longer find an external outlet and the drives turn inward, against the self. This is the origin of the paradox of a self-negating will, a destructive will that is part of life’s vital will to power but becomes thwarted and aimed against the affirmative forces of life. Following Butler’s psychoanalytic reading of Nietzsche’s Genealogy that displaces the historical speculation for the emergence of the subject in the family-scene, and placed in a more sociogenic and historical context of institutions of hierarchy, fragmentation and severance, perhaps the following oft-cited passage can be read as a scene of childhood subjection/subjectivation:

Every instinct which does not vent itself externally turns inwards (…) the internalization of man (…) the man who is forced into an oppressively narrow and regular morality (…) this yearning and desperate prisoner became the inventor of “bad conscience” (…) This instinct of freedom (…) forced back, trodden down, incarcerated within and ultimately still venting and discharging itself only upon itself: this is bad conscience at its origins, that and nothing more (Nietzsche 2008, 65–67)

This “internalization” for the first time reduces the human animal “to thinking, drawing conclusions, calculating, combining causes and effects, to their ‘consciousness,’ their most meagre and unreliable organ” (Nietzsche 2008, 64). The will now turned against itself, produces the notion of the subject, soul or self as a culpable subject. Butler summarizes this section as follows:
The internalization of instinct—which takes place when the instinct does not immediately discharge as the deed—is understood to produce the soul or the psyche instead; the pressure exerted from the walls of society forces an internalization which culminates in the production of the soul, this production being understood as a primary artistic accomplishment, the fabrication of an ideal. (Butler 1997, 74)

Unable to vent the will externally, the violent animalistic energies turned inward and become self-punishing: *I am ugly, I am bad, I am worthless*... from which an ideal of beauty can emerge.\(^77\) It is through this cruel self-punishment that the notion of self emerges for the first time: “the internalization of punishment is the very production of the self (...) there is no formation of the subject without a passionate attachment to subjection” (Butler 1997, 75; 67). Instead of Butler’s suggestion that this is inherent to any notion of self, I am suggesting that what is at stake here is the genesis and inheritance of investment in pure identity according to reactive binary logics of self/Other (as opposed to impure plural selves where identity exceeds its binary-reactive formulation).

*Nietzsche’s antiblackness and “ungendering” as b(l)ackdrop to his critique of modernity*

Despite Nietzsche’s preferred polemic style to shock his readers, from the perspective of Wynter’s sociogenic theory of the biocentric genre of Man, Nietzsche’s arguments suddenly seem far less original or provocative. True, against his contemporary European philosophers, Nietzsche was skeptical of progress and detected traces of teleological-developmental thinking in many versions of evolutionary theory. Nevertheless, his genealogy reproduces—Wynter would say “replicates”—the coordinates of biocentric Man based on the distinction between the naturally selected white civilized race at the latest stage of development of humanity on the one hand, and the figure of ahistorical, violent, animalistic, Blackness and primitiveness that remains stuck at the level of human infancy on the other hand—the “denial of co-evalness” where non-European others represent stages of human development in *time* instead of inhabiting a multiplicitous present (Fabian 2014; Lugones 2010; Wynter 2015). The figure of Blackness emerges unexpectedly in Nietzsche’s *Genealogy* but nevertheless is consequential for his entire understanding of humanity, history, destiny and morality:

\(^77\) “For what would the meaning of ‘beautiful’ be, if contradiction had not first become conscious of itself, if the ugly had not first said to itself: ‘I am ugly’? (...) After this hint, at least, the enigma of how contradictory concepts like selflessness, self-denial, self-sacrifice can suggest an ideal, a beauty, will be less enigmatic. (...) the origin of the ‘unegoistic’ as a moral value and of the concealment of the ground on which this value has grown: only bad conscience, only the will to mistreat the self supplies the condition for the value of the unegoistic” (Nietzsche 2008, 68)
Nowadays, when suffering is always summoned as the foremost argument against existence, as its worst question-mark, we would do well to remember the times when exactly the opposite conclusion was drawn, because mankind did not want to forgo the infliction of suffering, seeing in it an enchantment of the first rank, an actual seduction and lure in favour of life. By way of consolation to the more delicate, perhaps in those days pain did not hurt us as much as it does today. At least that might be the conclusion of a physician who has treated Negroes [sic] (these taken as representatives of prehistoric man—[sic]) for serious cases of internal inflammation; such inflammation would bring even the best organized European to the brink of despair—but this is not the case with N[—]. (Nietzsche 2008, 49; italics original)

In this passage Nietzsche expresses the biocentric symbolic code that structures its racial dehumanization temporally as a displacement out of the modern present into a prehistoric past: the “denial of co-evalness” as “denial of co-humanity” (Wynter 2015, 215), which divides the modern self from the premodern Other—a way of displacing contemporary historical violence of colonialism and slavery onto the necessity of training and disciplining a savage population otherwise stuck in humanity’s infancy.

An unelucidated reference to medical experimentation on Black people is referenced as evidence for Nietzsche’s historical thesis where the contemporary violence of racial science is displaced and resurfaces only as a figure of prehistoric man pushed outside of the contemporary and outside of the truly historical drama of the two competing forces—Rome (virile master-morality) against Judea (weak slave-morality). Yet, this (racialized, arguably antisemitic) drama requires this constitutive outside—Blackness, prehistory—as a figure for its coherence. Just as Black(ened) people are serviceable to a European economy and science, the figure of Blackness is serviceable to the philosopher’s projection onto human animality and savagery. The passage continues, with a strange sidenote positing the hypothesis that animal vivisection has produced less suffering than a modern human in pain for a single night. The ghost of the Cartesian animal-machine thesis haunts Nietzsche’s text, a link that Zakkiyah Iman Jackson points our attention to in a different context. Jackson refers to 19th century American practices of forced medical experimentation on Black women, showing how it was sustained by and reiterated the discourse that “African females did not feel pain or anxiety in the way white women do” (Jackson 2020, 186). Jackson continues:

An admission of suffering in black(ened) people was effectively bypassed by theories such as these to the extent that commonplace exaggerations of black females’ purported capacities for endurance offered assurance that black pain was not really pain. Regarding forced gynecological experiments on enslaved women in particular, Dr. James Johnson (…) comments on the “wondrous” capacity of the “Negro” to bear what would be insurmountable pain in whites: “When we come to reflect that all the women operated upon in Kentucky, except one, were Negresses and that these people will bear anything with nearly
if not quite as much impunity as dogs and rabbits, our wonder is lessened.”

What has typically gone unremarked is that Descartes' ticking-clock-animal-automata thesis, which held that animals felt pain but that pain was merely a mechanical response to stimulation, was historically coincident with theories about African women and childbirth. (Jackson 2020, 186)

I cite Jackson at length not only to reiterate the link between the discourse on animality and race, but also to point attention to the disappearance of gender or “ungendering” (Spillers 2003) in Nietzsche’s text. Nietzsche does not find it necessary to relate the details of the “scientific study” in order to draw from it his image of an ungendered (presumably male) “savage” who undergoes torture as if struck by a natural cataclysm without suffering pain as Nietzsche’s assumed “modern” *qua* white reader would. The myth of Black incapacity to suffer pain has served not only the distinction between savage and civil humanity in general, but has also served as a gendered marker to distinguish (modern, white, feminine) woman from non-coeval, subhuman, animalistic female (Lugones 2010; Spillers 2003; Broeck 2019). The capacity for suffering and sensibility operates as a key marker to construct a definition of womanhood as white femininity—whose sentimentiality and sensibility are, in turn, what differentiates Woman from the essence of Man (Rousseau 1961; Kant 2006)—defined over and against racialized-animalized femaleness. Because the racialized figure of prehistoric man lacks the modern human’s capacity for suffering, Nietzsche can claim how modern morality is sentimental, feminine, weak, whilst simultaneously relying on and making disappear contemporary, co-eval gendered antiblack violence. Here we catch a glimpse of how antiblackness, coloniality of gender and misogyny find coherence in Nietzsche: he can denounce and distance himself from the feminine softness of modern morality, by reinscribing it in an antiblack world based on the subjugation and serviceability of Black(ened) people. The disappearance of gender in the figure of Blackness sustains the gendering of the effeminate modern soul (that Nietzsche despises and wishes to overcome). What Nietzsche sees as weak, feminine, sentimental morality simultaneously relies on and eclipses gendered antiblack violence: its gendered dynamics are erased and the contemporary racial violence inflicted on human beings becomes an ungendered index for prehistoric savagery.

Nietzsche’s insistent polemic tone throughout the *Genealogy*, which indulges in evoking predatory cruelty and virility, makes this passage all the more striking: why conjure the image of a pained body to “console” the “more delicate” “modern” reader, when the whole essay deliberately seeks to provoke through a style that valorizes hardness, virility and strength against “modern” sentimentiality? Did the figure of Black suffering perhaps haunt Nietzsche as well and did he perhaps have to include this “consolation” to reassure his own conflicted feelings and put his doubts to rest? Or do the antiblack symbolic
codes of the descriptive statement of biocentric Man make Nietzsche completely blind and insensitive to this?

Nietzsche’s disgust for sentimentality and the effeminate modern taste is here shown to rely on the simultaneous evocation and displacement of contemporary racial and gendered violence. Nietzsche disparages these modern and utilitarian values not because they are hypocritically sustained by excessive violence and subjugation of most of humanity and other earthlings, but because it is too sentimental and feminine—concepts, which as I just argued rely on its disavowed racial underside and have to be understood in its colonial grammar (Lugones 2007; 2010). The silent backdrop of antiblackness (naturalization and dismissal of the structural violence against the Blackened, damned of the earth) allows for Nietzsche’s misogynistic appeal to “hard” patriarchal values of creation. The “denial of co-evalness” allows for the marginal presence/absence of Blackness that circumscribes the whole plot of the modern, of history and the future of humanity.

**Essay 3: The ascetic priest and coloniality**

The final essay introduces the figure of the ascetic priest as the man of ressentiment, anti-earth and anti-body, subjecting difference to the moralizing logic of ascetic identity, seeking to dominate through poisoning multiplicitous earthly ethical human animals with his own self-loathing. I suggest reading the figure of the ascetic priest as a colonial missionary.

Nietzsche argued in the second essay that the genesis of bad conscience comes from the “internalization of man” that ensues when the strictures of society are violently imposed: the enclosure of the instincts. The “yearning, desperate prisoner” seeks to find an explanation and the sadistic energies that do not find an external outlet become masochistic self-torture. The reason for suffering is sought within, but explanations are still lacking. In the third essay, Nietzsche introduces the figure of the ascetic priest as the one offering and explanation for this suffering, for giving a meaning to the internalized suffering of humanity. The priest preys on bad conscience and offers an explanation, gives it a meaning in the concept of *sin*. The meaningless suffering of guilt and bad conscience finds an explanation and purpose through the ascetic ideal. “Out of the sick man a ‘sinner’ is made” (Nietzsche 2008, 118).

Nietzsche calls the ascetic priest “the representative of seriousness itself” (Nietzsche 2008, 95). This anticipates the Sartrean category of seriousness, which Lewis Gordon describes as follows:

The serious man is in bad faith because he denies his freedom. He regards his values as objects to be *known*, not constructed. He eliminates himself as a source of value and hence simultaneously hides from himself as free and hides from himself as responsible for his freedom. He regards values—including the value that constitutes himself—as transcendent, independent “givens” and
desirability, including his own desirability, as a material feature of objects instead of a contingent feature of their relation to human reality. He is therefore Manichaean in spirit, treating good and evil as material features of the world that can be encouraged or eliminated like bacteria in water. (Gordon 1999, 23)

Nietzsche describes the ascetic priest as a no-saying to the earthly as “a particular kind of resentment (...) that of an unsatisfied instinct and will to power which seeks not to master some isolated aspect of life but rather life itself” (Nietzsche 2008, 96). The priest’s “no” to the pluralism of life becomes a “yes” to his own nihilistic totalizing value-system: “an attempt is made to use strength to dam up the very source of strength” (Nietzsche 2008, 96). This attempted domination of life in its entirety means a revenge on difference: it starts from a “no” to earthly pluralism and seeks to dominate it to promote its own existence as the universal, only legitimate one: “he demands that one should follow him, he imposes wherever he can his own evaluation of existence” (Nietzsche 2008, 96). The priest who seeks to escape his self-loathing crafts his identity through turning the persecution of the self into a persecution of others. The threat of difference is neutralized through a totalizing metaphysics that takes its revenge on the uncontainable pluralism of life through turning it into a source of shame, guilt, sin, in need of transcendental redemption based on the ascetic priest’s moral value-system. Nietzsche thus locates the need of (Manichean) morality and pure identity in hatred and self-contempt, a weariness and vengeful relation to earthly pluralism.

Nietzsche characterizes the priest as sick, but transforming this sickness into a creative value that seeks to repeat and perpetuate itself: “the wound compels him to live” (Nietzsche 2008, 100). In this way, the unprecedented experiment of the human animal has achieved something peculiar and unprecedented: turning forces of negativity and reactivity into creative ones, building entire worlds upon an anti-life and anti-earth metaphysics. The imposition of this value-judgment onto others is the will of the power of the sick ascetic priest who seeks to cope with and justify his own self-loathing through revenge onto others disguised as love: The Manichean evaluation of good and evil, in the judgement of others and self, has its source in the wound, an exhaustion with the self that seeks escape and release: “how could I escape from myself? (...) I have had enough of myself!” The Missionary persecutes difference as sin that needs to be weeded out. A metaphysics of self-punishment becomes the way to turn the ascetic priest’s dis-ease and unease with the self into a solid identity. Nietzsche locates this vengeful will to eradicate the various expressions of life (earthly pluralism) to a hatred of the self, rooted in self-contempt.

Nietzsche’s critique of the ascetic priest can echo as decolonial critique of the missionary who says no to the pluralism of earthly life and tyrannically imposes his own will to power onto others. This illuminates the encounter between Father Le Jeune and the Innu in the 17th century—Le Jeune’s
confrontation with the Innu’s radical egalitarian lifestyle based on interdependence and respect of everyone’s (including children’s) autonomy (see Introduction).

Le Jeune and the other Jesuits were shocked by the independence and freedom of all members of society, the egalitarian gender-relations, relaxed mores around sexuality, and in particular the freedom of children. Particularly upsetting was the lack of discipline and punishment for the children. By being “as free as wild animals” there was a lack of “a peremptory command obeyed, or any act of severity or justice performed” (cited in Leacock 1981, 54). The idea of justice, virtue and morality, then, requires a disciplining in order to obey the commands from above that transcend the untamed freedom of an alleged animal savagery: “The Savages [sic] prevent their instruction; they will not tolerate the chastisement of their children; whatever they may do, they permit only a simple reprimand” (cited in Leacock 1981, 46). The Innu, in turn, were shocked to see the importance of hierarchy, discipline, obedience and unfreedom among Europeans. Le Jeune reports

They imagine that they ought by right of birth, to enjoy the liberty of wild ass colts, rendering no homage to anyone whomsoever, except when they like. They have reproached me a hundred times because we fear our Captains, while they laugh at and make sport of theirs. All the authority of their chief is in his [sic] tongue’s end (…) he will not be obeyed unless he pleases the Savages (Le Jeune cited in Leacock 1981, 49)

What might Le Jeune have felt when he saw that the patriarchal, moral order based on submission of children to adults, women to men, humans to God, lower ranks to higher ranks, was completely absent? Both the Christian and secular versions of the Developmental genre of Man were based on the idea that without subjection to patriarchal rule there would be immorality, selfishness, untamed animality or savagery. Yet, curiously, as Le Jeune admitted just as many other early missionaries and settlers, it seemed that the imagined vices of unrestrained savagery—jealousy, anger, cruelty—were virtually absent:

As they have neither political organization, nor office, nor dignities, nor any authority (…) they never kill each other to acquire these honors. Also, as they are contented with a mere living, not one of them gives himself to the Devil to acquire wealth. (Le Jeune cited in Leacock 1981, 49)

Nevertheless, the image of the Other, the Sinner—the immoral selfish, lazy savage—gets grafted onto the Other despite these observations: “I would not dare assert that I have seen one act of real moral virtue in a savage [sic]. They have nothing but their own pleasure and satisfaction in view” (cited in Leacock 1981, 49). They are free (i.e., do not subject to parental or paternal rule) therefore they are immoral. Le Jeune attempted to introduce principles of hierarchy and patriarchy in relations between men and women (through monogamous marriage that ensures legitimate heirs and premised on the
submission of wives to husbands) and between parents and children. Le Jeune understood that the way to break the “the freedom and independence of these peoples, and the horror they have of restraint or bondage” (Father Vimont, Le Jeune’s successor, cited in Leacock 1981, 55) was by taking the children away from the community and to subject them to Christian education based on obedience to a higher authority from an early age. Le Jeune’s solution is to “[remove] the children from their communities for schooling” (cited in Leacock 1981, 46) based on the principles of discipline and corporeal punishment. His report continues to note the struggle and opposition to implementing punishment as a means of social cohesion.

Although this encounter from Le Jeune’s perspective maps well onto Wynter’s analysis of the symbolic codes of identity and morality (good self vs. evil Other), the reverse is less clear. The moral judgement contained in the form of othering and the need to impose one’s own moral universe onto the Other by eradicating their evil customs is different from the Innu’s expectation of reciprocal respect and relation despite the strange and cruel customs of the Christians. The missionary persecutes difference as sin that needs to be weeded out. A metaphysics of self-punishment becomes the way to turn the ascetic priest’s dis-ease and unease with the self into a solid entity. Nietzsche locates this vengeful will to eradicate the various expressions of life (earthly pluralism) to a hatred of the self, rooted in self-contempt. The way Le Jeune enacts the genre of Man requires the attack on earthly pluralism, difference and other modes of valuation, requires “that one should follow him, he imposes wherever he can his own evaluation of existence” (Nietzsche 2008, 96). The subjection to the highest authority of God the Father has to be mediated by his closest representative, God himself (see also Maldonado-Torres 2008, 112–140). As Nietzsche suggests, this mode of existence is rooted in the experience of powerlessness and violent subjection of the body to a stronger power through which the culpable self of good and evil comes into existence. Nietzsche might agree with the interpretation of the missionary as spreading European moral “sickness” to non-European others. At the same time, the early encounter between the Jesuits and the Innu shows that the opposite of the moral asceticism of the missionary is not the bird of prey or the conquistador (one healthy and the other sick, Nietzsche might add) but (the possibility of) a different mode of anarchical relational autonomy and freedom. The freedom that Nietzsche imagines as the alternative mode of valuation than the priestly slave-morality is not the

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78 Le Jeune met with much resistance to the efforts of taking children for most of the day to Christian schools, especially when the Innu realized that the children were customarily beaten. What is more, Innu community considered it a generous gesture to allow others the care of children of the community, but were upset when they realized such kindness was not reciprocated by not letting French Christian children be raised within the Innu community (Leacock 1981).
violent imposition of an expansionistic will, but respect for the Other’s autonomy within communal structures of care.

_Nietzsche and Imperial Man (slavery, colonialism and racialized breeding)_

Nietzsche did not write much about colonialism but there are some scattered aphorisms and unpublished notes (Holub 1998). These notes show that Nietzsche’s concern is primarily the “health” of Europe. Nietzsche’s critique of nationalism and antisemitism do not imply that he was critical of colonialism or that he was not a racist (including antisemitic) (Holub 1998; Bernasconi 2017; Broeck 2019). Instead, Nietzsche was favorable of European colonialism in that it showed the promise of a virility counter to Christian modern moral sentimentality within Europe. Rather than the moralizing myths of civilizational progress or Christianization that justified European conquest, Nietzsche admitted the sheer violence of European colonization: “The way Europeans found colonies proves their predatory nature.” And: “one can assess the character of Europeans according to their relationship to foreign countries, in colonization: extremely cruel” (notes from 1884, cited in Holub 1998, 42.)

Holub points out that “[a]lthough these statements, taken out of context, could be employed to condemn European colonialism, Nietzsche is actually affirming the cruelty and aggressiveness of imperialism” (Holub 1998, 43). As is clear from the discussion of _Genealogy_ , Nietzsche valorized cruelty and predation as signs of active master-morality. Whereas he deplored Europe’s “decadence” sickened or poisoned by Christian slave-morality for centuries, he saw the cruelty of colonial expansion as a promising virility of master-morality that runs from Rome to the Renaissance to Napoleon to Nietzsche himself.79

Although Nietzsche’s insights in reactivity and _ressentiment_ have been hugely influential including in anti-hierarchical liberatory readings of Nietzsche, his valorization of master-morality has been less convincing. Willett reads Nietzsche against himself and turns a critical eye to the reactive psychology of the plantation owners in the US: “it is curious that Nietzsche sees through the hypocrisies of European morality and yet takes as transparent the claims of the race of conquerors” (Willett 1995, 166). Nelson Maldonado-Torres also traces the imbrication of the asceticism that Nietzsche criticized and imperialism: “The ascetic mode of valuation (…) [can] be traced back (…) to the master and not to the slave (…) Asceticism often works as a discipline of control in the interest of the subordination and dehumanization of others”

79 In his notebooks, Nietzsche made explicit reference to Congo as proof that Europeans must be “barbarous” to remain “masters” over the “savages:” “It becomes quite obvious in practice what means one has to employ with savage peoples, and that ‘barbarous’ means are not optional and arbitrary, if one, with all one’s European pampering, is transplanted into the Congo or elsewhere and needs to stay the master over barbarians” (cited in Bernasconi 2017, 61).
(Maldonado-Torres 2008, 118). Saidiya Hartman also illustrates the connection between the panoply of means of subjection and the structure of “high crimes against the flesh” (Spillers) that range from moralizing disciplinary techniques to the absolute sovereign power over life and death (Hartman 1997), suggesting the interrelation of morality and violence within Euromodern Man as opposed to considering them as two separate tendencies in history. In liberation and decolonial philosophy, Enrique Dussel famously introduced the figure of the conquistador as foundational to Euromodernity over the oft-celebrated and oft-criticized Cartesian revolution: the cogito is preceded by the conquiro (Dussel 1985). Many decolonial approaches have noted how the two main weapons of European colonizers were the canons and the Bible. From this perspective, a perspective that Nietzsche has foreclosed in typical Euromodern manner (see above), these are not two opposite tendencies (reactive and active) but two sides of the same coin, belonging to the same Euromodern genre of Man.

Bernasconi interprets Nietzsche’s project of the Overman explicitly as one of “racialized breeding” (Bernasconi 2017). He cites Antichrist: “The problem I am posing is (…) what type of human should be bred, should be willed as having greater value, as being more deserving of life, as being more certain of a future” (Nietzsche 2005, 4). Bernasconi comments:

Nietzsche’s answer to this question, which was directed against the reigning morality of breeding, according to which “all variation is to be prevented” (…) was to promote “the breeding of a stronger race, a race whose surplus would lie precisely in those areas where the diminished species was becoming weak and weaker (will, responsibility, self-assurance, the capacity to set itself goals)” (…). In this vein, Nietzsche declared that his concern was “the problem of the order of rank between human types which have always existed and always will exist” (…). (Bernasconi 2017, 60)

The difference between Nietzsche and his contemporaries was not that Nietzsche rejected biological racism, but the opposition to the breeding of a “pure” race, and instead produce a stronger one through the mixing of certain strong specimens. Whereas he muses about his own mixed (German and alleged Polish) inheritance as responsible for his greatness, which can be read as an act of creative affirmation, a willing backwards, rather than a fixed biological destiny (see below), Nietzsche envisioned regulated marriage as the way to procure this higher class of (Over)man (Bernasconi 2017, 60): the creative destiny of individual greatness occur in the context of dreams of biopolitical experimentation that subject the will of most.
Affirmation and/or segregation of the paternal and maternal inheritance

The question of inheritance, affirmation and the creation of a higher type, become deeply personal in Nietzsche’s autobiographical self-narration. In his autobiography *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche attempts—unsuccessfully—to come to terms with his troubled relation to his mother and sister. Here Zarathustra’s lament that the past (the “it was”) “is the will’s teeth-gnashing and most lonely affliction (…) the will cannot will backwards” (Nietzsche 2003, 161) and the attempt at overcoming through the will: “All ‘It was’ is a fragment, a riddle, a dreadful chance—until the creative will says to it: ‘But I willed it thus!’” (Nietzsche 2003, 163) seems to be a challenge for his own self-narration. In *Ecce Homo*, there is the attempt at affirmation of his inheritances through this “I willed it thus!” and the “unlearn[ing of] the spirit of revenge” (Nietzsche 2003, 163). The themes of affirmation and the double inheritance that he lays out in *Genealogy* flare up once again, this time not between the world-historical forces of Rome against Judea but focused on his own directly familial inheritance that Nietzsche tries to come to terms with through its narrativization (Kofman 1994). Here the binary inheritance is his alleged noble “Polish ancestry” supposedly from his father’s side and his “base” Germanness from his mother’s side. Nietzsche gratefully identifies with the image of his father, whose alleged “Polish blood” Nietzsche claims to be responsible for much of his powerful “instincts.” Nietzsche conjures the image of his father, a country priest, as exalted above the mortals: “the peasants to whom he preached (…) said that that was how an angel must look” (Nietzsche 2007, 10). The positive inheritance of Nietzsche’s father is not taken to be one of priestly revenge, but, to the contrary, a noble soul exalted above the masses who is, as Graybeal puts it, “dead to the ordinary mortal world of attachment” (Graybeal 1998, 154). In other words, the familiar image of hierarchy of the high and low, with any democratic sense being an affront to this natural order, is positively attributed to his father who has “one foot beyond life” (Nietzsche cited in Graybeal 1998, 154). This one

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80 Below, I follow Graybeal’s (1998) speculative argument about the psychology of the author to put Nietzsche’s theory in relation to the themes of inheritance and affirmation: what does it mean to affirm one’s own becoming and to will one’s eternal return? Graybeal’s analysis is illustrative of the types of abjection of important women in Nietzsche’s life (his mother and sister) as preventing him from affirming his own inheritances. Oliver has argued that rather than reading the author’s psychology, a psychoanalytic reading sheds more light on the role of gender in philosophy’s textual operations. Following Kristeva’s theory of the abjection of the mother, Oliver differentiates between the feminine and the maternal in Nietzsche: whereas Nietzsche despises everything feminine, he appropriates maternal metaphors for himself as creator: “For the creator himself to be the child new-born he must also be willing to be the mother” (Nietzsche 2003, 111; Oliver 1995).
foot beyond life is not the ascetic ideal of the priest who devalues earthly existence in the name of a beyond, but the graceful nobility who is naturally above the majority. His maternal inheritance, on the other hand, is something that Nietzsche eschews:

When I consider how often I am addressed as a Pole when I travel, even by Poles themselves, and how rarely I am taken for a German, it might seem that I have been merely externally sprinkled with what is German. Yet my mother, Franziska Oehler, is at any rate something very German. (cited in Graybeal 1998, 155)

In the published version, Nietzsche describes his maternal inheritance as one of Germanness, which, as he later describes, is associated with “corrupt[ing] culture.” He laments that he is “condemned to Germans” (cited in Graybeal 1998, 156). Nietzsche’s destiny lies between the noble paternal inheritance and the superficial tainting of a maternal German inheritance that drags him down. At the same time that he seeks to distance himself from his maternal inheritance, Nietzsche attempts to affirm this double inheritance as an explanation for his greatness:

This double origin, just as if from the highest and lowest rungs on the ladder of life, at the same time decadent and beginning—this, if anything, explains that neutrality, that freedom from bias in relation to the total problem of life, that perhaps distinguishes me. I have a better nose for the signs of ascent and decline than anyone has ever had. I am the teacher par excellence about this—I know both, I am both. (Cited in Graybeal 1998, 155)

In this passage, Nietzsche plays with the Christian-Enlightenment conception of the human, as a creature between beast and angel. Nietzsche takes over the existential destiny of this hierarchical order of things (beast-man-angel) but reverses the contents of this hierarchy: the lofty angelic side is the affirmation of self and world that he identifies with the earthly, cultural, healthy paternal inheritance of master-morality, whereas the beastly level becomes the realm of anti-culture, petty, vengeful, maternal slave-morality. Between these two levels, Nietzsche believes to have the freest perspective on the problem of life and morality. We see Nietzsche’s attempt to say yes to his fate, to affirm his existence even in its unwelcome maternal, German inheritance that he simultaneously needs to keep at a distance (“I am both”). In this version of Ecce Homo, Nietzsche remains silent about his mother. But shortly before his collapse, Nietzsche wrote another version where he described his mother in more detail. His friend and publisher, and later Nietzsche’s sister Elizabeth, considered this version inappropriate for publication and the passages where Nietzsche tries to come to terms with his mother only saw daylight in 1969 (Graybeal 1998). Here, Nietzsche no longer attempts to incorporate but instead exorcize his maternal and German inheritance: “Whenever I seek the deepest contrast to myself, the incalculable meanness [or commonness] of instincts, then
I always find my mother and sister” (cited in Graybeal 1998, 160). He admits to being continuously haunted and tormented by his mother and sister who he describes as follows: “Here works a perfect hell-machine, with unfailing certainty about the moment when one can bloodily wound me—in my highest moments (...) for there all strength is lacking to defend oneself against poisonous vermin” (cited in Graybeal 1998, 161). Nietzsche needs to fully exorcize the haunting of the feminine, German “hell-machine” and cannot even acknowledge, as he was able to in the previous version, that his blood is “sprinkled” (angesprengelt) with German blood. Now he claims to be “a Polish nobleman pur sang, with which not a drop of bad blood is mixed, least of all German” (Nietzsche 2007, 10). Graybeal describes Nietzsche’s disavowal of the maternal inheritance, the attempt to claim his greatness by making himself motherless, as follows:

A castrating mother awaits him at the bottom of his ladder of life as the opposite of his divinized, angelic, noble, pure-blooded, dead father. She threatens bloodily to wound him, although he has just claimed to be a “Polish nobleman pur sang” (no mention of Blut!), “in whom not a drop of bad blood is mixed, least of all German.” He has only pur sang like his father, and none of the mother’s bad, German blood; yet she is capable of bloodily wounding him, reminding him all too painfully of his low, “bloody” German origins. (Graybeal 1998, 162)

This poses the greatest difficulty for Nietzsche to live up to his own doctrine, of _amor fati_ and the eternal recurrence: “But I confess that the most profound objection against the ‘eternal recurrence,’ my truly abyssal thought, is always mother and sister” (Nietzsche 2007, 10). In this later attempt, where he tries to face this inheritance, Nietzsche seems to lose all control, drowning in excessive hatred and a forced attempt at exorcizing the maternal specter. Graybeal goes so far as to say that this final writing right before his collapse is a coming face-to-face with Medusa that paralyzes and plunges him into madness: the inheritance he could not say yes to and work through ultimately broke him.

Despite Nietzsche’s language of blood and race, Kofman interprets Nietzsche’s “family romance” as explicitly non-racial or biological but as “typological” (Kofman 1994): the baseness of Nietzsche’s sister and mother allegedly have nothing to do with blood. Nietzsche’s further fantastical associations in his family history with “great men” of history (Caesar, Napoleon, Dionysus) that he lays claim to as his ancestors further illustrate Nietzsche’s non-biological, ironic usage of kinship and inheritance. It is not blood that makes destiny, but an act of the will: “as if making a mockery of himself and his pretension to such a lofty and distant origin, Nietzsche wants to make it understood that true kinship is not of a physiological but a typological order” (Kofman 1994, 48). In this way, Nietzsche’s attempt at affirming his inheritances is as much a (re)creation thereof—it becomes an act of the will. Bernasconi shows that the distinction between the typological and the biological
does not hold for 19th century race-discourse: “what made racism so pervasive in the nineteenth century was the intertwining of the natural and the moral” (Bernasconi 2017, 59).

Nietzsche admits to the wounding at the hands of his mother and sister, who, let us repeat, he describes as a hell-machine and poisonous vermin (giftiges Gewürm), inducing “unspeakable terror” (unsägliches Grauen). Whereas in the first version he concedes that this is also, however faintly, part of himself, in the second version the poison comes from outside, from below, dragging an otherwise pure nobleman down. This gives a clue to the opposition of the (masculine) master-morality and the (feminine) slave-morality and the function of their separation. Can they really be as separate as Nietzsche wishes them to be? Despite his occasional admissions of their contamination and his double inheritance, Nietzsche’s investment in strength and nobility maintains the policing order of segregation and purity that sustains his own sense of identity. The different versions of Ecce Homo seem like two distinct attempts at affirming the inheritances: one by claiming the mixture of blood as giving him the best vantage point on questions of life and value, and the other one as a claiming to the purity of his blood. This is not the distinction between purity-thinking and impurity-thinking but can be seen as two modes of purity-thinking: one claiming pure purity and the other pure impurity. Again, returning to Bernasconi, in Nietzsche and 19th century biocentric thought more generally, these are not mere metaphors but refer directly to blood and race. Bernasconi argues that what made Nietzsche distinct from other 19th century German racism is not that the absence of it, but a particular variation of it: whereas most Germans started to argue in eugenic fashion for breeding the purity of a Germanic race, Nietzsche believed that the way to breed the strongest race was precisely by mixing certain types. Nietzsche’s gay science and experimentation with life beyond Man thus are not only the philosopher’s or warrior’s acts of self-experimentation, but also the eugenic biopolitical experiments in breeding.

The hateful language of vengeance and poison aimed at his mother and sister is nothing new. In the Genealogy, he takes as its target the resentful lowly humanity in general and women in particular:

the will of the sick to display any form of superiority, its instinct for secret paths which lead to a tyranny over the healthy—where is it not to be found, this will to power of the weakest! The sick woman in particular: her techniques of domination that end, the sick woman spared nothing living, nothing dead, she disinters the most deeply buried things (the Bogos say: woman is a hyena). Look behind the scenes of every family, every organization, every community: the struggle of the sick against the healthy is everywhere to be found—a silent struggle for the most part, with poison in small doses, with pinpricks, with sly games of long-suffering expressions, but also with that Pharisee tactic of the sick (…) compulsion, and tyranny are unsurpassed in their refinement. (Nietzsche 2008, 102)
From the move to understand Nietzsche’s opposition between *activity* and *reactivity* as two sides of the same coin of what I have sketched as Euromodern Developmental Man, and thereby opening up Nietzsche’s binary to a hopefully less Euromodern understanding of relationality and responsivity for an immanent ethics of uncharted becomings outside notions of predatory virility or universalizing morality. Within this reading, what does this mean for Nietzsche’s philosophy of *affirmation*? I suggest that Nietzsche’s insistence on valorizing and naturalizing the Hobbesian side of Euromodern Man leads to a misguided notion of affirmation. Nietzsche’s infatuation with the inheritance of master-morality that runs counter to the (slave-)moralizing hegemony in history subjects the philosophy of affirmation to the reactive logic of purity instead of embracing the impure inheritances, including the unwelcome inheritances. Although in many ways Nietzsche’s work is about how to creatively transform and affirm even the unwelcome inheritances that are life-stultifying, he ultimately entrenches a reactive logic of purity (and sometimes pure impurity) in his call to segregation:

Away with this shameful weakening of sensibility! That the sick should *not* infect the healthy with their sickness—which is what such a weakening would represent—this ought to be the prime concern on earth—but that requires above all that the healthy should remain segregated from the sick, protected even from the sight of the sick, so that they do not mistake themselves for the sick (…) the higher should not reduce itself to an instrument of the lower, the pathos of distance should keep even their missions separate to all eternity! (…) they alone are the guarantors of the future, they alone are under an obligation to the future of mankind. (Nietzsche 2008, 103)

Does Nietzsche offer a different view on relationality and affirmation outside the logic of purity and segregation? Resisting Wynter’s strong conclusions about the blind replication of the sociogenic symbolic codes of the descriptive statement (Wynter 1999), I want to linger with the question and show a moment of hesitation in Nietzsche. In Nietzsche’s earlier aphorisms (especially his middle period), the tone and observations are often more nuanced and open exploration of new pathways (Abbey 2000). Here we find one atypical aphorism that seems to suggest that the conditions conducive to flourishing and earthly affirmation are less the alleged “animalistic” drives to hierarchy, cruelty, expansion and imposition, but the quiet web of sociality in which human life is embedded:

those social expressions of a friendly disposition, those smiles of the eyes, those handclasps, that comfortable manner with which almost all human action is as a rule encompassed (…) it is the continual occupation of humanity, as it were its light-waves in which everything grows; especially within the narrowest circle, within the family, is life made to flourish only through this benevolence. Good-naturedness, friendliness, politeness of the heart are never-failing emanations of the unegoistic drive and have played a far greater role in
the construction of culture than those much more celebrated expressions of it called pity, compassion, and self-sacrifice. (Nietzsche 1996, 38)

Nietzsche cloaks his observations in a gentleman-like language of dignified benevolence, warding off language that would make such an observation appear soft. Nevertheless, it offers a different picture of responsive relationality as the conditions of flourishing rather than the fantasy of the motherless Child that Nietzsche dreamt of.

_Inheriting Nietzsche: rereading Nietzsche as spectral heir_

One reason for turning to Nietzsche in the context of unlearning and respons-ability is the special place that Nietzsche as a figure occupies in the cultural imaginary and its appeal for young men in particular—an identification with an independent free spirit who distinguishes himself from the herd. Within the discipline of philosophy, this is considered irrelevant. Yet, I wonder whether maintaining a pure distinction between serious scholarship and the non-scholarly uses and abuses of Nietzsche does not eclipse something significant. It seems relevant to me to suspend this distinction as methodological experiment of reading as a spectral heir (unlearning, critical affirmation) rather than a legitimate heir (in the name of the Father). This mode of reading philosophy, which keeps the social, cultural and psychological impact and influence in mind, seems to me an important part of a method of unlearning and response-ability, and resists a simple dismissal of these influences as merely an adolescent misunderstanding or perversion of the pure/purified philosophy. In this way, it is also my attempt at spectrally inheriting, i.e., affirming Nietzsche’s legacy and influence on me, as a critical and creative selection and response, to avoid the uses and abuses of Nietzsche as the lone thinker who needs to distinguish himself from others—a sign of masculine reactivity/reactive masculinity cloaked as a self-valorization of an aristocracy of the mind. I am taking myself not as a unique case here but as example for understan-diing the appeal of a certain figure of Nietzsche from the question of unlearning. As many a lone and isolated teenager, I was strongly drawn to this figure of Nietzsche, which seemed to justify the sense of isolation from others and give one’s own separation a certain dignity and weight. Although at a conscious level I did not identify with the themes of hierarchy and valorization of warrior-values, and focused on skepticism towards authority, institutions, morality and Protestantism, and themes of independent thinking and self-creation, the affective reading experience nevertheless solidifies and offers something like a metaphorical script for the experience of isolation. His psychological probing

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81 As Hartman puts it, the autobiographical example “is not a personal story that folds onto itself; it’s not about navel gazing, it’s really about trying to look at social and historical processes, as an example of them” (cited in Sharpe 2016, 8).
of the power-games of appropriation and domination, which are often cloaked in moral terms within human relationships, made me obsessed with attaining emotional autonomy out of respect for myself and the Other. From this, it became increasingly difficult to embrace interdependence and mutual care—though my desire thereof, of course, remained strongly present. The sense of separateness both functions as a cause of suffering and as a mark of distinction, to refuse to give in to the world of others who are deemed shallow and hypocritical.

It is strange to think back on how gender featured in this in quite an obvious way that completely escaped my perception: the existential drama of individual self-creation vs. herd-mentality contained an implicit judgement of pop culture and fashion associated with femininity. Nietzsche’s notorious misogyny does not have to be taken up literally in order to have its effect, chiefly in the gendered metaphysical script of masculine independence of spirit and feminized herd-culture. The (by no means conscious) association of femininity and herd-mentality tended to foreclose an openness to what someone else is facing, struggling with and trying to make sense of. The figure of Nietzsche feeds into a metaphysics of loneliness that makes the journey of figuring things out and reconfiguring the self not a relational journey of co-becoming and learning to be responsive but one of isolation and judgement of both self and other, leaving the fragmented sociogenic order in place. One important lesson for me was that Nietzsche as prophet of misunderstood masculinity leads not to affirmation but entrenches the reactive psychology that relies on the fragmentation of self and other (“I am X because you are Y”) that conceals sociogenic factors of alienation through an injunction to activity, independence and willpower.

Looking back, I believe I was strongly in need of a voice like James Baldwin’s rather than Nietzsche, someone who explores existential questions of masculinity through his desire, vulnerability and resistances to it, within the pressures and weight of sociogenic dis/figuring through race, gender and class. But how would I have perceived and responded to a voice like Baldwin’s at that time? Could I even have been in a mindset to be perceptive and receptive to the messages that I needed to hear? My “fragmented perception” (see chapter 6) of the Euromodern genre of Man based on pure identities, fragmentation and hierarchy, would most likely have reduced Baldwin to social commentary about Blackness or poverty or queerness in the United States, instead of listening to a witness whose messages about power, love, affirmation, self-transformation and interpersonal relationality (within systems of multiple interlocking/intermeshed oppressions) I needed to hear. The first time I picked up a cheap paperback of

82 This is not to say that there is no metaphorical ambivalence of gender in Nietzsche (Derrida 1979; Oliver 1995; Schrift 1994).
Baldwin on a book market (it was *If Beale Street Could Talk*, I believe), the
description on the back cover boxed it into the category of “social commentary”
explicitly saying it did not have literary greatness. The messages of Baldwin
would have already been spatially and temporally confined to the particular, in
contrast to the universal figure of Nietzsche as philosopher proper (that is, white,
male and dead) who continues to raise existential questions from beyond the
grave, where the historical distance gives extra weight and dignity to the voice
rather than being a sign of its time and place. Reading Nietzsche as a spectral
heir means an attempt at unlearning *and* affirmation, at learning to live well with
the ghosts, not an attempted exorcism of impure traces of Nietzsche or a former
self.

**Conclusion**

This chapter continued and concluded the first part *Socio-Genealogies of
Morality and Identity*. The previous chapters focused on what Wynter might call
the symbolic codes proper to the Euromodern genre(s) of Man through the lens
of developmentalism, im/maturity and the civilizational figure of the Child that
circumscribe the ideas and praxis of human subjectivity, ordering of temporality
and morality. Then, I proposed an alternative to Wynter’s answer to how these
symbolic codes are inhabited and inherited. Whereas for Wynter, transmission
is described in terms of a quasi-behavioral replicating machinery (which
potentiated double consciousness can overturn), I made critical and selective
usage of Narvaez’ (ontogenic/phylogenic) theory of developmental psychology
based on different early childhood experiences. If read critically through a
sociogenic and genealogical lens, it opens a view to how childhood subjection
and subjectivation in its various modes generate or cultivate tendencies to binary
systems of pure identity and transcendental morality. At the same time, it
acknowledges a multiple inheritance that is both transgenerational and
embodied in lived experience of responsivity that always insists and pries open
the closure of the binary systems of identity and morality that Wynter examines.
In other words, no one is fully defined and determined by the subjection or
subjectivation according to socio-genealogies of violence; there is always an
excess of response-enabling inheritance that allows for a partial openness to
other futural relational becomings neither liberated from nor fixated by reactive
identity and morality. I turned to (and against) Nietzsche to develop a language
for this double or multiple inheritance, as well as suggesting a fruitful cross-
reading of sociogeny and genealogy. Whereas Wynter lays out transhistorical
structural “codes” of identity and morality (universal in structure, relative in
contents; transhistorical until the emergence of double consciousness),
Nietzschean genealogy argues for their ontological and psycho-existential
emergence through historico-political violence: the claim to pure identities is
concomitant with the rise of transcendental morality-systems, which originate in the experience of powerlessness in the context of hierarchy.

Nietzsche offers an analysis of how the reactive binarisms of self/Other (pure identity) and anti-earthly, anti-relational systems of transcendental morality (Good/Evil instead of good/bad) take root in the lived experience and transgenerational legacies of powerlessness through a violence endured by the body. Putting his patri-archal racist fictions of (pre)history aside, I suggested that this can be read as scenes of childhood subjection and subjectivation. In the light of the tenets of Developmental Man laid out earlier (hierarchy, severance, denial of vulnerability, etc.), the violence and powerlessness Nietzsche speaks of as begetting reactive typologies can be seen as a violation and severing of the response-enabling web of relationality that is constitutive of every inheriting and becoming. Spectral inheritance avoids the logic of purity that makes one defined either responsive or reactive inheritance, acknowledging the constitutive and inseparable influences of both inheritances in everyone. By proposing to read this in terms of childhood subjection and subjectivation, decolonial and Indigenous approaches show the relativity and historicity of Euromodern patri-archal modes of hierarchical childrearing based on civilizational-developmental notions of im/maturity and the Child.

I thus proposed to recast the conceptual pair activity/reactivity in terms of responsivity/reactivity: within the immanent tradition of potential/potestas Nietzsche partakes in, I argued that in order to avoid the virile language and masculinist bias of Nietzsche and Deleuze, these terms must always be understood relationally as response-enabling/response-debilitating (see also chapter 7). This preempts the Nietzschean impetus to attribute hierarchical value and judge beings hierarchically as strong and weak, arguing instead for the always-already socio-political and environmental factors that are at play in enabling some and debilitating others in their responsive becoming. This would also shift the emphasis in Deleuze and Guattari’s figure of the rhizome: instead of focusing on the expansionistic sprouting of each singular element, the focus on the mycelium network emphasizes the embedded relationality through which individuality can flourish and to which it returns, without ever transcending the preceding relations it emerged from and partakes in.

Genealogy, as already mentioned in the previous chapter, further troubles the phylogenetic/ontogenetic perspective that employs the language of natural origin from an evolutionary perspective (Narvaez); the latter leads to the colonial temporality of a (Euro)modern aberration of a supposed natural state of humanity, which is ridden with questionable normative assumptions about the natural human. The genealogical approach that displaces origin and emphasizes only the series of historical accidents that produce different becomings simultaneously highlights the irreducibility of political violence in the constitution of geopolitically and intersectionally differently positioned subjects, as well as queering becoming by eroding any possible normative type
of human anyone can be measured against (Puar 2017). The latter could not be further from Nietzsche’s intention, of course, as he was primarily preoccupied with setting up a hierarchical scale of values, in which he doubled down on antiblackness and misogyny of his inherited descriptive statement of Man. I therefore found it important to examine Nietzsche’s own cultural imaginary and writing-strategies that prevent an an-archical relationality and ethics of response-ability, as well as Nietzsche in the current cultural imaginary (his appeal to young men in particular), as a mode of spectrally inheriting and unlearning the reactive and hierarchical tendencies of his thought and legacy.

The next part continues what would be an ethics of response-ability (in contrast to transcendental morality), which emphasizes impurity, unlearning and co-becoming. Lugones’ vocabulary of modern pure selves premised on hierarchical fragmentation of pure identities, as opposed to impure relational selves, flesh out the framework developed here in more or less Nietzschean terms of transcendental morality and substantive selves. Lugones broaches an approach to response-ability as always amid the thick historicity marked both by the inheritance of the fragmented hierarchies of Euromodernity, yet always maintaining the possibility of recuperating another mode of relationality and (co-)(b)ecoming from other inheritances. The notion of response-ability as unlearning acknowledges this impure impurity, which is never able to transcend or exorcize the unwelcome inheritances, yet is also not defined by it. The emphasis of feminist ethics of response-ability will then focus on the thread of Developmental Man’s disavowal of vulnerability, which transforms vulnerability into powerlessness. As we have seen with and against Nietzsche, it is this powerlessness that propels subjectivities into binary reactive systems of pure identity and transcendental morality.
Vignette

In Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals, Alexis Pauline Gumbs tells the story of reports that “dolphin mothers sing to their babies while they are in the womb, and for a few weeks after so they can learn their names. Not only that, but according to the report, the rest of the pod holds space for that learning, quieting their other usual sounds so this can happen” (Gumbs 2020, 31). However, as much as Gumbs wishes to rejoice in such a beautiful practice, she refuses to gloss over the fact that it has been observed in captivity—of a mother who gave birth at Six Flags Discovery Kingdom: “It matters to me that this practice of singing, communal listening, was observed not in the open ocean but in the confines of captive dolphin birth. I think of Debbie Africa, who gave birth secretly in prison, how the other women prisoners used sounds to shield her birth process. They protected the two of them from guards so that she and the baby were able to share precious time together, undetected for days” (Gumbs 2020, 31). Is the dolphins’ collective praxis of holding, singing, welcoming, protecting, a “natural” practice, or a response to the situation of captivity? The holding-singing-welcoming ceremony helps to unlearn this question and re-channel the desires contained in that question, affirming that this praxis connects to an enabling inheritance of/through the social-maternal-ancestral, and the communally produced conditions that enable a futurity stolen away from the conditions of defuturing debilitation.
PART 2: FEMINIST ETHICS OF RESPONSE-ABILITY

Chapter 6: Lugones and Levinas Face-to-Face: Response-ability as Unlearning

With whose blood were my eyes crafted?
–DONNA HARAWAY

Superiority? Inferiority? Why not simply try to touch the other, feel the other, discover each other?
–FRANTZ FANON

Introduction

This chapter stages a missed encounter between Emmanuel Levinas’ and María Lugones’ explorations of the face-to-face with the aim of redefining the concept of response-ability in terms of temporality and relationality from and for a feminist ethics. It thus places Lugones and Levinas in con-frontation, in the etymological and original meaning of the word, “bringing two parties face to face for an examination and discovery of truth” (Etymology online n.d.).

Levinas is perhaps the most influential canonical philosopher of ethics whose influence is felt much in feminist (Chanter 2001; Oliver 2001; Butler 2006; Cavarero 2016; Barad 2007; to name just a few) and decolonial philosophy (Dussel 1985; Maldonado-Torres 2008; Slabodsky 2010). Levinas’ critique of the egological and sovereign project of Western philosophy in favor of positing an originary ethics based on the primacy of the Other (alterity) finds strong resonances with decolonial and feminist approaches. For feminist philosophy in particular, the centrality of the categories of responsibility and vulnerability in Levinas’ thought continue to inform contemporary debates in ontology and ethics. In this chapter I will focus on the notion of responsibility—both indebted to and as a critique of Levinas’ work. In the next chapter, I will turn to discussions on vulnerability primarily through Judith Butler who also acknowledges their indebtedness to Levinas among others for their vulnerability-based ethico-political paradigm.

Levinas places not the ego but responsibility for the Other at the heart of subjectivity:

I speak of responsibility as the essential, primary and fundamental structure of subjectivity. For I describe subjectivity in ethical terms. Ethics, here, does not
supplement a preceding existential base; the very node of the subjective is knotted in ethics understood as responsibility. (cited in Cavarero 2016, 167)

Kelly Oliver’s work on witnessing and response ethics is consistent in its feminist taking up of Levinas’ legacy that defines subjectivity as constituted by response from and to others:

Responsivity is both the prerequisite for subjectivity and one of its definitive features. Subjectivity is constituted through response, responsiveness, or response-ability and not the other way around. We do not respond because we are subjects; rather, it is responsiveness and relationality that make subjectivity and psychic life possible. In this sense, response-ability precedes and constitutes subjectivity, which is why, following Levinas, I argue that the structure of subjectivity is fundamentally ethical. We are, by virtue of our ability to respond to others, and therefore we have a primary obligation to our founding possibility, response-ability itself. We have a responsibility to open up rather than close off the possibility of response, both from ourselves and from others. (Oliver 2004, xviii)

Or put formulaically: we are response-able for the Other’s response-ability (Oliver 2001). In Oliver’s formulation, the commitment to one’s own constitutive possibility of being response-able through having been/being responded to, i.e., the alterity constitutive of any self, means a commitment to a context or environment where others are enabled to be responsive themselves. It a relationally response-enabling ethics committed to the flourishing of all, which need not remain anthropocentric as it does in Levinas.

At the same time, the politics of Levinas’ ethical paradigm are under scrutiny given its antiblack (Moten 2018), anti-Palestinian (Zalloua 2017) and patriarchal tenets (Chanter 2001; Brody 2001). This is the Levinas-paradox that many feminist, antiracist and other philosophers have faced: how is it possible that the most prominent philosopher of ethics within the Western tradition, who always claims the precedence of ethics over ontology, relies on and forcefully reproduces an antiblack, anti-Palestinian and misogynist conception of the human?

Can this problematic be separated from Levinas’ theory of ethics and subjectivity as responsibility? Or does the concept of responsibility itself need to be reworked? I argue that decolonial feminist philosopher Lugones’ ethico-political model of the face-to-face (2003) offers a desirable and necessary alternative to (and can serve as a corrective of) the Levinasian paradigm: whereas Levinas’ uni-versal transcendental model of ethics unfolds against a constitutive backdrop of antiblack patriarchal fragmentation, Lugones’ ethics of the face-to-face encounter explicitly deals with the unlearning of fragmenting perception in a processual encounter of “co-becoming” (Lykke 2022) or “becoming-with” (Ortega 2016) the Other in their multiplicity and opacity. It addresses the problems of response-debilitating fragmentation that undergirds Levinas’ perception and theorizing. In this imaginary encounter between
Levinas and Lugones, I read Lugones’ ethics of the face-to-face as precisely offering a *response* to the Levinas paradox, as a *responsive* ethic of *unlearning* the fragmented perception that Levinas does not address, which thereby returns to trouble Levinas’ ethics as first philosophy.

Through Lugones’ reflections on the face-to-face encounter, I argue for a reconceptualization of the meaning of responsibility. I agree with Oliver’s formulation of the constitutive force of responsivity and response-ability for subjectivity and the primacy of ethics it implies, thereby displacing the subject at the origin of the world in favor of a structure of ethicality through which subjectivity can emerge in the first place. Lugones adds an important dimension by addressing and working through the ways fragmentation is inhabited, reproduced and transmitted in the encounter with the Other. She asks what it takes to unlearn the sedimented fragmented habits of perception that shut out responsivity to the Other and debilitate the Other’s response-ability. Lugones’ approach to the face-to-face adds a clear temporal component to Levinas’ and Oliver’s notion of response-ability: one of unlearning (thereby opening up the relation to the plural past83 in ways that are more response-enabling and less response-debilitating) and co-becoming (an unchartered and (re)creative becoming that reworks the relational past for futural experiments of response-enabling sociality and coalition). Next to this temporal fleshing out of response-ability, Lugones’ conceptualization of the face-to-face, traversing other worlds, and coalition, clarifies what a commitment to *alterity* must entail: a commitment to the *impure multiplicity* of the Other and to their *opacity*.84

I argue that these dimensions of responsibility (unlearning and co-becoming) and alterity (impure multiplicity and respect for opacity) remain wanting in Levinas, through which his patriarchal, antiblack, anti-Palestinian universal worldview ends up undercutting his own theory of ethics that sought to displace the sovereign subject of Western philosophy. Ironically, Levinas’ ethics of alterity remains tied to a heritage for the legitimate heirs of the Graeco-Judeo-Christian universal tradition that excludes the “infantile” and “exotic” Other who fails to live up to the mature seriousness of (Graeco-Judeo-Christian) Man.

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83 The notion of the relation to the plural past will be explored further in chapter 8 through *hauntology* and Alia Al-Saji’s work.

84 For the right to opacity, see Glissant: “Agree not merely to the right to difference but, carrying this further, agree also to the right to opacity that is not enclosure within an impenetrable autarchy but subsistence within an irreducible singularity. Opacities can coexist and converge, weaving fabrics. To understand these truly one must focus on the texture of the weave and not on the nature of its components” (Glissant 1997, 190). For Lugones on opacity, see Lugones (2006). For explicitly bringing these two threads together, see Vázquez (2020). Other explorations of opacities that I am indebted to are the approach to the archive in Saidiya Hartman’s work (1997, 2008) and the work of Saodat Ismailova (ed. Bloemheuvel 2023).
A few methodological remarks on my reading strategies in this chapter and the dissertation as a whole: Lugones was an Argentinian philosopher who has been influential in feminist theory since the late 1980s, especially with her essay “World-Traveling, Playfulness and a Loving Perception” (1987). Her earlier essays deal with the question of resistant subjectivity in the face of multiple oppressions and the possibility of coalition-building across differences rather than based on sameness (Lugones 2003). More recently, her influence is mostly apparent within decolonial theory for her pivotal contributions and interventions and contributions, in particular her concept of coloniality of gender (Lugones 2007; 2008; 2010; 2020). There seems to be a discrepancy in reception within feminist theory on the one hand and (the primarily male voices within) decolonial theory on the other hand: The latter do often cite her work on coloniality of gender but a sustained engagement with her other work often remains lacking.

Interestingly, Levinas does remain central for many decolonial theorists for a decolonial ethico-political paradigm of otherness (particularly in Dussel 1985 and Maldonado-Torres 2008). Given the antiblack, anti-Palestinian and patriarchal circumscription of Levinas’ thought, I am surprised that Lugones’ more complex exploration of the face-to-face, which does not gloss over differences in subject-position and power but precisely addresses them, has not been considered in this discussion. At the same time, the canonicity of Lugones within decoloniality might also obstruct rather than invite a transdisciplinary contamination that puts Lugones in dialogue with other philosophers. Although Lugones has painstakingly worked to critically nuance, counter and work through the pitfalls of identity politics (Carastathis 2019), the framing as a decolonial theorist (in a narrow sense) might turn her legacy into one of non-coalitional identity politics within academia, or what Chela Sandoval calls “academic apartheid” (Sandoval 2000).

Lugones had many reasons to break with citational practices within philosophy and increasingly embed her philosophy in (and write for) resistant communities and a tradition of women of color feminist theory. Nevertheless, I believe that its critical interlocution remains important as a critical mirror beyond her intended audience. Such cross-readings can avoid the tendencies of citational and disciplinary enclosures.

From the point of view of feminist philosophy taking up the (trans)generational task of decolonizing knowledge, this cross-reading is not meant as a moralizing framework where Levinas is a representative of Western

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85 This is not to suggest that decolonial philosophers have ignored this dimension. Much work is about drawing on a Levinasian framework through a critique of his Eurocentrism and making it geopolitically more useful (e.g. Maldonado-Torres 2008; Dussel 1985).
hybris and Lugones the decolonial alternative. Indeed, despite my critical engagement with Levinas, there is much impactful critical ethical and political work done inspired by him and much of the discussions on relationality, response-ability and vulnerability are in one way or another indebted to his work. Reading them together is precisely aimed at undoing disciplinary decadence (Gordon 2011) that avoids the closure of disciplinarity through canonical citational practices and emphasizes the need for transdisciplinary philosophizing. My engagement with their work and putting them into dialogue is part of the argument for the constructive and coalitional potential of cross-reading philosophers and other theorists outside of academic apartheid—both to avoid institutional tendencies of self-enclosure of (some versions of) continental philosophy and (some versions of) decolonial theory. What Lugones sketches out as an “exercise in impurity” (Lugones 2003, 123) is also a guiding principle at the methodological level. The structure of the argument thus follows from my commitment to impure impure methodologies inspired by Sandoval’s coalitional methodology of the oppressed (2000) and to imploding the entrenched canonicity of continental philosophy (Maldonado-Torres 2010).

The first part of this chapter discusses Levinas’ concepts of responsibility and an-archy, proceeded by a critical reading of Levinas from the framework set up in this dissertation: I argue that Levinas’ distinction between the Saying/Said in Otherwise Than Being (1981) is undercut by a third term of what he derogatively calls “babbling”—as merely “infantile” or “primitive” expression with little to no ethical and metaphysical significance. The maturity-trope is at work here to hierarchically differentiate between those who are human properly and those who are immature and undeveloped. Next to this reading of Saying/Said/Babbling, in a reading of “Meaning and Sense” (Levinas 1987), I show how Levinas’ conservative and Eurocentric engagement with political decolonization entrenches a West vs. the Rest narrative that recenters the West as generously bestowing meaning onto an Other who remains silent. Levinas is fearful of the multiplicity of meaning that ensues with decolonization and argues for a universal ethics, which can only be derived from the Western tradition. Positioning himself as a legitimate heir of the Graeco-Judeo-Christian legacy, Levinas again differentiates between humanity proper and its more primitive (babbling, or in a different context, dancing) Other. In the second part, I introduce Lugones’ concepts of fragmentation and multiplicity in relation to a critique of the modern subject as a “lover of purity” (Lugones 2003, 126) relying on the fragmentation of self and others. I link these concepts to a phenomenological exploration of Lugones’ concepts (Ortega 2016) of hierarchical perception that reproduces society’s oppression, which she explores under different names (e.g. “arrogant perception,” “boomerang perception,” “homogenizing perception,” the “colonizing gaze” among other terms), which I will refer to as fragmented perception.
Special attention will be paid to the role of self-deception, which I compare to Gordon’s usage of the Sartrean category of bad faith (Gordon 1999). Developing the vocabulary built up with Nietzsche and Wynter in the previous chapters, this chapter explores the reactive logic of fragmenting perception as linked to the desire for pure identity and rooted in fragmentation. Moving to the multiplicitious self and the logic of impurity, I argue that Lugones offers an ethical theory of the face-to-face based on unlearning reactive fragmented perception toward a responsive ethics and a coalitional politics. In addition to Oliver’s helpful and politically critical revision of a Levinasian ethical paradigm that focuses on responsivity to the singular other, Lugones (read in conjunction with Alia Al-Saji; see chapter 8) highlights the roles of memory and temporality: the decolonizing feminist ethics of unlearning entails response-ability toward not only the other and the self, but also response-ability to the plural past. This is the work of “reconfiguring” (Al-Saji 2018) the relation to the past as an individual and collective exercise in unlearning reactive/fragmented/hierarchical/colonizing modes of perception and relearning/recreating non-hierarchical modes of sociality and ethicality that allows for the flourishing of all.

The emphasis on memory in world-traversing coalitional work in Lugones, with the help of Al-Saji’s work on temporality, helps expanding Oliver’s Levinasian definition of response-ability for the Other’s response-ability through the temporality of unlearning and co-becoming, and redefining alterity in terms of impure multiplicity and the right to respect for opacity.

Since this chapter introduces many terms to introduce both Levinas and Lugones, a short-cut through this chapter (focusing on the interpretation of response-ability with less attention paid to the conceptual landscape of Levinas and Lugones) is possible by moving on to the sections “The Levinas Paradox” and the conclusion.

Part 1: Levinas: responsibility, alterity, babbling and decolonization

Levinas and responsibility

The notion of responsibility in Levinas inherits a Jewish tradition that links it to alterity. For Levinas, responsibility, intertwined with the thought of alterity, displaces the sovereign self in favor of a relational understanding of the self that is vulnerable to and bound by the Other. The Hebrew word for responsibility immediately implies this relation to the Other:

In Hebrew the word “responsibility” comes from the word “response.” It implies existence of an other who has legitimate claims on my conduct, for, or to, whom I am accountable. The Hebrew equivalent, achrayut, derives from the word acher, meaning “an other.” Responsibility is intrinsically relational (...) Achrayut contains the respect for the absolute alterity of the other; it is to
alterity that we have a responsibility. Because of the unicity of the other in the world, I am responsible for the other as part of my responsibility to the world. It is the fact that every person is other, *acher*, that makes us responsible, *achrayut*. (Topolski 2015, 131)

In *Otherwise than Being* and in his other later writings, Levinas articulates his ethics as first philosophy in terms of responsibility for an anteceding otherness prior to intentionality, ego, sovereignty. In the encounter with the face of the Other, “the I loses its sovereign self-coincidence” (Levinas 1987, 97) and inescapably confronts this antecedence, which manifests as a call to responsibility: “the subject is a responsibility before being an intentionality” (Levinas 1987, 134). Such a notion of responsibility breaks with the hegemonic “juridico-moral idea of personal responsibility,” which is premised on the sovereignty of the individual subject—a conception that emerged with the bourgeois philosophies at times of social enclosure and erosion of existing social bonds (Diprose 2009). Levinas precisely finds responsibility in the address that pierces through and leaves the sovereign self undone. Responsibility manifests as the content of the pre-original “subjectivity prior to the ego” (Levinas 1987, 133). This undoing of the sovereign self through its call to responsibility is a “traumatism, a responsibility for which it had not taken any decision but which, closed up in itself, it cannot escape” (Levinas 1987, 133). Levinas introduces the temporality of the antecedence of inescapable responsibility through the categories of the *saying* and the *said*.

*Responsibility* for the other, in its antecedence to my freedom, its antecedence to the present and to representation, *is a passivity more passive than all passivity* (…) *exposure of exposedness, expression, saying*. This exposure is the frankness, sincerity, *veracity of saying*. Not saying dissimulating itself and protecting itself in the said, just giving out words in the face of the other, but saying uncovering itself (…) *Substitution*, at the limit of being, *ends up in saying*, in the giving of signs, giving a sign of this giving of signs, *expressing oneself*. This expression is antecedent to all thematization in the said, but it is not a babbling or still primitive or childish form of saying. (Levinas 1981, 15; emphasis added)

In short, “responsibility, the ‘pre-original,’ is a *saying*” distinct from the *said* (Levinas 1987, 133). The said is the immanent realm of any determinate expressed, whereas the saying is the trace that enables all forms of the said: a past that has never been present. This is reminiscent of a Heideggerian understanding of language as an inheritance and a dwelling, as well as his ontico-ontological difference.86 No one ever invents a language but inherits as

86 Maldonado-Torres (2007) calls the difference between Levinas and Heidegger the “trans-ontological difference” (beyond being) as opposed to the ontico-ontological difference (between being and beings).
an inexhaustible resource that one responds to and through which one becomes response-able: in the responsiveness to the saying lies the generative openness of the trace. The expressed contents (the said) are grounded in the non-ground of the trace. It does not begin with the command (arche), but with the antecedent otherness (an-arche) from which all finite expressions stem: if the sovereign self emerges as the arche (beginning, command) of himself (gender intended), then responsibility in the face of otherness is an-archic. Ethics is the transcendental antecedence of an-archy that calls on the I in their encounter with the face of another. This relation to the saying opens up the realm of an-archical responsibility to anterior otherness that transcends yet gives all immanent determinable contents, the trace of an immemorial time outside of recuperation as a conscious memory or history. The responsibility in the face of the Other is a “traumatism,” a wound and opening of the sovereign individual whose infinite heteronomous indebtedness of a subjectivity prior to the ego becomes manifest in its inescapability. Although much has been written about the saying and the said as the organizing terms for Levinas’ later writings, less attention has been paid to the third organizing term which is needed in its disavowal to maintain the loftiness and transcendence of the saying: “This expression is antecedent to all thematization in the said, but it is not a babbling or still primitive or childish form of saying” (Levinas 1981, 15; emphasis added). After a detour of reading Levinas’ essay “Meaning and Sense,” in which he deals with the question of meaning and ethics in an age of decolonization, I will return to this dual notion of saying/said and show how it relies on the third notion of babbling, illustrating how Levinas’ responsibility is overdetermined by an infantilizing, sexualizing and racializing grammar.

Levinas on decolonization

In “Meaning and Sense” (“La Signification et le Sens,” written in 1972), Levinas reflects on the status of philosophy in the era of decolonization. Throughout the text, there is a suggested parallel between the Western history of ideas and political history. The end of Platonism based on the totality and unity of rationality gave way to a pluralistic understanding of meaning, moving away from the ideal of a non-cultural, rational representation of truth to a situation where the role of language, metaphor and culture is irreducible to the meanings produced. This is the anti-Platonism of “contemporary philosophy” (by which he mainly refers to the influence of Bergson and Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology): “the intelligible is not conceivable outside of the becoming which suggests it (…) the access is part of the meaning itself” (Levinas 1987, 83–84). If Platonism denotes the belief in a privileged culture beyond any particular historical culture, which “as it were, coloniz[es] the world,” then the era of decolonization reflects the loss of such a dream of totality. The language of “loss” is not accidental: Levinas, although critical of the dream of totality,
nevertheless laments the \textit{loss of orientation} that allegedly comes with the pluralism of meaning. Decolonization is not only a political but an ontological moment of disorientation:

The most recent, boldest and most influential ethnography [a reference to Lévi-Strauss] maintains the multiple cultures on the same plane. The political work of decolonization is thus attached to an ontology—to a thought of being, interpreted in its multiple and multivocal cultural meaning. And this multivocity of meaning of being—this essential disorientation—is perhaps the modern expression of atheism. (Levinas 1987, 86)

The essay proposes, within this era and philosophy of disoriented pluralism, a new, universal grounding, which he finds in the ethical encounter with the Other, which is a transcendence from the plural irreducibly historical meanings on the level of immanence. His ethics is the suggested “unique sense” that provides an orientation against the disorientation of plural meaning. Levinas posits his transcendental ethics as a response \textit{both} to the Platonic dream of totality that characterizes Western (or, rather, Euromodern) philosophy \textit{and} the disintegrated pluralism as a space of immanence and war, which would undermine ethics and orientation. Cultural pluralism is a “crisis in monotheism” and a transcendental ethics of the encounter with the face of another is its cure (Levinas 1987, 89). This is Levinas’ argument for a “return to Platonism in a new way” where it is possible to “judge civilizations on the basis of ethics” (Levinas 1987, 101). Not only does the undermining of a universal sense through the plurality of meaning require a transcendental universal orientation to prevent plurality from collapsing into the absurdity of relativism, \textit{the plurality of meaning is itself a discovery and generous bestowal of the West onto its Other:}

Philosophy had to denounce the excellence of Western culture to be culturally and historically conditioned. Philosophy thus had to rejoin contemporary ethnology. It is then that Platonism is overcome! But it is overcome in the name of the \textit{generosity} of Western thought itself, which, catching sight of the \textit{abstract} man in men, proclaimed the absolute value of the person, and the encompassed in the respect it bears it the cultures in which these persons stand or in which they express themselves. \textit{Platonism is overcome with the very means which the universal thought issued from Plato able to understand the particular cultures, which never understood themselves.} (Levinas 1987, 102; emphasis added)

Levinas evokes the works of Lévi-Strauss (for arguing against hierarchies among cultures) and Merleau-Ponty (for arguing for the multifocal emergence of meaning that undermines a universal hierarchical order of meaning) to show the ontological significance of decolonization and pluralism. The entire argument relies on a coloniality of knowledge that always already excludes the non-European Other from being a potential agent or interlocutor (let alone
philosopher), which betrays a fear of the Other’s consciousness, to borrow Gordon’s phrase fear of Black consciousness. Gordon writes: “many (if not most) whites had before presumed they are the world. Thus, they supposedly needed not be in a relationship with anyone beyond other whites. They remained, at the logic of norms, among themselves” (Gordon 2021, 37). The meaning of the non-European other is unintelligible to themself and await discovery and generous bestowal from the West. The coloniality of knowledge transcends the contents of Levinas’ thought (his agreement or disagreement with Lévi-Strauss and Merleau-Ponty) but the Euromodern form that makes the discussion about the (non)value of other cultures a prerogative of the legitimate heirs of Greco-Judaic human civilization premised on the myth of its single trajectory and destiny as un-creolized, self-enclosed center. Through the exclusion of a non-European or non-white consciousness from which meaning and contestation of Levinas’ own values can occur, there is a closure of a circular racist reasoning that a priori excludes any voice that could challenge (t)his totality. Only through the circularity of such racist reasoning can the politics and the ontological implications of decolonization be reinscribed in terms of discovery and generous bestowal from the one culture that is simultaneously among and above all the others. Against the anti-Hegelian ethical “intentions” of a thinker who wants to avoid the totalizing logic of “the same/self [‘integrating’ (aufheben)] the Other via the denial or destruction of his [sic] absolute otherness” (Levinas 1987, 91) who wishes to avoid the logic of Ulysses who traverses the world only to return to the selfsame, a grammar of coloniality overdetermines Levinas’ ways of seeing. For the ethical thinker who speaks of the antecedence of responsibility to the inassimilable otherness of the Other that addresses and calls into question the self, there is a pre-emption of responsibility, a pre-emption of responsiveness to the otherness of most of humanity through the denial of any possible “seriousness.” The address to the self becomes tautological where the world that one inhabits cannot be put into question but where the “conflation of Europe and world” is only confirmed in the alleged ethical moment of sovereignty undone. This violent dismissal of the Other who is not recognizable to Euromodern ways of seeing undergirds Levinas’ fear of the relativism of pluralism, which leaves “us” with indifference and absurdity: “Absurdity consists not in non-sense, but in the isolation of innumerable meanings, in the absence of a sense that orients them. (…) The absurdity lies in multiplicity in pure indifference” (Levinas 1987, 89). The political work of decolonization and its ontological implications can only be

87 Central to Fred Moten’s meditation on Levinas’ racism is through the phenomenological category of “intentionality” next to Levinas’ statement that there is “no racism intended” when he separates the seriousness of humanity from most humans (Moten 2018, 1–64).
rendered in terms of *indifference* if one has *a priori* emptied out the existential and political dimensions of the struggle for a viable world and has denied the Other’s presence in the creation of their meaning. The non-European Other maintains their fixed status as malleable object for and *under Western eyes* (to borrow Chandra Mohanty’s phrase; Mohanty 1984).

To summarize Levinas’ argument: the destiny of the West *qua* destiny of the world has moved dialectically (as a closed totality relying on its disavowed outside) from a colonizing Platonism to pluralism (as achievement and generosity of the West) and is in need of the “unique sense” of ethics as a transcendence of the totality that leaves the colonial order of the world as the sphere of immanence completely intact: “the progress of Western consciousness would no longer consist in purifying thought of the alluvium of cultures and the particularisms of language, which far from signifying the intelligible would perpetuate the *infantile*” (Levinas 1987, 101; emphasis added). The evocation of the infantile brings us back to primitive and childish babbling.

**Saying/Said/Babble: “a babbling or still primitive or childish form of saying” and the fear of pluriversality**

In *Otherwise Than Being*, Levinas refers to “babbling” multiple times in negative contrast to the loftiness of saying and exposure to ensure the seriousness of metaphysics and ethics. For example: “It is the subjectivity of the subject that makes itself a sign, which one would be wrong to take as a babbling utterance of a word, for it bears witness to the glory of the Infinite” (Levinas 1987, 151).

The need to differentiate the seriousness of a mature “saying” from the contaminating presence of something “still primitive or childish” repeats the Euromodern Enlightenment trope of a dignified humanity emerging out of the stage of immaturity that put children, women, and non-whites on a plane of underdevelopment. This doubtful status of humanity of the Other is explicit in Levinas, who, like Kant, considers the non-Western Other formally human but incapable of anything worth its name: “I often say, although it is a dangerous thing to say publicly, that humanity consists of the Bible and the Greeks. All the

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*Elsewhere, Levinas problematically illustrates “babbling” through the figure of the “mute” and a foreigner *enclosed* in a maternal language: “Saying saying saying itself, without thematizing it, but exposing it again. Saying is thus to make signs of this very signifyingness of the exposure (...) But to thus make signs to the point of making oneself a sign is not a babbling language, like the expression of a mute, or the discourse of a stranger shut up in his maternal language” (1987, 143). The imprisonment in a maternal space, the alleged closure of the foreign other in their narrow world, are familiar themes in the racialized and gendered assemblages of Developmental Man, which progresses towards openness and universality away from a narrow “tribal” consciousness or an “infantile” attachment to the closure of the maternal space.*
rest can be translated: all the rest—all the exotic—is dance” (cited in Zalloua 2017, 4). In another interview Levinas utters an almost identical statement: “the Bible and the Greeks present the only serious issues in human life; everything else is dancing” (cited in Moten 2018, 1). The appeal to the “only serious issues,” which, in the other citation denotes humanity itself, thereby strangely posits dance outside the realm of humanity and/or seriousness. Afraid of the contamination of the seriousness of philosophy and religion by the exotic and dance, Levinas must also provide enough distance from the scene of childhood and the “feminine” to maintain his dignity.

Between Totality and Infinity and Otherwise than Being a shift seems to occur that trades the space of the feminine as the pre- and non-ethical horizontal sphere of eros for more eulogic metaphors of maternity as a name for “saying” (Brody 2001). In Totality and Infinity, Levinas notoriously uses the metaphor of the feminine (its relation to women simultaneously suggested and disavowed) to designate the home-dwelling and the “phenomenology of eros,” which remains pre-ethical (Levinas 1979, 154–156; 256–266). The only relation to the transcendental in the erotic encounter is through procreation quaaternity, where the father lives on through the son and thereby transcends time (Levinas 1979, 279). The ethical dimension opens only outside the home, in the realm of the social, where the ethical is introduced through the (also gendered) metaphor of fraternity. The link between the feminine in the home-dwelling and women simultaneously suggested and disavowed, “[she is] relegated to the shadow as his double” and “serves as a bridge between the Father and the son” (Irigaray 2001, 133). The differences between the pre-ethical sphere of eros and the social sphere among brothers where ethics is introduced is captured in metaphors of “height” (Cavarero 2016). The encounter with the face of the Other is ethical precisely because it is an “alterity of height” that reveals God (McGettigan cited in Moten 2019, 8). The divinity of otherness that induces dignity and responsibility is explicitly severed from the pre-ethical horizontality of the home-dwelling where the feminine resides and children babble.

Levinas falls back onto what Lugones calls a “logic of purity” and social fragmentation when he tries to articulate responsibility and Saying as free from the contamination of the unseriousness and unworthiness of Babbling. Despite his dramatic prose of the undoing of the sovereign ego, Levinas is wedded to a way of seeing that provides a unified self who has to hierarchically differentiate himself from the impurities that are carried by other (playful, dancing, “unserious”) bodies. Levinas’ responsibility thereby forecloses a responsiveness to the preceding relationality that has enabled him, whilst confining femininity spatially to the private dwelling. The investment in the seriousness of the ethical self that has grown out of the infantile sphere fails to be response-able to what falls outside of his coloniality of perception. The an-archy and anteriority of ethics does not lead to the unity of the One that provides orientation despite pluralism; the precedence of an-archy is an inassimilable spectral inheritance of
the always-impure plural relationality that nourishes and enables responsibility. Levinas’ responsibility turns his back to such a response-ability and perpetuates an ethics that does nothing to challenge a fragmented world. This is because Levinas’ Saying/Said distinction relies on a constitutive outside (infantile Babbling) that threatens to contaminate the adult masculine subject who faces the brother and finds a patriarchal God free of the trace of the maternal. As with the domestic scene of the feminine and the child, the non-European Other is the repressed content of Levinas’ exteriority—an “outside created by the inside.” Trying to collapse this constitutive outside into the same ontological sphere of immanence or totality based on the concept of nature that is the property of the legitimate heirs of Western philosophy, Levinas hardens in his patriarchal, racist perception in order to avoid the gaze of the Other that might truly address and challenge the centrality of the Euromodern self. Levinas shows that ontology can never be exhaustive and complete as totality and relies on anterior otherness, an-archy, “precedence” (Vázquez 2020). Yet, he takes away any generative or subversive power (potentia) by fixating Euromodern totality as complete besides the divine Infinity that transcends it. The anterior otherness, or precedence persists, insists and exists in, through and despite every attempted enclosure by ontological totality (or transcendental morality). It is through this haunting of the ontological (hauntology) that there remains an unpredictable openness that transgresses the totality.

In Levinas, antecedence and responsibility are inscribed into a monotheistic script of transcendence and immanence. Despite Levinas’ attempt to change and accommodate philosophy of liberation and political struggles in his ethical framework, this fundamental distinction maintains a moral interpretation of the universe, a way of seeing that is uncomfortable with and needs to hierarchically differentiate between humanity proper and exotic dance that is not quite worthy of the name humanity. Any gesture towards that non-Western other becomes a sign of the generosity of the West or a manifestation of the glory of the Good despite their entrapment into obscure immanence, failing to understand themselves.

The Levinas-paradox
This leads to an irreconcilable paradox of an ethics based on the irreducible otherness of the Other and the racist blanket statements about the (sub)humanity of the non-Greek and the non-Jew. The political consequences of this contradiction are well known. In a 1982 interview where Levinas is asked to
comment on the Sabra and Shatila massacre, he is asked: “you are the philosopher of the ‘other.’ Isn’t history, isn’t politics the very site of the encounter with the ‘other,’ and for the Israeli isn’t the ‘other’ above all Palestinian?” Levinas’ reply:

My definition of the other is completely different. The other is the neighbor [prochain], who is not necessarily my kin [proche] but who may be. But if your neighbor attacks another neighbor, or treats him unjustly, what can you do? Then alterity takes on another character, in alterity we can find an enemy or at least we are faced with the problem of knowing who is right and who is wrong, who is just and who is unjust. There are people who are wrong. (cited in Zalloua 2017, 24)

Levinas’ dramatic staging of the ethical encounter as becoming a “hostage” to the Other with infinite responsibility to the point of “substitution” loses its meaning when one already has distinguished “a good neighbor (neighbor as kin) from a bad neighbor (neighbor as enemy)” (Zalloua 2017, 26), a distinction following from a view of humanity that erases the non-Western Other who can only speak ventriloquized through the generosity of the West. Needless to say, this is not the last word on the relation between Levinas and the politics of decolonization and the philosophy of liberation. Dussel has found a resource in Levinas for articulating a philosophy of liberation that takes the Levinasian Other as the geopolitical Other of European modernity. Although their meeting did not lead to a desired dialogical exchange and emphasized the differences in their political and philosophical languages, it nevertheless led Levinas to positively reconsider the place of decolonization in his ethics and Levinasian ethics continues to provide a resource for decolonial ethics in for example Nelson Maldonado-Torres’ work. However, Levinas’ attempt at opening up his work to the possibility of decolonization in Otherwise than Being (published

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89 The Sabra and Shatila massacre refers to the massacre of (mostly) Palestinian refugees in the Sabra neighborhood and the Shatila refugee camp in the South of Beirut during the Lebanese civil war (1982). Committed by the Christian fascist Lebanese Forces, it occurred with the support of the IDF which was besieging Beirut at the time.

90 Dussel tries to articulate Levinas’ category of Exteriority as an internal transcendence of European totality, an “outside created by the inside,” in order to rearticulate Levinas in geopolitical terms. See Dussel (2006 and 1985).

91 Slabodsky shows the impact of this meeting on Levinas and the latter’s reconsideration of decolonization. Slabodsky argues that this is not necessarily incompatible with Levinas’ views on Palestine, given that this is prior to the influential publications of Edward Said that established a necessary link between decolonization and the Palestinian cause in the Global North. Prior to that, influential intellectuals for the meaning of decolonization like Jean-Paul Sartre did not draw the same conclusions when he failed to embrace the Palestinian cause in 1967 (Slabodsky 2010). For a more elaborate discussion on existentialism, Sartre, De Beauvoir and Arab liberation see Di-Capua (2018); for further usage of Levinas for decolonial ethics, see Maldonado-Torres (2008).
some years after “Meaning and Sense”) ultimately does not challenge his ways of seeing Palestinians and the “exotic.”

How does this relate to Levinas’ conceptualization of responsibility and alterity? It is important in his ethics to strip the face of the Other of all particularity: “the epiphany of the other involves a signifyingness of its own independent of this meaning received from the world. the other comes to us not only out of the context, but also without mediation; he signifies by himself” (Levinas 1987, 95). This does not abstract from or reduce the singularity of the Other, but precisely avoids consuming the singularity of the Other in terms of language and cultural frames of the “same.” This seems to be both the major strength—the unconditionality of the responsibility to the Other despite social relations of kin, brother, friend, neighbor or other frames of recognition (although, the face itself can be considered such a frame already)—and its Achilles’ heel: what is the use of an ethics that cannot be responsive to the context and situation of any individual? Cavarero argues that Levinas’ writing remains caught in this inconsistency or tension between the stripping of all cultural context and identitarian labels on the one hand, and his reliance on Biblical and Talmudic stories and other familiar figures from his own cultural archive. Indeed, Levinas’ text is shot through with references to the figures of the orphan, the widow, the poor and the stateless as key exemplars of the Other that makes one an infinitely responsible hostage-subject, thereby contradicting his own insistence on the face’s non-contextual, unmediated expressivity and self-signification (Cavarero 2016, 164–165).

Perhaps this tension points not only to the impossibility but the undesirability of approaching response-ability to the face of the Other without mediation. This has been a bone of contention for (among others feminist and decolonial) interpreters of Levinas and to the question of how to make his ethics socio-politically and geo-politically relevant, instead of quietly relying on his proudly inherited Eurocentric patriarchal cultural archive. What then are the grounds, besides Levinas’ own cultural blindspots and personal preferences and commitments, to exclude the caregiver(s)-infant relation from the (an)originary, an-archical ethical scene (Willett 1995; Cavarero 2016)? And, to repeat, does ethical responsivity to the Other not entail taking seriously contextualization and attunement to the particularities of the Other?

As Cynthia Willett and others have pointed out, this makes it hard to see what his ethics mean in terms of facing a concrete, embodied other (Willett 1995). Sara Ahmed complicates this interpretation by focusing on the mediation of a face-to-face encounter of the perceptual grid that recognizes and categorizes

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92 For a full discussion of the political implications and the place of the Palestinian question in Levinas, see Zalloua (2017, chapter 1). For a meditation on Levinas’ persistent racism, see “There is no racism intended” in Moten (2018, 1–64).
faces (as neighbor or as stranger for example): “facialisation involves textuality” (Ahmed 2000, 146).93 This is where Lugones’ face-to-face precisely differs from Levinas. Levinas’ ethics goes beyond his otherwise phenomenological language to reach the absoluteness of ethics. Like Alcoff’s argument that phenomenology requires hermeneutics to unlearn “sedimented contextual knowledges” (Alcoff 2006, 203–204), Lugones’ face-to-face makes the phenomenological exploration the very stuff of the ethical encounter. From the painful labor among women of color and between women of color and white women, Lugones “stays with the trouble” of exploring the fragmentation of cultural-colonial frames that inform the initial reactive encounter, to set in motion the process of its unlearning and undoing towards a responsive and response-able co-becoming and coalitional world-building.

Part 2: Lugones’ phenomenology of fragmented perception and ethics of the face-to-face

María Lugones develops a vocabulary to speak about how oppression marks people differentially, how such oppression is internalized and reproduced, and the ways of unlearning and resisting these marks and internalization, introducing the conceptual pairs fragmentation/multiplicity, purity/impurity (2003) and the notion of complex communication (2006). She does this in different texts for different purposes,94 always confronting the painful differences that must not be overlooked in order to find the possibility for deep coalitions: The specificity of the interventions and the rootedness in lived experience of various spaces and struggles are important to keep in mind in approaching Lugones’ texts, as to avoid traditional philosophy’s tropes of the view from “above” or from “nowhere” (Haraway 1988). Nevertheless, it would also be a misreading to chain her investigations to the particularity of the question posed or the experience that engendered it. Such mode of philosophizing does not operate from and challenges the usual distinction between the general and the particular. To read Lugones—in my attempt at being responsive to her investigations (in a hopefully response-able way)—may have the appearance of attempting to systematize her thought. However, from a conviction of the motility and open-endedness of concepts and theory, taking up of her work aims at a pluralizing

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93 What Ahmed, still working more within a poststructuralist framework, calls “textuality” is developed in Ahmed’s later work in a more affective and phenomenological language of “sticky histories” (Ahmed 2014) and “(dis)orientations” (Ahmed 2006) that produce the emotive social field: the relation between embodiment and the inheritance of a racist and heteronormative world.

94 E.g. the possibility of racialized women to relate to each other outside of the oppressor’s framework, or to figure out what it means for women to get to know and love each other, or why racialized or otherwise targeted men are so often complicit in or indifferent to gender-based violence and male dominance.
effect for what I take to be useful and important theoretical work to travel to different worlds and partake in their constitution.

The vocabulary and phenomenological exploration provides tools to analyze how Levinas continues to rely on a phallocentric, antiblack and anti-Palestinian conception of the human and points towards an ethic that directly addresses the fragmented perception instead of making it of secondary importance.

Lugones distinguishes between fragmentation and plurality or multiplicity. She connects fragmentation with a logic and desire for purity and unity; multiplicity, on the other hand, is an “exercise in impurity” (Lugones 2003, 127). Lugones explains her notion of impurity through the notion of “curdling” (discussed below). She introduces the concepts of fragmentation-unity and multiplicity-mestizaje in the context of conceptualizing the different im/pure logics of identity, locating the desire for purity as a colonizing logic. This logic of purity that is not only reserved for a dominant class of men who need to fragment the Others of Man to embody the illusion of a unitary sovereign self, but is at work within most if not all social groups and individuals who are infested with the oppressive logic of identity and purity, perpetuating the fragmentation of others in an attempt at escaping one’s own fragmentation. This points to one of Lugones’ main questions throughout her work—the question how oppression gets reproduced and how to instigate its undoing.

I read Lugones’ commitment to impurity and multiplicity/plurality, and resistance to unification-fragmentation as a phenomenological and ethical approach to what Fred Moten, borrowing from Édouard Glissant, calls “consent not to be a single being” (Moten 2018). Lugones seems to use plurality and multiplicity interchangeably. Mariana Ortega prefers the term multiplicity to emphasize the singular existential and experiential base that underlies multiplicity, whereas plurality might suggest that there are plural beings whose underlying relation and unity is unclear (Ortega 2016). I will continue to use the terms interchangeably. To me the importance of the category multiplicity/plurality as opposed to fragmentation is best summed up by Jean-Luc Nancy in his redefinition of the oneness of Being as being singular plural: “in Latin, plus is comparable to multus. It is not ‘numerous’; it is ‘more.’ It is an increase or excess of origin in the origin” (Nancy 2000, 39). Using Levinas’ vocabulary, this excess of origin is an-archical, whereas fragmentation remains wedded to arche and patri-arche.

Impure and multiplicitous thinking as avoiding pure identity and authenticity
I find this conceptual pair helpful to challenge the framing of oppression as one of a (natural or cultural) organic unity that is then fragmented and distorted. The latter suggests a pre-alienated state of unity that is “lost” due to oppressive histories (e.g. colonialism). This would mean that liberation is either a recovery
of a prior of or a working towards a futural authenticity that structures of domination would bar.95 Indeed, Lugones’ vocabulary suggests that the very notion of unity bears a colonial imprint and connection to the purity-logic of fragmentation. Instead, what is fragmented is (i) always-already multiplicitous and (ii) impurely contaminated or co-constituted by fragmentation. Multiplicity does not simply replace unity or authenticity in an uncomplicated manner, but must be understood in its impurity, i.e., always-already contaminated by but irreducible to fragmentation. Multiplicity ek-sists in excess of, per-sists despite, and in-sists through fragmentation.

Lugones is deliberately ambivalent on this point: she admits that sometimes she suggests that multiplicity is more originary than fragmentation, but explicitly notes that this is not her intention:

I do not claim ontological originality for multiplicity here. Rather both the multiple-mestizo and the unified-fragmented coexist, each have their histories, are in contestation and in significant logical tension. I reveal the logics underlying the contestation. Sometimes my use of language strongly suggests a claim of originality for the multiple. (Lugones 2003, 127)

I understand the ambivalence of multiplicity being in a way preceding yet inseparable from fragmentation without serving as a stable ontological anchor in an analogous way to Hortense Spillers’ concepts of flesh and body (Spillers 2003).96 In a similar vein, multiplicity both is and is not “prior” to fragmentation.

95 As I argued in the previous chapters, Narvaez’ neurobiological model equally relies on such a projected origin that gets thwarted. Genealogy, on the other hand, traces histories without such recourse to a natural origin or originary state—there is only a series of historical accidents.

96 Spillers aims to show how the American concepts of gender, body and personhood rely on and simultaneously obscure the extremely violent processes of dehumanization and “ungendering” of Black people. She develops an alternative language that addresses this dehumanization without participating in it: the flesh both signals the subjugation to the extremity of violence (the “high crimes against the flesh”), which also points to something that precedes and exceeds the subjugation itself. Flesh is not a reduction to nature, which awaits its violent cultural inscription, but is the (re)creation and the (re)claiming of sociality that is denied within the hegemonic American white supremacist “grammar” or symbolic order. In this sense, flesh has no ontological originality or primacy over a subsequent cultural inscription culture/body, as a natural “sexed” body would be culturally marked in “gendered” terms. Flesh can only emerge through the absolute violence of severance from kinship, sociality and gender-systems. Only through the specific histories of extremely violent submergence into a dehumanizing white supremacist global capitalist colonial order, can the distinction between flesh and body emerge. Nevertheless, “flesh” exceeds the structure of dehumanization that is enforced and speaks to an embodied reality that cannot be reduced to its violation and dehumanization. The severance attempts to completely eradicate heterogenous
It embeds and exceeds it, it is the material that fragmentation feeds on and seeks to dominate within the classifiable logic of purity, a colonizing-totalizing logic that always falters: it thwarts and disfigures multiplicity but cannot contain its impure overflow within the logic of purity, hierarchy and exploitation.

In other words, impurity is not a pure impurity (in a binary opposition to purity and fragmentation) but enmeshed with it: impurely impure. This contamination of multiplicity is key for resisting the effects of fragmentation without recourse to authenticity or origin. In other words, it allows for queering and creative multiplicitous flourishing, which embraces and does not disavow fragmenting histories or have a recourse to a desirable or normative state of unity or nonalienation. Anzaldúa’s new mestiza is a prime example of such impure impure becoming that acknowledges, works through, and recreates the histories of fragmentation without disavowing-externalizing them (Anzaldúa 2015; Lugones 2006). Since even the impure impurity remains impure, there is always the danger that this analysis slips back into the similar structure of an authentic, ontologically prior multiplicity (having now replaced unity) due to a later fragmentation (alienation). This is not a search for the right (pure) word but a doing, what Lugones calls an exercise in thinking, acting and responding in impurity.

\textit{Fragmentation and bad faith}

Fragmentation can be understood not only as the socio-political and institutional hierarchical differentiation of pure identities, but also as the perceptual-cognitive mechanisms that are shaped by and invested in these systems of exploitation. Lugones thereby also shows that logic of purity of the oppressor continues to be at work within resistant communities.\textsuperscript{97} Fragmented perception is a way of fixing the identity of the Other through which one can assert one’s own identity as stable and coherent. Fragmented perception arises from the fragmented social world based on hierarchy and identity to and through which subjects are subjected/subjugated/subjectivated.\textsuperscript{98}

\footnotesize{multiplicity of the other and the alternative worlds of sociality, politics, kinship and gender, feeding on and seeking to master this multiplicity in order to render the social world hierarchical, immobile, fragmented-unified – a world of neatly distinguishable persons and things. But this multiplicity is testimony to the response-enabling spectral inheritances and the power to recreate and reinvent sociality from its traces.

\textsuperscript{97} For how this relates to a critical but constructive interpretation of intersectionality, see Carastathis (2019).

\textsuperscript{98} The relation between the psycho-existential and the socio-political needs to be highlighted to avoid the misconception of liberation through changing one’s attitudes only. As argued above in the context of sociogeny, the focus on phenomenology and ethics should not eclipse the socio-political and institutional structures that engender and sustain it. Fanonian sociogeny address these interrelated layers without giving precedence to one that explains all (Tembo forthcoming).}
The fragmenting logic of oppression functions through the ideal of the modern subject who has to be coherent and whole, which relies on its division and mastery of external reality:

The subject who can occupy such a vantage point, the ideal observer, must himself be pure, unified, and simple so as to occupy the vantage point and perceive unity amid multiplicity (…) The conception of this subject is derivative from the assumption of unity and separability. The very “construction” of the subject presupposes that assumption (…) the urge to control antecedes this conception of reason (…) the urge for control and the passion for purity are conceptually related. (Lugones 2003, 129)

Purity, clarity of vision, a metaphysics of separability and the “urge to control” converge in the conception of the unified subject, which, Lugones argues, is premised on the domination of others: in order to take up the unified subject-position, one has to deny one’s multiplicities and impurities that trouble the image of the unified self. As such, the hardening of the self as modern subjects entails the “production of discrete units” in the denial of their impure enmeshment and multiplicity (Lugones 2003, 129). The division of the world into discrete units are the institutional inscriptions onto external bodies. To be a subject means to place those marks outside of oneself:

To the extent that mastering institutional inscriptions is part of the program of unification, there cannot be such markings of his body (…) He must at once emphasize them and ignore them. He must be radically self-deceiving in this respect. His production as pure, as the impartial reasoner, requires that others produce him. He is a fiction of his own imagination, but his imagination is mediated by the labor of others. (Lugones 2003, 131)

He (gender intended) relies on the institutional inscriptions as the defining marks onto other bodies outside of himself. He turns the tainted other into the hypervisible/invisible backdrop that he needs in order to be the unified modern subject: “they [modern subjects] exist complete only to the extent that what we [marked, fragmented others] are, and what is absolutely necessary for them, is declared worthless” (Lugones 2003, 131). The logic of purity denies multiplicity/plurality and unifies the identity of the subject through fragmentation: “racist/colonialist perception is narcissistic; it denies independence to the seen, it constructs its object imaginatively as a reflection of the seer” (Lugones 2003, 157).

This is the modern subject or sovereign self that has been deconstructed time and again—what does this add? Read as critical phenomenology, it links the critique of the modern subject to fragmented perception. Instead of reading it as saying that some have the identity-position of unified modern untainted subject and others have the identity-position of being marked and fragmented, it is the logic of oppression and racial, gendered and other hierarchies that operate in both oppressor and oppressed groups and individuals—having shaped
and formed us differentially, the logic of purity, fragmentation is the structure of hierarchy and oppression that connects and divides us. The various degrees of being tainted or marked in various ways in contradistinction to the genre of the human based on the unitary sovereign self qua white bourgeois Man also infiltrate in the policing of parts and celebration of fragmented identities in resistant groups subjected/subjectivated through this fragmented social world. Importantly, the critique of the logic of purity does not entail a wholesale rejection of identity politics or intersectionality, but offers a nuanced affirmation of a “complex identity politics” and a selectively affirmative “heterodox interpretation of intersectionality” (Carastathis 2019, 93).

Lugones highlights the importance of “self-deception” to sustain the illusion of unitary, sovereign selves at the expense of fragmentation of self and others.

Perceiving oneself as an oppressor is harder to sustain morally than deception. (...) Self-deception appears to require the unification of the self to be conceivable, that is, it is one self that deceives him- or herself. (...) As a self-deceiving multiple self, the oppressor does not remember across realities. Self-deception lies in this disconnection of memory. (Lugones 2003, 14)

The emphasis on self-deception as part of the fragmented cognitive-perceptual way of being-in-the-world brings to mind Gordon’s usage of bad faith (Gordon 1999), although Lugones’ pointing to memory will connect to a temporality and ethics of unlearning different from the existentialist framework of future-oriented freedom treating the past only as facticity (which will further be explored with Al-Saji in chapter 8). Gordon employs as a prism through which to understand antiblack racism in a white supremacist world. The framework of bad faith lays out a structure of subjectivity that resists any substantive notion of the subject whilst critically laying bare how substantive thinking serves an existential purpose of securing a sense of a stable and sovereign self.

“From the Sartrean perspective, we seek our identity by way of negating or ‘freezing’ that of others. But in this process we lie to ourselves with the notion of being at one with our various identities” (Gordon 1999, 6). From this perspective, whiteness is an operation in bad faith that requires the Black(ened) Other in order to reassure one’s identity. Whiteness is explicitly or implicitly the standard of the untainted pure self that requires the tainted fragmented other.

99 Key is Lugones’ distinction between interlocking oppressions (following the logic of purity and fragmentation) and intermeshed oppressions (following the logic of impurity): “Interlocking is conceptually possible only if oppressions are understood as separable, as discrete, pure. Intermeshed oppressions cannot be cogently understood as fragmenting subjects either as individuals or as collectivities (...) the categorial training of human beings into homogenous fragments is grounded in a categorial mind frame. Interlocking is possible only if the inseparability of oppressions s disguised” (Lugones 2003, 223).
To see a person “as black is to see enough (…) [it] is not to see him at all. His presence is a form of absence. Like Ellison’s Invisible Man, the more present he is, the more he is absent” (Gordon 1999, 99). “Blackness” is the symbolic marker of the “destruction of presence” (Gordon 1999, 99), the backdrop against which someone can harden into a stable identity. This “destruction of presence” as the denial of the Other’s interiority or the fear of the Other’s consciousness maintain institutional and individual forms of bad faith, which can be understood as what Du Bois called the “public and psychological” sides of the “wages of whiteness,” which nourish the sense of self based on self-possession and legitimate heirs to the ownership of the earth. Through this fragmenting fixation of the Other and the unifying fixation of the self, the latter avoids a confrontation with their own fragmentation under patriarchal racial capitalism, which disconnects them from their multiplicity. Such a mode of analysis seeks to combine the individual psychological attachment to subjection with the social world of fragmentation As W.E.B. Du Bois, Angela Davis and others have pointed out, white supremacy has driven a wedge between the white working class and people of color and wins over the white working class with “wages” that allows them to find identity and security within a system that exploits them (Du Bois 2007; Davis 1981). For example, white male workers who seek identity through whiteness and patriarchy escape their powerlessness, humiliation and exploitation by reasserting his masculine sovereign identity through differentiation from and domination of Blackness (racial purity, national belonging) or wife and children (Williams 1991). This fragmentation usurps the multiplicity of the self and transforms humans into an absence defined by an orchestrated presence of a part—a being whose multiplicity and opacity is denied.

Lugones’ face-to-face encounter is the confrontation with the fragmentation of the Other and the self. If one encounters the eyes of the other—and not the orchestrated presence-absence produced by the modern fragmentation machinery—the eyes of the Other become an address to the self

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100 “It must be remembered that the white group of laborers, while they received a low wage, were compensated in part by a sort of public and psychological wage. They were given public deference and tides of courtesy because they were white. They were admitted freely with all classes of white people to public functions, public parks, and the best schools. The police were drawn from their ranks, and the courts, dependent upon their votes, treated them with such leniency as to encourage lawlessness. Their vote selected public officials, and while this had small effect upon the economic situation, it had great effect upon their personal treatment and the deference shown them” (Du Bois 2007, 573). From “The Souls of White Folk” (Darkwater): “‘But what on earth is whiteness that one should so desire it?’ Then always, somehow, some way, silently but clearly, I am given to understand that whiteness is the ownership of the earth forever and ever, Amen!” (Du Bois 2021, 18).
that necessitates a process of unlearning of the perceptual-cognitive machinery of fragmentation, allowing for a (re)learning of encountering the disavowed multiplicity of the Other and the self.

In sum, at the phenomenological level, fragmentation can be understood as the perceptual-cognitive mechanisms that are shaped by and invested in the system of exploitation based on hierarchical differentiation of pure identities.

**Multiplicity, curdling, impurity**

Lugones uses the metaphor of curdling to speak of the logic of impurity and impure difference to counter the “categorial eye” and a substantive metaphysics of fragmentation and separability into pure parts. She introduces this as a way of thinking, acting and resisting through a logic different from the one of fragmentation and oppression. It is an attempt to navigate and inhabit the fragmented world differently, to approach it from impure multiplicity that exceeds the frames of fragmentation and subverts the alleged pure separability of identity-markers. Following Anzaldúa, this impurity is understood as mestizaje: “if something or someone is neither/nor, but kind of both, not quite either; if something is in the middle of either/or; if it is ambiguous, given the available classification of things; if it is mestiza; if it threatens by its very ambiguity the orderliness of the system, of schematized reality” (Lugones 2003, 122). In developing the curdling-metaphor to explore the logic of impurity, she turns to a childhood scene of learning to make mayonnaise:

*Segundo sentido. Estoy hacienda mayonesa.* I am making mayonnaise. I place the yolk in a bowl, add a few drops of water, stir, and then add oil drop by drop, very slowly, as I continue stirring. If I add too much oil at once, the mixture *se separa*, it separates. I can remember doing the operation as an impatient child, stopping and saying to my mother “Mamá, la mayonesa se separó.” In English, one might say that the mayonnaise curdled. Mayonnaise is an oil-in-water emulsion. As all emulsions, it is unstable. When an emulsion curdles, the ingredients become separate from each other. But that is not altogether an accurate description: rather, they coalesce toward oil or toward water, most of the water becomes separate from most of the oil—it is instead, a matter of different degrees of coalescence. The same with mayonnaise; when it separates, you are left with yolky oil and oily yolk. (Lugones 2003, 122)

The idea of a pure separation would be the logic of fragmentation, whereas the logic of curdling always carries contaminating traces of that troubles any pure self-identity. The example is significant because the backstory itself expresses the curdled, impure logic it thematizes. On one level, it links conceptual work of philosophy to lived experience, turning to a childhood scene of transmission of culinary knowledge from mother to daughter. On a second level, this memory is not a traditional scene of mother-daughter transmission but also marks the simultaneous ambiguity of gender-roles and the attempt at fragmenting-fixing them according to certain patriarchal frames. As Lugones explains, the task of
making mayonnaise in Argentinian households was usually assigned to boys and men. Lugones’ mother assigned her the task to do this task because she “considered [her, María] a boy because of [her] physical prowess and good memory” (Lugones 2003, 34). The metaphor for impurity designates Lugones’ own gender-ambiguity, which both exceeds the strict gender-binarism and repeats the patriarchal framework of patriarchal gender-intelligibility and valuation. In other words, it bears the mark of multiplicity (irreducible to the social order of fragmentation-unification) and is a sign of that fragmentation: impurity is contaminated by the logic of fragmentation and purity—an impure impurity. The curdling metaphor posits neither a prior unity nor a telos of unity, but maintains a certain messiness that is a testimony both to the productive power of fragmentation and its limitation—what exceeds its control, mastery, organization, classifiability. This brings to mind Glissant’s creolization as it both marks the violent histories of racialization and colonization that seeks to unify-fragment a racial global order for profit and power through racial (and other) classifications, and the unclassifiable poetics of relation that emerge from, through and despite of the civilizational project of fragmentation-unification (Glissant 1997).

**Lugones’ critical phenomenology**

The fundamental relation between perception and knowledge is underscored by phenomenologists. Lugones offers ways of unlearning what Martín Alcoff calls the “learned cognitive maps and learned modes of perception” (Alcoff 2006, ix) in order to “cultivate a perception that rejects the fragmenting/homogenizing perception of the lover of purity” (Lugones 2003, 198). Reading Lugones through the lens of critical phenomenology, I share Alia Al-Saji’s aim in her work on critical hesitation, which is “to show what is phenomenologically needed for perception and affect to become responsive, and the ontological ground of this possibility in the structure of temporality and affective life” (Al-Saji 2014, 144). I will draw from her various investigations to understand the interconnected ways of arrogant/fragmented/colonial ways of seeing (Lugones 2003).

Linking Lugones’ exploration of “arrogant perception” to “fragmented perception,” we can turn to Lugones’ own exploration of her relation to her mother and servants in her childhood. Lugones relates how as a child she was both the victim of arrogant/fragmented perception and its accomplice. In her relation to her mother, the learned arrogant perception was in part reproduced and in part resisted. Lugones resisted full identification with her mother and thereby “failed” to love her in what is considered appropriate fashion. This is because she sensed that what counts as love for her mother was inseparable from the fragmented way of perceiving her, i.e., in her role as mother within the family system, which was one of abuse. To love her mother within this world of
heteropatriarchal fragmentation would be tantamount to participating in her abuse, and to open herself up to being abused by identifying with the fragmented gender-roles of girl-daughter-future-mother: “My love for my mother seemed to me thoroughly imperfect as I was growing up because I was unwilling to become what I had been taught to see my mother as being” (Lugones 2003, 80). If there is ambiguity and resistance in navigating this fragmented social world in the ambivalent mother-daughter relation, there is less ambiguity and more straightforward complicity in fragmented ways of perceiving—and reproducing the fragmented social world—in Lugones’ relation to servants. She relates how she was taught to perceive servants arrogantly: “I was not supposed to love servants: I could abuse them without identifying with them, without seeing myself in them” (Lugones 2003, 80). Here the processes of identity-formation or subjectivation operate through ways of being perceived and learning ways of perceiving. There is an unquestioned identification with parts of her identity vis-à-vis a lower-than group (the servants) and ambiguity: the supposed unity of her identity (class-markers) reproduce the class-based fragmentation or hierarchical perception. The sensing of oppression in the gender-role leads to ambiguous identification and resistance that remains within the frames of intelligibility of that fragmented, hierarchical social world.

Lugones’ ethics: a response to the Levinas Paradox

From Lugones’ framework of fragmentation-unity/multiplicity-mestizaje, we can approach the Levinas-paradox that we started with: how and why does Levinas, despite claiming precedence of ethics over ontology, remain wedded to his fragmented perception? In his essay on decolonization, we saw how Levinas shows a fear of multiplicity or pluriversality; frames the multiplicity of meaning in such a way that it is a generous bestowal of meaning from the West onto the Other; the Other remains mute as their philosophical, ethical and political meaning is debated among the racialized figure of legitimate heirs of the Graeco-Judeo-Christian patrimony belonging to the West. In Otherwise Than Being, despite the metaphysical significance of the gendered figure of the Child qua Son in Totality and Infinity, we saw how the conceptual pair of the Saying/Said relies on the hierarchical differentiation between the merely primitive or childish babbling that is not worthy of metaphysical and ethical consideration. With Lugones, we can read these as habits of perception and thinking, and a desire for a pure identity as a serious, non-dancing philosopher and legitimate heir of the Graeco-Judeo-Christian heritage. Levinas might not be an identitarian thinker, but the analysis of fragmented perception reveal that the question of purity and identity nevertheless undergird his philosophizing. From Lugones’ framework, we can read Levinas’ desire for universality and unity as an investment in the unified self that structurally relies on the fragmentation of others. Despite his attention paid to the meaning of
decolonization and the metaphysical importance of the Child/Son, Levinas’ universal ethics are circumscribed by a disdain or fear for the unserious dancing and babbling bodies.

Unlearning: the mirror and the address

How does Lugones’ critical phenomenological exploration of fragmented perception rooted in lived experience lead to an alternative ethics of the face-to-face? How does Lugones’ situated knowledge, which does not gloss over the inscription of power in the scene of theorizing but precisely starts from and remains committed to it without transcendentalizing tropes, translate into a situated ethics? I suggest reading Lugones’ face-to-face encounter as an ethics that “stays with the trouble” of fragmented perception in a movement of unlearning that is at once a relational transformation of sociality.

The self-deception or bad faith in fragmented perception ensures that the Other can only appear in a certain way. It does not address the Other and returns to the self. Fragmented perception encounters the Other without response-ability or address. The identity of the subject relies on the fragmented others but denies that the Other can address and confront the self.

Lugones confronts the arrogant perception that returns to the self by becoming an address. She does this by the metaphor of the mirror:

But what would it be to be noticed? We are noticed when you realize that we are mirrors in which you can see yourselves as no other mirror shows you (…) What we reveal to you is that you are many—something that may in itself be frightening to you. But the self we reveal to you is also one that you are not eager to know (…) You block identification with that self because it is not quite consistent with your image of yourself (…) You know a self that is decent and good, and knowing your self in our mirror frightens you with losing your center, your integrity, your oneness. (Lugones 2003, 72–73)

The metaphor of the mirror has become suspicious in feminist theory because of Haraway’s and Barad’s suggestion that the mirror privileges “self-reflection,” which only reflects back the selfsame, thereby foreclosing understanding of difference and becoming. Instead, in order to avoid perpetuating the centrality of the sovereign subject, they offer the alternative metaphor of diffraction (Haraway 2018; Barad 2007). In Lugones, however, the usage of the mirror and self-reflection is a critical usage that emphasizes the labor of unlearning and displacing the centrality of the sovereign subject. On one level, it shares the critique of the gaze that returns to the selfsame. Lugones refers to what Elizabeth Spelman calls “boomerang perception:” “I look at you (…) and come right back to myself. White children in the U.S. got early training in boomerang perception when they were told by well-meaning white adults that Black people were just like us—never, however, that we were just like Blacks” (Spelman cited in Lugones 2003, 157). The fact that the Other serves precisely as a way to mirror back the selfsame subject is precisely what is confronted in the ethical encounter.
with the Other and becomes the site of its unlearning. Lugones’ description evades any possible abstraction and becomes a mutual address: *how do you see me? How have you been taught to (not) see me? What does this say about you? What role do I play for your sense of being some-one / a unified self? What does it take for us to see each other not through the fragmented lens of colonial gazing but to encounter each other in respect of the impure difference and plurality with a loving perception?*

As an address, the face-to-face encounter forces the Other to confront their fragmented perception. But it also forces the Self to unlearn their own fragmented perception: what is reflected back when I look at you? How have I learned to (not) see you? What are the histories and memories that have shaped my perception of you? How am I invested in this projection onto you for my own sense of identity? The situated ethics of unlearning cannot jump over or move beyond this oft-deconstructed subject, but is an ongoing undoing of our own implication and investment in its fragmenting operations. Here, the mirror signifies a reversal of the gaze: if I rely on a sense of unity and identity through fragmenting (fixing, labeling, identifying, classifying) others, then to encounter the Other beyond my arrogant perception implies a confrontation with my investment in this unified self: it requires an unlearning of that self to see the differences, impurities within, the wounds of my own fragmentation under patriarchal racial capitalism. This self-reflexive unlearning is simultaneously a relearning of my perception that allows me to become more proximate with the Other’s world in their plural difference and opacity—“an exercise in impurity” to cultivate alternative modes of world-building. The element of self-reflexive unlearning might be irreducible and not something to move “beyond,” but in the ongoing process of unlearning there is a (re)creation of other non-reactive relational modes of ethicality and sociality.

**Memory and co-becoming**

Lugones insists that in order to understand oneself as multiple, it is important to remember oneself as inhabiting different worlds. Hence, she emphasizes the importance of memory for the ethical encounter with the Other. To unlearn the arrogant perception toward servants, to learn for women to love each other—this memory-work is crucial. Without remembering herself within the family power-relations, Lugones might insist on her unified self without questioning the fragmented perception that it relies on. Returning to that scene allows her to learn the ways in which she became fragmented and the ways in which she internalizes the oppressor’s logic of fragmentation and thereby participates in the oppression of the self and others. To take an example closer to home, moving from Lugones’ exploration of socialization into fragmented ways of seeing in an Argentinian household to a conservative Christian town in the Netherlands
of my own upbringing: When I was very young, most activities and implicit and explicit learning revolved around being a good Christian distinct from the immorality of worldly affairs. I recall that on the coffee table of my childhood home there was a little donation box with a picture of a Black child on it. As good white Christians we would donate to “save” the “poor African children.” (Similar charity campaigns are also a common feature of many people’s primary and secondary school experience for many generations at least up till mine, teaching very particular notions of responsibility and morality serviceable to racial capitalism.) Such a memory helps understand how my own sense of identity - striving to be a good (white) Christian—was entangled with fragmentation of others (the Poor, Black, African Other) in a natural and moral order of the universe in which we generously bestow boons onto the “less fortunate.” A liberal self-identification would dissociate from this more parochial former self to achieve a more worldly, tolerant, culturally sensitive and mature sense of self; but such liberal self-identification precisely relies on the same mechanisms of crafting a unified identity through a disavowal of the conservative other, as if the legacies and traces of the latter are completely separate from myself. To try to perceive myself as unitary subject in the present would require the disavowal of those other realities and thereby obscure how other unifying identification in the present can rely on similar/different forms of fragmentation. Disavowing the multiplicity of the self (disavowing such a memory that does not fit my current self-identification) would not only deny the traces of sedimented fragmented perception, but also obscure the same mechanism of unification-fragmentation in contemporary self-identifications.

In “On Complex Communication” (2006), an engagement with Anzaldúa’s legacy, Lugones revisits many themes from her earlier essays—world-traveling, impurity, multiplicity, memory. Here she highlights the interconnection of reclaiming one’s own language and story as a way of activating a collective memory. Maintaining the memory of one’s own story further enables the traversing to someone else’s world, story and collective memory—which are always-already intertwined and related, even when systems of fragmentation seek to put them into boxes of separated root identities:

The particular openness is expressed as a willingness to traverse each other’s collective memories as not quite separate from each other and as containing the stuff that she may incorporate into her own recreation. The new mestiza is a scavenger of collective memories, memories that she does not see as completely discontinuous with her own. This to me is a very important ingredient of Anzaldúa’s story. It is the coalitional gesture; it begins to provide an understanding of complex communication. (2006, 80–81, emphasis added)
Lugones’ insistence on a relationality between collective memories that are “not quite separate from each other” suggests a form of commonality, but she is careful to separate this from a notion of the transparency of the Other’s identity. Here the theme of co-becoming comes to the fore: the traversing to and with the Other’s world requires an openness to self-transformation through the encounter, and (re)inventing the relationality between self and other:

Complex communication thrives on recognition of opacity and on reading opacity, not through assimilating the text of others to our own. Rather, it is enacted through a change in one’s own vocabulary, one’s sense of self, one’s way of living, in the extension of one’s collective memory, through developing forms of communication that signal disruption of the reduction attempted by the oppressor. Complex communication is creative. In complex communication we create and cement relational identities, meanings that did not precede the encounter, ways of life that transcend nationalisms, root identities, and other simplifications of our imaginations. (Lugones 2006, 84)

With this final ingredient on respect of opacity, Lugones’ approach to responsibility differs from the absolute alterity of Levinas’ Other, emphasizing the elements of unlearning and co-becoming in the face-to-face with the Other.

Conclusion

Lugones’ face-to-face shows that one does not need to de-contextualize to remain committed to alterity. This would precisely gloss over the fragmentation that is constitutive of the encounter with the Other. The commitment to alterity must be a commitment to the impure multiplicity and the opacity of the Other: knowing that the Other always exceeds the fragmenting perceptual frames and knowledges that are constitutive of my own and the Other’s perception and self-understanding, and the spaces we share. The commitment to opacity of the Other coincides with the commitment to the Other’s impure multiplicity: I cannot (and must not) unsee the fragmented identity-categories, but as both ontological and ethical point my starting point is the overflowing and instability of those categories. The ethicality of the encounter is not derived from the unmediated self-expressivity of the context-free face, but starts from a “recognition of opacity” and “working with opacity” (Lugones 2006, 75) despite the fragmenting lens through which I have learned to see you. Through this commitment, there is the opening of another space, also shared, for tapping into and a building of an otherwise/elsewhere. This does not mean that the Other remains wholly other. In the encounter, there is a figuring out of (i) how we were already related, and (ii) recreating relations for something new: the encounter is creative (Lugones 2006). Listening to the Other’s story, which always speaks to a larger collective memory, also allows for a different attuning to the relationality with one’s own story and collective memory. The story and collective memory are not a fixed essence or property of the respective subjects
(the logic of purity and fragmentation) but are (re)created and (re)invented in
the commitment to the Other and one’s own self-transformation in the process
of that commitment (Lugones 2006).

In this alternative face-to-face, the meaning of response-ability changes.
Oliver already harvests the potential of Levinas’ ethics in the formulation of
ethics as response-ability for the response-ability of the Other, as part of a
process through which subjectivity emerges in the first places (hence it is not an
intersubjective ethics; it is the ethicality and relationality that is prior to and the
content of subjectivity). Lugones helps transform the meaning of alterity in the
notion of response-ability, away from the paradox of needing to strip away
context for the face to not be consumed by the categories of the same, toward
an understanding of alterity as impure multiplicity and opacity. Impure
multiplicity and opacity cannot be reached by stripping away or overcoming
context (or less deceptively neutral and more poignantly in Lugones’ terms,
systems of fragmentation), but one honors these elements in self, other and
world in the ongoing immanent process of unlearning fragmentation and the
creative co-becoming it instigates or replenishes.

This highlights the temporal dimension of the meaning of response-
ability through Lugones’ emphasis on (collective) memory-work and creativity:
response-ability as unlearning and co-becoming, both understood as the process
of learning to relate to the past differently as an inherently creative and critical
exercise (Anzaldúa 2012; Al-Saji 2018, 2019). The absolutism of alterity is thus
displaced by a relational co-becoming where there is an ongoing search for
understanding how one is always-already related and how one can build
coalitional worlds to honor that relation response-ably. As Levinas’ own
investment as legitimate heir of a Western tradition, based on his fragmented
perception of the infantile and the exotic show, alterity put on a pedestal has no
critical content and opens the way to the bad universalizing and abstracting
tropes that conceal the fragmented hierarchical world that it is based on.
Levinas’ responsibility in the face-to-face does not address the response-
debilitating fragmented perception, whereas Lugones’ face-to-face shows the
work of unlearning for the sake of response-enabling co-becoming.
Chapter 7: Judith Butler on Vulnerability Revisited: When Vulnerability turns into Powerlessness

*Only by persisting in alterity does one persist in one’s “own” being. Vulnerable to terms that one never made, one persists always, to some degree, through categories, names, terms and classifications that mark a primary and inaugurate alienation in sociality.*

–JUDITH BUTLER

*I wonder what our sensitive edges have to teach us. What do our mortality and openness mean to the ecology we could surrender to together? (…)*

*Marine mammals live in a volatile substance whose temperature is changing for reasons not of their own making. Their skin is always exposed, they are surrounded on all sides by depth. What could enable us to live more porously, more mindful of the infinite changeability of our context, more open to each other and to our own needs?*

–ALEXIS PAULINE GUMBS

Introduction

The paradigm of vulnerability in ethical and political philosophy breaks with and seeks to offer an alternative to the dominant paradigms of autonomy and sovereignty of individuals and/or states. This involves a critique of a traditional “ontology of individualism” (Butler 2008, 33), and taking relational ontologies as a point of departure. This approach, taking “the category of relation to rethink a subjectivity marked by exposure, vulnerability, and dependence” (Cavarero 2016, 11), draws heavily on Levinas’ critique of the sovereign subject and his emphasis on exposure and vulnerability of the body toward the Other and the world. Judith Butler and Adriana Cavarero are central in taking vulnerability as paradigmatic of human subjectivity and for rethinking ethics and politics from such a relational ontology. This relational ontology begins with the constitutive sociality of every being, and builds on the self as created by, exposed to, and always dependent on others or an outside. Sovereignty, paradigmatic for the Euromodern philosophies of the subject and political and moral philosophy, is neither possible nor desirable. Instead, ethics and politics need to be reoriented towards the care and support systems necessary for everyone’s persistence and thriving, and in particular at remedying the differential production of vulnerability.101 As Johanna Hedva puts it, this means honoring everyone’s

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101 Butler acknowledges the danger that an ethics of vulnerability can slip into paternalistic modes of governance that rank levels of vulnerability, in which the alleged least vulnerable can bestow care onto the more vulnerable (Butler 2020).
vulnerability and the practices of care: “To take seriously each other’s vulnerability and fragility and precarity, and to support it, honor it, empower it. To protect each other, to enact and practice community. A radical kinship, an interdependent sociality, a politics of care” (Hedva 2016, 12). It is in full support of this (queer)feminist approach that I write this chapter and seek to challenge Butler’s conception of the self, sociality and vulnerability, precisely because their seminal work has been key for taking vulnerability as shared ethicopolitical project and horizon. Although Butler has consistently critiqued and deconstructed the notion of a sovereign subject, their reliance on psychoanalytic models of (inter)subjectivity—Melanie Klein and Sigmund Freud in particular—leads to an overemphasis on particular forms of subjection and violence that I believe are specific to Euromodern Developmental Man, both in its philosophical articulations and its sociogenic systems of producing such subjects. As Kelly Oliver points out, Butler’s theory of subjectivation overemphasizes what Nietzsche called the reactive forces of existence and leaves by the wayside another, more affirmative articulations of constitutive sociality necessary for thriving (Oliver 2001). To borrow from Wynter, Butler thus “overrepresents” Nietzsche’s reactive Man, which I interpret in the light of the Developmental genre of Man, “as if it were the human itself” (Wynter 2003).

To be clear: I do not take issue with Butler’s notion of vulnerability, which entails an irreducible violence inherent to any constitutive sociality, and find especially their introducing of moral ambivalences in the language of relationality crucial. As Cavarero insists, starting from vulnus as paradigm for existence and ethics implies both the poles of wound and care as intricately and inseparately linked (Cavarero 2016). Indeed, every form of sociality and existence involves forms of violence in one way or another. My challenge to Butler’s notion of vulnerability is not about their emphasis on the fact that relationality always involves violence and wounding. However, the particular kinds of violence and subjection that they theorize require more sociogenic tools and should not be universalized. What is more, the constitutive sociality for a nonsovereign relational theory of subjectivity is not necessarily a form of alienation (see epigraph). For this argument, I wish to distinguish between vulnerability and powerlessness. My wager is that when vulnerability is

This patronizing governance is perhaps elucidated within the frame of Developmental Man as infantilizing modes of governance (Gill-Peterson 2018). An ethics of care within Developmental Man relies on infantilized governance of the immature; demonstrating how the civilizational idea of the Child – which is the primary frame of those in need of mature care or governance – as premised upon severance and violence, shows how a whole range from infantilized care to genocide go back to the same Euromodern notion of civilized Man and his Other(s).
respected and honored, it enables one to be responsive to the wounding, which is an inevitable part of life. The type of subjection and violence that Butler takes to be inherent to psychic life and every sociality, however, are often modes of powerlessness, which relies on the violation of vulnerability. I connect this to both the philosophical and sociogenic formations of Developmental Man I outlined in previous chapters, where the denial of vulnerability and subjection to hierarchical power is constitutive of Euromodern subject-formation. These modalities of subjectivation based on a disavowal of vulnerability, turn vulnerability into powerlessness. I take the word powerlessness from Nietzsche (see chapter 5), who theorizes the emergence of bad conscience, guilt, ressentiment and a reactive typology as the formation of the subject or soul, from the violence inscribed into the body by a stronger force. Butler (productively I think) interprets this as scenes of childhood subjectivation and blends it with psychoanalytic readings. However, this does not denote a general structure of the psychic life of power, but must be understood as sociogenically produced. Inducing powerlessness, is precisely what debilitates responsivity or is response-debilitating.

The aim of this chapter is to develop a notion of vulnerability—and thereby rethink the meaning of constitutive sociality—that is clearly distinguished from response-debilitating powerlessness and abuse in order to reclaim vulnerability for an affirmative ethics. This is done, first, through a critique of Butler’s notion of vulnerability and the undergirding notions of relationality and sociality in their work; and, second, by turning to Gloria Anzaldúa and Nina Lykke’s embracing of vulnerable co-becomings. I use affirmative ethics in Braidotti’s Spinozist-Deleuzian sense, which she contrasts with the “negative” ethics based on vulnerability (Braidotti 2006). Surely, this oppositional framing is not something that Butler would subscribe to. Indeed, they are committed to affirming vulnerability as basis for a shared ethico-political horizon. My aim is to show that vulnerability and affirmation are not in contradiction (a claim that Butler would agree with), but that this requires a different conception of vulnerability and subjectivity than the one that Butler theorizes. As I will show, in particular through Butler’s reliance on Klein, the underlying conception of subjectivity, relationality and vulnerability continue to rely on and an “overrepresentation [of some tenets of Developmental] Man as if it were the human itself” (Wynter 2003). This mistakes the specificities of (Euromodern) violence and violation of vulnerability (which produce powerlessness) for universal structures inherent to every system of subjectivation. Thereby, Butler’s conception repeats certain tropes of maturation and development that this dissertation critiques. As Butler, Cavarero and Anzaldúa all insist, wounding and vulner-ability are constitutive of human (and more-than-human) existence. Again, the point is not to separate
vulnerability from violence or being wounded, but to differentiate between violence that denies vulnerability (turning it into powerlessness; response-debilitation), and vulnerability respected, which enables one to be responsive to violence and wounding.

Ultimately, within the argument of this dissertation, the conceptual pair vulnerability/powerlessness is brought in dialogue with Lugones’ conceptual pair of multiplicity (or pluralism)/fragmentation. Butler is one of the key thinkers to theorize the effects of subjectivation based on the play of power and powerlessness but limits the affirmative part of the story as a secondary effect of violent subjection: without separating vulnerability from powerlessness, Butler privileges and inflates histories of fragmentation and tre them as a single, universal story without an outside. This leads Butler to articulate the foundation of an ethical or political community mostly (but not exclusively) in negative terms, as a diminishing of and a protection from an inherently violent state of being. The specter of a Hobbesian violent state of nature (and a Hegelian/Kojèveian antagonistic model of relationality) animate such defensive ethics of Butler through their reliance on Freudian and Kleinian theory (Butler 2020).

Before introducing Butler’s theory of vulnerability in relation to ethics and subjectivity, I will begin by a brief note on Butler’s methodology, oscillating between feminist genealogy and feminist psychoanalysis. I argue that Butler does not submit psychoanalysis to the same genealogical critique that they employ elsewhere and thereby reproduces the universalizing reach of canonical psychoanalysis with its Euromodern postulates. Here, Fanon’s sociogenic intervention in psychoanalysis (Fanon 2008) is crucial to prevent generalization of Euromodern theories of the subject. As I show, classical psychoanalysis’ developmental model of the human and the civilizational maturity-trope resurface in Butler’s work. The maturity-trope refers to a developmental model of the human where one must transcend the primitive stages of asocial egotism and superstition to become social, moral, individuated agents (see chapter 3). Although Butler is critical of the injunction to and very possibility of sovereign maturity after a more infantile “narcissism” and “dependency,” they nevertheless remain uncritical of how this figure of infantile narcissistic dependency is theorized. This in my view undercuts a truly transformative notion of relationality, sociality, subjectivity and vulnerability. Second, I sketch Butler’s notion of vulnerability through a reading of The Psychic Life of Power

102 In this chapter I cannot do justice to this Hegelian dimension of Butler’s thought. Instead, I focus on the psychoanalytic and especially Kleinian dimension of their conception of subjectivity. For the Hegelian dimension, see e.g. Oliver’s critique of Butler, who argues that the whole paradigm of recognition theory based on the master/slave (or lord/bondsman) dialectic mistakes a theory of identity through domination for the structure of subjectivity in general (Oliver 2001).

After the critical discussion of Butler’s work and distinguishing between powerlessness and vulnerability, I attempt an affirmative reconceptualization of vulnerability. This draws on Erinn Gilson’s (2014) and Margrit Shildrick’s work (2002). In Gilson’s words, “vulnerability may be understood as an openness to being altered, and, more specifically, being altered in ways that destabilize a previously stable, or seemingly stable, state” (Gilson 2014, 64). Shildrick suggests that “exposure, a vulnerable openness in the face of alterity, is the very condition of becoming” (Shildrick 2002, 101). This positive redefinition of irreducible vulnerability does not mourn the impossibility of an invulnerable bounded sovereign self, but instead “shatters the ideal of the self’s clean and proper body; and it calls finally for the willingness to engage in an ethics of risk” (Shildrick 2002, 86). I explore this affirmative conception of vulnerability as ethical co-becoming through the work of Anzaldúa and Lykke.

Vulnerability comes from the Latin *vulnus*, which means wound (Cavarero 2016). Anzaldúa shows that it is not being wounded that is debilitating, but hierarchical power (*potestas*) that prevents one from being response-able to wounding. Ethical sociality as respecting vulnerability and as vulnerable co-becoming does not prevent the being wounded (an impossibility) but allows for a response-able relation to it. Respecting the Other’s vulnerability is distinguished from powerlessness, a violation of vulnerability where the wounding becomes the source of response-debilitating subjection. I read Anzaldúa through Lugones’ terms of the distinction of multiplicity and fragmentation (see previous chapter), to sustain the distinction between (response-enabling) vulnerability and its abuse that turns it into (response-debilitating) powerlessness. I read Lykke as developing an affirmative decolonial and posthuman ethics of vulnerability as co-becoming. Although I agree with Braidotti’s argument for an affirmative basis of ethics, I am cautious of Braidotti’s Spinozist distinction between the joyful and the sad affects, as it risks normativizing the “right” type of affect for ethics and politics. I therefore turn to Lykke’s *Vibrant Death* as a bridge to take up the challenge of an immanent affirmative ethics without introducing new norms of the right type of affect (i.e., joy over sadness). Lykke shows how mourning and loss can function within an immanent philosophy of affirmation. The point here is to separate the Spinozist distinction of *potentia* and *potestas* (Deleuze 1988; Braidotti 2011) from particular type of joyful and sad affect, in which mourning and vulnerability has to be overcome to move to the moment of affirmation and futurity. Instead, I suggest, *potentia* and *potestas* can be more usefully thought of as response-enabling and response-debilitating, along the lines of Lugones’ distinction of multiplicity and fragmentation. This distinction seeks to keep at
bay any normativity in what counts as enabling and debilitating (e.g. valorizing joy over sadness). Based on a more explicitly affirmative notion of vulnerability, an ethics of response-ability is grounded in a respect for vulnerability through which relational subjectivity can flourish. Here one’s own response-ability is tied up with the response-ability of the Other—making me response-able for the response-ability of the Other (Oliver 2001)—as well as to the plural past (see chapter 8).

**Butler’s methodology: between genealogy and psychoanalysis**

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler sets out a “feminist genealogy” of the category of “women” in order to show how the subject of feminism is produced within structures of power (Butler 1990, 9). This means that there can be no feminist politics opposing structures that it is not complicit with, from the outside as it were, but must account for its own implication and production within the socio-political structures it seeks to name and challenge. As Oliver points out (Oliver 2001), this understanding of genealogy is more Foucauldian than Nietzschean: Nietzsche introduces the genealogy of morality (and identity) as thwarting another way of becoming (the active master-morality). Foucault, on the other hand, insists on the immanent play of power that has no outside. This element will be crucial for Butler’s taking up of a feminist genealogical method: “The juridical structures of language and politics constitute the contemporary field of power; hence, there is no position outside this field, but only a critical genealogy of its own legitimating practices” (Butler 1990, 7). Butler’s insistence on the totality of the field of power—history, language, politics—that can only be “subverted” within an immanent “iteration” remains present in their entire body of work. In *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997), Butler seeks to bring together genealogical methods with insights from psychoanalysis. With the increasing importance that psychoanalysis plays in their subsequent work, a problem arises. As they develop “a more general conception of the human (…) one in which we are, from the start, given over to the other, one in which we are, from the start, even prior to individuation itself and, by virtue of bodily requirements, given over to some set of primary others” (Butler 2006, 31), Butler turns to Freud and Klein for theoretical scaffolding. Curiously, these classic psychoanalytic texts are not submitted to a similar genealogical critique. The model for the human that emerges, then, remains a relatively unchallenged version of traditional psychoanalytic notions based on clinical observations of bourgeois European children on the one hand, and imperial civilizational understanding of the nuclear family and civilizational stages of humanity on the
Butler’s argument about the relationality-prior-to-individuation and the vulnerable interdependence of the human individual, is circumscribed by a highly specific historical, race and class situation. In particular, the patriarchal civilizational understanding of child-rearing was based on severance and discipline as the oedipal road to maturity and independence (see chapter 3). In conjunction with the Foucauldian point that there is no outside to the field of power-relations, we ironically find the resurfacing of a Euromodern genre of Man. Butler’s theories would require a more sociogenic approach, both in the Fanonian psychoanalytic sense and in Wynter’s philosophical anthropological sense. Fanon insists that the very presuppositions and methodology of psychoanalysis—and other disciplines—are based on colonial structures. The order of knowledge is not neutral and objective but coextensive with the world of empire (Fanon 2008; Gordon 2011; Mariott 2011). Fanon’s transformative approach to psychoanalysis and philosophy thus required what Gordon calls a “teleological suspension of disciplinarity;” adequate knowledge cannot be produced within the insular horizon of each discipline, since that division itself obscures and maintains many crucial socio-historical and existential situations (Gordon 2011).

Butler and Klein: the developmental model of the Child
How does Butler draw on psychoanalysis in general and Klein in particular for a theory of human sociality in their attempt to build an ethico-political project based on this originary human bond? Focusing on this serves to show how Butler accepts a form of the maturity-trope and the developmental model of the Child that needs to transcend or grow out of a more primary selfishness, aggression or narcissism, in order to become an ethical agent and reach maturity. These developmental notions, I argue, are inseparable from the racial and sexual logic of a civilizational discourse rooted in the analogy of a single line of human

103 There has always been a gap, even within bourgeois societies, between the realities of family life and the ideal image of a separate, autonomous nuclear family. For example, Freud exorcized any trace of nurses and servants from the general theories of the psychic life of an individual, even though they featured greatly in many of the cases he studied (McClintock 1995). Conversely, the trope of the isolated nuclear family as the natural order of society and its hierarchies was projected onto primates and prehistoric humans, at the same time that colonialism undermined the myriad expressions of social fabric in populations deemed “primitive” (Haraway 1989; McClintock 1995; Vázquez 2020; Lewis 2022).

104 It is telling that Butler does not engage Fanon psychoanalytically: In The Force of Non-Violence, Fanon briefly surfaces as a “critical supplement” to Foucault’s biopower but is absent in the discussions of Klein and Freud (the latter doing most of the theoretical lifting for Butler’s conception of human nature). For Butler’s most sustained engagement with Fanon (in relation to Hegelian recognition-theory), see Butler (2004). Unfortunately, this does not inform Butler’s use of psychoanalysis (cf. Butler 2020).
history from (savage) infancy to (civilized) maturity that takes clinical observations of bourgeois children as the model of normal and civilized human development.

Although Butler insists that their usage of Klein is “un-Kleinian” (Butler 2009, 44) by which they mean that they move away from Klein’s focus on self-preservation toward a social ontology, they follow Klein’s argument of love growing out of hatred, and the injunction to overcome narcissism and resentment to arrive at a moral consideration of the Other by way of guilt. Butler turns to Klein to answer the following question: “what kind of motivation is animated in psychic life when we actively seek to safeguard the life of another?” (Butler 2020, 87). They want to develop a theory of an originary social bond, of a constitutive interdependency that implicates every I in the lives of the Other. This in turn ought to lead to a commitment to the preservation of the life of the Other, since the destruction of the Other is at the same time a disruption of the originary social bond that my own life depends on. Butler finds a model in Klein, whose work focuses on the mother-child dyad as the originary human bond that leaves its psychic imprint on the individual’s later life. For Klein, the infant’s life is an oscillation between total satisfaction based on the mother’s presence and the total frustration when their needs are not met. The pleasure the infant derives from its mother provides the basis for love and the experience of frustration leads to hatred. As the child becomes aware of her total dependence on the (m)other, the child’s psyche becomes an ambivalent battleground of the conflicting feelings of love and hatred. The hatred that the child feels towards his mother is ridden with anxiety because of the awareness of their total dependency on her. Thus, the hatred and their concomitant destructive wishes translate into an unconscious sense of guilt. So, Klein’s originary social bond—based on the mother-child dyad—is ridden with ambivalence of pleasure-love, frustration-hatred, destructive and restorative phantasies, resulting in an anxious child who seeks to maintain his relationship to the (m)other:

105 “his mother is primarily only an object which satisfies all his desires—a good breast as it were” (Klein 1985, 307).
106 Note how much of Klein’s theory relies on the category of “phantasy,” the earliest and most primitive form of mental activity (Klein 1985; Segal 1988): “primitive phantasying is the earliest form of the capacity which later develops into the more elaborate workings of the imagination” (Klein 1985, 308). The role of phantasy in psychoanalysis has two very dubious sources. First, its language of primitiveness suggests the logic of recapitulation theory, which posits that the development of the individual repeats the development of human history writ large; a development from infancy to maturity, from primitive savagery to civilization. This racist civilizational prism is Freud’s hermeneutical key for all of his musings on civilization and history, and his attempt at explaining “primitive” religion rooted in ignorance and magical
Our grievances against our parents for having frustrated us, together with the feelings of hate and revenge to which these have given rise in us, and again, the feelings of guilt and despair arising out of this hate and revenge because we have injured the parents whom at the same time we loved—all these, in phantasy, we may undo in retrospect (taking away some of the grounds for hatred), by playing at the same time the parts of loving parents and loving children. (Klein cited in Butler 2020, 90)

This becomes key to the (moral) maturation of the child: “my psychoanalytic work has convinced me that when in the baby’s mind the conflicts between love and hate arise, and the fears of losing the loved one become active, a very important step is made in development” (Klein cited in Butler 2019, 92). One would expect some critical reservations with using this model for its reliance on the theory of innate aggression, the overrepresentation of a bourgeois family represented as universal, the naturalization of the mother-child dyad, or even within the discipline of psychology the fact that all of Klein’s observations seem to more speak to a deeply “insecure attachment” of anxious children (unsurprising under depriving social technologies of the family based on hierarchy, discipline and separation). Instead, Butler wishes to “expand” the scene of the mother-child to a more general conception of the social bond:

> Although the developmental account presumes infant and mother, can we say that this ambivalent form of the social bond takes a more general form once the interdiction against murder becomes an organizing principle of a sociality? After all, that primary condition in which survival is insured through an always partially intolerable dependency does not exactly leave us as we age. (Butler 2020, 96)

Butler accepts the maturity-trope of Klein’s developmental model that seeks to abate a more primary narcissism: “Individuation is an accomplishment, not a presupposition, and certainly no guarantee” (Butler 2006, 27). Butler’s commitment to psychoanalysis leads to repetition of a form of the maturity-trope (see chapter 3), where atomistic and hostile animality has to be transcended to arrive at ethical sociality. True, they posit the impossibility and the undesirability of ever achieving such mature sovereignty. Yet, this ambivalence does little to challenge a Freudian understanding of “infantile traces” continuing thinking in particular (Freud 1950). Secondly, Freud only introduced the idea of childhood incestuous fantasies and fake memories after his initial thesis based on women’s “hysteria” being the result of childhood experience of sexual abuse and rape met with silence from the medical establishment who did not welcome the idea of a culture of sexual abuse of children in the respectable patriarchal families of Vienna. In the wake of this silence, Freud reformulated the causes of neurosis as rooted in childhood fantasies, which became a psychoanalytic dogma for much of the 20th century (Herman 1992).

For a further critique of Butler’s developmental model of subjectivity, see also Berlant (2011, 181–185) and Gilson (2014).
to haunt the ego and prevent them from achieving full maturity. Butler continues to rely on a notion of a narcissistic individual who needs to overcome a primary narcissism and aggressiveness by turning toward a moral consideration of others. In other words, they do not challenge the trajectory of Developmental Man who moves from a pre-ethical Nature toward the attainment of moral sociality.

Although I agree with Butler’s notion of a constitutive relationality that is prior to individuation, I believe that the Kleinian model does not actually offer this: relationality gets translated into despair and destructiveness at the child’s “helplessness” or powerlessness. This powerlessness finds its explanation in an atomistic, Hobbesian even, conception of human nature, in which the individual seeks their own pleasure and safety, rather than being a sign of a social technology of family life based on hierarchy and discipline, severance and fragmentation. I would even go so far as to say that not only Butler’s recourse to Klein but even their original question—“What kind of motivation is animated in psychic life when we actively seek to safeguard the life of another?”—undercuts the answer that they seek: if one starts from the narcissistic ego who has to transcend the self to reach an ethical commitment to the life of the Other, then altruism and ethics become a transcendental problem, having to transcend a pre-ethical infantile narcissism to reach ethical sociality and relationality.

Although Butler bases their argument on the existential basis of interdependence, ethics is based on overcoming a prior narcissistic and aggressive selfishness that continues to haunt and co-constitute the subject. Surely, there is also space for less violent and more caring dimensions of touch in Butler’s account. Nevertheless, with recourse to Klein’s psychoanalytic framework, they seek to derive ethics from a more primary aggression deriving from a frustrated mother-child relationship. Here again atomistic conceptions of selfish and aggressive individuals and a negative relationality of deprivation and dispossession lay the foundation for the ethic of non-violence. The sociality that Butler and Klein have in mind is based on the unbearable helplessness of being dependent on the (m)other. Butler’s ethic of nonviolence is explicit in its aim of abating the sense of “intolerable dependency” that continues to haunt the subject. The reparative “phantasy” (see footnote 107) to undo the destructive wish upon the (m)other becomes the thrust for individual maturation and an ethical commitment to the life of the Other. The social bond is one of primary deprivation, despair, and powerlessness, which nevertheless chains us to taking responsibility to maintain that bond: nonviolence is a negation of a more originary violence (or the “phantasy” thereof), ethics is derived from the negation of a more originary narcissism. A Nietzschean critique would argue that the Kleinian-Butlerian focus on the genesis of guilt as the motor of moral development leaves out more life-affirming forces as the material for a (communal) ethics. Challenging this negative notion of ethics (or, rather, morality) based on the despair and helplessness derived from dependency will
be central to this chapter’s aim to reclaim vulnerability for an affirmative feminist ethic. This affirmative ethic seeks to move away from developmentalist accounts that differentiate between the Child and maturity, as this is precisely the site where a host of racist and sexist presuppositions and normativity based on the Euromodern Developmental genre of Man resurface.

Butler relies on tropes of developmentalism or maturation that seek to abate and overcome an alleged problem of unavoidable destructiveness in psychic and social life. As Lauren Berlant puts it, Butler “pursues a developmental model of political subjectivity that sees infantile dependency as the seed of a kind of sadistic normativity in adults that can be interrupted by an ethical commitment to compassionate emotion” (Berlant 2011, 181–182). A “progressive subject” emerges who “dismantles her pathological sense of defensive sovereignty or sovereign indifference on behalf of a healthy non-sovereign identification” with others (Berlant 2011, 182).

Next to following Klein on the moral development through guilt, Butler builds directly on Freud’s theory of the death drive (Butler 2020). They follow Freud’s argument that there is an irreducible drive to destruction due to “intolerable dependency” (Butler 2020, 96) and psychic ambivalences resulting from being a non-sovereign self, which can only be mitigated by “education” (Butler 2020, 180). The question then becomes how to counterbalance an unavoidable destructive urge that arises from an alleged intolerable dependence on others. If the conservative modality of the maturity-trope entails a paternal injunction to “grow up” and take “personal responsibility,” the progressivist modality of the maturity-trope appeals to an educated mind who can transcend the less evolved tendencies towards intolerance and destruction. As we know, in Freud this explicitly entails a civilizational progressivist narrative that seeks to overcome but is always haunted by a racialized savage past that lurks within everyone, even in modern subjects and cultures. The project of a relational ontology and ethico-political horizon that starts from vulnerability and constitutive sociality in my opinion must entail an explicit critique and reworking of such civilizational notions of Man.

**Butler’s notion of vulnerability**

In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Butler attempts a psychoanalytic interpretation of Foucauldian theory of subjectivation, i.e., the paradoxical processes of “simultaneous subordination and forming of the subject” (Butler 1997, 7). Here, they introduce the theme of the Child’s vulnerability as the site of subjectivation through their dependency qua exploitability: “Although the dependency of the child is not political subordination in any usual sense, the formation of primary passion in dependency renders the child vulnerable to subordination and exploitation” (Butler 1997, 7). Butler continues to try to theorize both the connectedness and differences between political subordination proper and the
classic psychoanalytic scene of the child’s development, although there remains a tension. In *Psychic Life*, Butler is concerned with how subjectivation is a process of “passionate attachment” to the very processes of subordination (Butler 1997). The exposure to/through constitutive sociality is explained as alienation and subordination, so that human existence (as social creatures) is by its very logic one of subordination:

the self has no story of its own that is not also the story of a relation—or a set of relations—to a set of norms (...) The “I” is always to some extent dispossessed by the social conditions of its emergence. This disPossession does not mean that we have lost the subjective ground for ethics. On the contrary, it may well be the condition for moral inquiry, the condition under which morality itself emerges. (Butler 2005, 8)

This insight is derived both from Hegelian frameworks of intersubjective recognition as constitutive of subjectivity, as well as Kleinian psychoanalysis of the dependency of the infant on the (m)other for survival. Because of the dependency and intertwinement with this constitutive externality, the subject is neither self-contained nor sovereign (a common critique of liberal notions of the sovereign subject). On the other hand, this relationality also dispossesses the subject: “Despite my affinity for the term relationality, we may need other language to approach (...) a way of thinking about how we are not only

108 As Oliver argues, Butler nevertheless fails to distinguish between subjectivation and subordination, leading to a dangerous conflation between the processes of subjectivation found in bourgeois childrearing on the one hand and genocidal and other dehumanizing histories on the other (Oliver 2001, 66). Butler would certainly agree with Oliver that there should not be a conflation between violent histories of dehumanization on the one hand, and the processes of subjectivation derived from psychoanalytic readings of the bourgeois family. Nevertheless, in what way can it be said that most children’s processes of subjectivation are not political “in any usual sense” (Butler 1997, 7)? Would this not only apply to an ideal(1) of the private family life separate from the public? How to think subordination and subjectivation together in their entanglement without reducing one to the other will remain a challenge throughout this chapter and the dissertation in general. I propose that one of Butler’s pitfalls is the acceptance of the validity of a universalizing psychoanalytic framework, which is not submitted to genealogical critique or sociogenic transformation. Through this socio-genealogical differentiation, I nevertheless believe that though different, the processes of subjectivation of bourgeois subjects (as “humanization”) and dehumanized others are related. The discursive and phenomenological exploration of the childhood and maturity-tropes, and the frameworks for thinking the haunting legacies of the fragmentation and severance it is based upon, seeks to theorize the relations between these differences. Ultimately, I am convinced that no single biography would fit neatly in a categorical distinction between those who would fall within the norm of the human and those who would fall outside of it (e.g. Vázquez’ distinction between “subjectification” and “subjugation;” Vázquez 2020, 15). Although the modes of analysis need to keep in view geopolitical differences of subject-positions, the categories used need to remain flexible.
Gendering remains paradigmatic: without a child’s choosing, they are subjected to gender-labels and other gender-regimes in ways that are simultaneously constitutive of subject-formation as well as subjecting a child to names and rules not of their own making:

> Bound to seek recognition of its own existence in categories, terms, and names that are not of its own making, the subject seeks the sign of its own existence outside itself, in a discourse that is at once dominant and indifferent. Social categories signify subordination and existence at once. In other words, within subjection the price of existence is subordination. (Butler 1997, 20)

In short: vulnerability is the inevitable exposure to the simultaneously constitutive and dispossessing effects of subjection. According to Butler, this double-bind of subjectivation is inevitable because we dwell within history and language. To be vulnerable, then, means to be “vulnerable to violence:”

> there is a more general conception of the human with which I am trying to work here, one in which we are, from the start, given over to the other (…) even prior to individuation itself and, by virtue of bodily requirements, given over to some set of primary others; this conception means that we are vulnerable to those we are too young to know and to judge and, hence, vulnerable to violence; but also vulnerable to another range of touch, a range that includes the eradication of our being at the one end, and the physical support for our lives at the other (Butler 2006, 31).

With Precarious Life and Frames of War, Butler seeks to clarify how the general psychoanalytic scene of the Child’s subjectivation (subordination/becoming-subject) is always-already socio-politically differentiated and based on the social norms of recognizability: which subjects are grievable? Whose humanity is recognizable? What are the operative frames that make some subjects deemed worthy of protection and mourning, and others not?

Butler develops vulnerability here in two ways that they try to bring together: first, as a shared existential condition, and second, as discursive effect of certain framing of who counts fully as human and who counts as less-than-human. Butler argues that these two modes are always-already intertwined: the acknowledgement of who counts as a human/vulnerable subject can only happen within the discursive frames that produce the border between the grievable life of the human subject and the less-than-human who falls outside of the frames. This discursive formation partakes in the (material) differential production of vulnerability: the framing of the incarcerated in Guantánamo Bay as “bad people” who “don’t share the same values like you and me” (George W. Bush, in The Road to Guantánamo) sustains and reproduces their structural position of extreme vulnerability/violability. Butler connects these two poles—existential vulnerability and their frames of recognizability—through an ontological view of the body as constituted by what is outside of its own porous
boundaries (both the nourishing support of a caregiver as well as social institutions). On this view of the body, “we cannot understand bodily vulnerability outside this conception of social and material relations” (Butler 2016, 16). As part of the social and material relations, this is inseparable from frames of recognizability: “a vulnerability must be perceived and recognized in order to come into play in an ethical encounter (...) vulnerability is fundamentally dependent on existing norms of recognition” (Butler 2006, 43).

In *Frames of War*, Butler explicates the distinction between a shared existential vulnerability that they dub “precariousness,” and a politically induced differential allocation of vulnerability, “precarity” (Butler 2009).

**Critique of Butler’s concept of vulnerability**

The mostly negative conception of vulnerability is inseparable from a larger issue in Butler’s work: although their genealogical critique and deconstruction of identity would seem to undermine the concept of the sovereign subject, the specter of the latter nevertheless animates Butler’s conception of relationality: it is premised on inagurative dispossession and alienation through subjection to an external power. As Oliver puts it:

Butler’s theory itself can be read as an oscillation between the ideal of a self-made, self-possessed subject, and the constitutive/subjecting play of power itself. For Butler, because they are “not of our making,” our primary relationships, our subsequent relationships, our relations to language, power, and society, are relations of subordination and subjugation. (...) Why does dependency have to be figured as violent, alienating, subjugating, and dominating? Only if we start with the ideal of the self-possessed autonomous subject is dependence threatening. (Oliver 2001, 67–68)

The negative understanding of vulnerability is thus haunted by the specter of Hobbesian selves in Freudian and Kleinian psychoanalysis, and the Hegelian antagonistic self-other model. In order to arrive at an affirmative notion of vulnerability as a positive foundation for ethical and political community, the notions of sociality and relationality need to be reworked as well. Instead of starting from an atomistic ontology in which the individual is subjected to an outside through constitutive-yet-dispossessive/alienating relationality, relationality and sociality have to be understood as precedent. This is not prior in the sense of pre-individual —before individuality is “achieved”— but of relational becoming within a sociality that individuality never transcends. From

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109 Butler addresses some of the problems with the vulnerability-approach as the basis for a shared ethico-political project in *The Force of Non-Violence*, particularly the question of competition between vulnerable groups (“who is the most vulnerable”) and the paternalistic attitude of having to “protect” the vulnerable in a way that does not do justice to people’s agency and complex situation (Butler 2020, 185–204).
such an immanent and precedent notion of relationality, vulnerability can be thought of as the openness of relational becoming, separate from its abuse. Paradoxically, despite Butler’s commitment to deconstruct any notion of the substantive self, the specter of the sovereign subject seems to return as the negative foundation of sociality and ethics. But if vulnerability is inseparable from subjection and abuse, then can it possibly serve as a resource for an affirmative ethics? If existence can only be thought on the basis of vulnerability, and vulnerability is inseparable from violation and destruction, then do we not end up with an ethics that is “anti-earthly” (in a Nietzschean sense)? Or, rather than an earthly ethic, a transcendental morality that seeks to protect against the forces of life?

Negative ethics vs. affirmative ethics: Rosi Braidotti

Braidotti is perhaps the most vehement in refusing vulnerability as the basis for an ethical and political community. Taking up the immanent philosophical tradition of Spinoza, Nietzsche and Deleuze, Braidotti separates the repressive and negating effects of power (potestas) from the empowering forces of relations (potentia) that make subjectivity and life ever-changing modes of becoming. Whereas Butler emphasizes the paradox of the subject’s relationality’s double-bind of constitution and dispossession, Braidotti recasts relationality as the interplay between empowering good encounters as opposed to oppressive/disempowering bad encounters: “The bodily self’s interaction with his/her environment can either increase or decrease that body’s conatus or potentia” (Braidotti 2006, 240). To base ethics on “vulnerability” would be to ground ethics on negativity and sadness (the history of potestas) instead of the affirmation of creative and joyful becoming. This does not mean that there is no place for the sad affects in Braidotti, but they play a subservient and “clinical” role to arrive at affirmation:

The qualitative leap through pain, across the mournful landscapes of nostalgic yearning, is the gesture of active creation of affirmative ways of belonging (…) the process of becoming-ethical: the move across and beyond pain, loss, and negative passions. Taking suffering into account is the starting point; the real aim of the process, however, is the quest for ways of overcoming the stultifying effects of passivity, brought about by pain. (Braidotti 2006, 242)

Additionally: “The ethics of affirmation is not the denial of [negativity and disorientation]. It’s a way of processing this material in the direction of affirmation (…) curing us from the overdoses of negativity of the system that we are working in” (Braidotti 2019, 471). Braidotti’s impatience with negativity and celebration of positivity has led some critics to argue that Braidotti’s affirmative ethics rely on a voluntarist conception of ethics based on the will to

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110 See the Nietzschean-Deleuzian distinction between ethics and morality in chapter 5.
overcome sadness, which is inseparable from privileged subject-positions that do not do justice to the differential effects of the weight and haunting of history and politics. As Sabine Broeck (2019) argues, Braidotti risks re-entrenching a white feminist subject able to reclaim futurity at the expense of abjected Blackness. Broeck goes so far to say that Braidotti “relegates Black knowledge to a social, political, and cultural immobility and pastness only to be transcended by posthumanist vitalism” (Broeck 2019, 178). Whilst more reparative readings are certainly possible. I share the concern for the temporality in Braidotti’s affirmative framework (see also chapter 2), which a more affirmative reworking of vulnerability can challenge as well. Oliver and Braidotti both seek in their different ways to articulate an affirmative ethics. Braidotti does so by compartmentalizing vulnerability within her ethics, as merely a moment of clinically working through the sad affects in order to arrive at a truly affirmative ethics based on the joyful/gay affects (Braidotti 2006; Braidotti 2019). Oliver seeks an affirmative alternative in her figuration of “witnessing” as an ethical and positively relational mode of subjectivity against the Hegelian-Kojèvian recognition model based on the antagonistic relationality of the master/slave-dialectic that Butler takes up (Oliver 2001).

**Powerlessness and vulnerability**

The distinction between powerlessness and vulnerability goes back to my discussion of Nietzsche’s genealogy and the psycho-existential sketch of reactivity stemming from an experience of powerlessness due to a violation of the exposed body. Oliver argues that Butler loses sight of Nietzsche’s key distinction between life-affirming and life-denying forms of power:

> We could diagnose Butler’s insistence on violence and the inability to distinguish productive power from abusive power as her Foucauldian rather than Nietzschean inheritance. (…) Nietzsche makes a distinction between life-affirming and life-denying forms of power: those forces that expand life or produce excess are life-affirming, and those forces that conserve and limit life are negating. (Oliver 2001, 66)

For Oliver, Butler’s theory of subjection and subjectivation undermines rather than constitutes the relational and ethical structure of subjectivity, which she understands in terms of witnessing and responsivity. Butler offers an analysis of subject-formation within a hierarchical relation of domination (potestas), which they claim to be at the heart of psychic life in general. Butler offers keen insights in the psychic life in particular sociogenic subject-formation, but in their reliance on a universalizing psychoanalysis, they mistake Reactive Man and Developmental Man for the human itself. In reclaiming irreducible ethical relational subjectivity in excess of modern subject-formation (operating through severance and fragmentation), I distinguish between vulnerability and
powerlessness. To give an existential sense of powerlessness, I borrow Jill Stauffer’s definition of ethical loneliness:

[T]he isolation one feels when one, as a violated person or as one member of a persecuted group, has been abandoned by humanity, or by those who have power over one’s life’s possibilities. It is a condition undergone by persons who have been unjustly treated and dehumanized by human beings and political structures, who emerge from that injustice only to find that the surrounding world will not listen to or cannot properly hear their testimony—theyir claims about what they suffered and about what is now owed them—on their own terms. So ethical loneliness is the experience of having been abandoned by humanity compounded by the experience of not being heard. Such loneliness is so named because it is a form of social abandonment that can be imposed only by multiple ethical lapses on the part of human beings residing in the surrounding world. (Stauffer 2015, 1–2)

I employ the definition of “ethical loneliness” for understanding powerlessness because it emphasizes the violation of a default social and ethical arrangement of existence rather than claiming that it is inherent to any social bond and structure of subjectivation (as Butler claims). The second element, the question of witnessing and being heard, finds resonance in Oliver’s notion of the ethical structure of subjectivity being based on a responsive structure of witnessing. The final element, the “multiple ethical lapses on the part of human beings,” finds agreement in the ideas of Butler’s “precarity” and Cavarero’s “helplessness” (see below) that these are states induced by social arrangements. Within the framework of sociogeny, it is important to highlight that much of Euromodernity is based on the arranged production of powerlessness in the name of Developmental Man. Stauffer discusses ethical loneliness in relation to modes of political violence and torture in particular and there is a danger in broadening its application. Although I acknowledge the dangers of employing such notion intended for scenes of torture and political violence to childhood scenes of subject-formation, I believe it is nevertheless important to pursue this connection to show how these scenes of utmost violence and dehumanization should not remain in a vacuum and need to be connected to a spectrum of hierarchical violence that includes childhood scenes of subject-formation (see also footnote 109). Childhood becoming is always-already political. What is more, it insists on keeping in view the relation between the figure of the Child within the Developmental Genre of Man (based on a hierarchical relationship of absolute denial of vulnerability and disrespect for the will of the Other) and colonialism’s and coloniality’s targeting of children in particular (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2019).

Butler’s “enmesh[ing] of all sorts of unlike phenomena, conflating dependence with subordination, psychic self-dispossession with political injustice, and personal with political subjectivity” (Berlant 2011, 182), leads to a generalization of specific forms of violence that produce powerlessness as if
involved a general structure of psychic life and power. I therefore turn to a more affirmative sense of vulnerability understood as co-becoming through alterity. To be fair, Butler does sometimes hint at these more affirmative dimensions, but they remain secondary in their conceptualization of vulnerability (e.g. Butler 2006, 23).

The distinction between vulnerability and powerlessness is not quite the same as Butler’s distinction between precarity and precariousness (Butler 2009, 3). They take precariously to mean the shared existential condition of vulnerability and precarity the differential production of vulnerability (the realm of politics). From the ontology of precariouslyness, they seek to build an ethics and politics based on mitigating precarity and thus rendering equal the differential allocation of vulnerability. This distinction remains helpful, but my intervention takes place at the level of their conceptualization of precariouslyness, where I would argue many features of precarity (the differential producing of vulnerability) find their way into their conceptualization of precariouslyness in general. Cavarero makes a similar distinction (Cavarero 2011, 29–32; Söderbäck 2018, 282–286) between helplessness and vulnerability, arguing that “vulnerability is a permanent status of the human being, whereas finding oneself helpless—except for in infancy and, sometimes, extreme old age—depends on circumstances” (Cavarero 2011, 31). For Cavarero, vulnerability is a shared reality of all, being exposed to an outside that can wound anyone. Helplessness, however, is about absolute defenselessness. She takes the infant or the child as paradigmatic of helplessness, as an existential condition of being totally dependent on others. For adults, states of helplessness are politically induced. Helplessness calls for care and support, and the deliberate inducing of states of helplessness constitutes an “offense at the ontological level” (Cavarero 2011, 32). The idea of helplessness as an induced state that constitutes ontological violence is helpful, but I am doubtful that the figures of the Child and the mother-child dyad must be taken as paradigmatic for relationality and ethics. What is more, starting from helplessness as an existential condition of all infants and some other humans might open a host of other issues of categorization and distinctions between different states and conditions that may not be desirable. For my distinction, it is important that powerlessness is a state that can be induced or imposed also for infants and children (in non-responsive and response-debilitating sociogenetic structures of severance, fragmentation, discipline, isolation) rather than being their existential condition by default.

The distinction between powerlessness as response-debilitating and vulnerability as response-enabling hopefully offers a more expansive and flexible understanding of the potestas/potentia distinction, without the arguably affectively normative dimension (sadness=bad; joyfulness=good) of the latter. This hopefully adds to the socio-genealogical tools of naming the violence in Euromodernity as well as the resources for its undoing, adding to Lugones’ conceptual pair of fragmentation/multiplicity. As with all the conceptual pairs
in this dissertation, they themselves need to be understood in their mutual contamination and impure impurity; their temporal and ontological (or hauntological) modalities as per-sisting, in-sisting and ek-sisting is further fleshed out in chapters 8 and 9.

**Affirmative Vulnerability**

In the second part of the chapter, I take up the suggestion by feminist philosophers and scholars to redefine vulnerability in positive terms in order to move to an affirmative ethics of vulnerability. This moves away from Butler’s theorization of sociality as (originally) dispossessive and subordinating, defined negatively as our inability to be sovereign subjects, fatally having to submit to a world “not of our own making.” I will follow Gilson’s and Shildrick’s suggestion to develop an affirmative ethics not by minimizing the role of vulnerability but by positively reconceptualizing it: instead of reducing vulnerability to susceptibility to violence and abuse, Gilson redefines it as “an openness to being altered and, more specifically, being altered in ways that destabilize a previously stable, or seemingly stable, state” (Gilson 2014, 64). Shildrick similarly defines vulnerability as an “irreducible [component] of any ethical becoming” (Shildrick 2002, 7) that challenges the power of the norm understood as an attempt at selfsame sovereignty unaffected and uncontaminated by the mark of deviant otherness (“monstrosity”). The ethics of openness to co-becoming with differences is developed in critical contrast with the power of the norm that produces the monstrous (Shildrick 2002). The ethics of vulnerability then glimpses a relationality of critical co-becoming as alternative resource to the power of the norm that Butler analyzes so well. I will develop Gilson’s suggestion of thinking vulnerability as openness to being altered and Shildrick’s argument of vulnerability as integral to our (co-)becoming from within an immanent philosophy of affirmation, and in line with the positive relationality that Oliver is aiming at. I will do so by turning to Anzaldúa and Lykke.

This notion of vulnerability as “openness to being altered” might offer a bridge to the affirmative ethics of the immanent philosophical tradition without reinstating hierarchical distinctions between the right type of affect; the *chrononormativity* of which subjects are stuck in the past and which ones can lay claims on the present and future. Recasting subjectivity as an ethical structure of responsivity and response-ability—initiated in a prior sociality that it never transcends, rearticulates the *potential/potestas* distinction as *response-enabling/response-debilitating*.

*Gloria Anzaldúa: Vulnerability and the transformation of fragmentation*

Gloria Anzaldúa’s work can be read as a reclaiming of disavowed vulnerable parts of herself. Her vulnerability has been violated and turned into a source of
powerlessness. On her philosophical, spiritual and political journey, she reclaims it as a source of power, as a way of becoming responsive and responsible to herself and her environment.\textsuperscript{111} Vulnerability, just as in Butler, comes to the fore as a process of subjection in the impossible crafting of modern subjectivity, which fragments her multiplicious Chicanx culture, sexuality, spirituality and bodily self. But vulnerability is also a resource for reclaiming her own becoming and connecting to human and nonhuman others. It is precisely Anzaldúa’s sensuous and spiritual ability to connect and respond to her more-than-human surroundings that is under attack in the fragmentation machinery of white heteropatriarchal society: “[the intelligence of the universe] is constantly speaking to us but we don’t listen, we don’t look. (…) I need to simplify my life and slow it down so that I have these moments of connection” (Anzaldúa 2009e, 75). This requires a “multi-level kind of listening (…) with both outer ear and inner ear. (…) It’s a different way of being in tune with people and the environment” (Anzaldúa 2009e, 75). What Butler theorizes as subordination and dispossession, has according to Anzaldúa an effect of fragmentation. In order to be accepted within a racist, hetero-sexist, ableist, classist, colonial sociality, Anzaldúa learns to split off many parts of herself: her body, her sexuality, her spirituality, her Chicanx culture, her sensitivity to the nonhuman environment, the relation to the netherworld of spirits and the dead, etc.

I denied a whole lot of my sense of connection as I got to be an adolescent: all that stuff was superstition (…) I was going through that “putting down my culture” thing. It was all connected to race. It was better to say I was Latin American or Spanish. In Texas and the Southwest, if you said you were Mexican, you were nothing. (Anzaldúa 2009e, 79)

It is the (often painful) openness to the host of relations to humans/nonhumans, the living/the dead, to her own embodiment, that get fragmented in the hierarchical world of coloniality that she is socialized in as a queer Mexican kid. Next to these white supremacist patriarchal modes of fragmentation, she also reflects on her atypically developing body, which, on the one hand contains the source of spiritual empowerment (connected to her bodily and sexual sensibilities), and on the other as a source of shame that she had to keep secret (Anzaldúa 2009, 84). Anzaldúa reflects on the stages of attempted identification with the norms and the cost of disavowal of the multiplicity (mestizaje) within her. The cost of this is understood psychoanalytically in terms of the Shadow, where all the split off parts (fragmentation) get projected onto an Other or outside. As a queer, racialized woman, her body becomes the projection screen for everything that majority culture deems inferior and worthless.

\textsuperscript{111} See also the discussion of Lorde and the erotic in chapter 8.
The movie *Alien* affected me greatly because I really identified with it. (…) It seemed like they were taking all the things they fear and hate about themselves and projecting them onto the monster. Just like we did with blacks and like people do with queers—all the evils get projected. My sympathies (…) were with the alien. I think that’s how the soul is. It’s treated like an alien because we don’t know it. It’s like a serpent; it’s slimy and bad. That’s what they did with women’s sexuality and with women (…) All the evils get projected onto children, third world people, animals, and women (…) to me spirituality, sexuality, and the body have been about taking back that alien other. (Anzaldúa 2009e, 87)

Her body of work is a testimony, a bearing witness, to the reclaiming and integrating of the split off parts. To relearn her responsivity to her own body, sexuality, spirituality and to others, is a way of reclaiming violated vulnerability and taking the marks of disempowerment (*potestas*) as sites of empowerment (*potentia*) and reconnection, for an ethical co-becoming that relies on openness to being altered. The ongoing path of healing and reintegration was not only necessary for her own survival, but the cultivation of her spiritual-political practice of bridge-work that has connected so many people and continues to connect and transform individuals and helps shape new coalitional collectivities: “It’s about honoring people’s otherness in ways that allow us to be changed by embracing that otherness rather than punishing others (…) a multiplicity that’s transformational, such as in mestiza consciousness” (Anzaldúa 2009d, 246–247). The “honoring people’s otherness” is a respect for the Other’s vulnerability that enables becoming and transformation from difference and multiplicity.

Anzaldúa does not always differentiate between fragmentation and multiplicity and insists on dwelling in and transforming its messiness. Lugones, building on Anzaldúa, introduces this as an analytic with the multiplicity/fragmentation conceptual pair: the logic and optics of fragmentation continue to operate coloniality through dividing and policing impure multiplicity into pure, governable parts. Multiplicity follows the impure logic of curdling. As I have argued throughout this dissertation, the embracing of impure logic must be understood as an *impure impurity*, not separable from the fragmentary logic of coloniality. Recall that Lugones introduces the curdling-metaphor from culinary lessons transmitted by her mother. This tactile space of sociality and intergenerational transmission sustains and cultivates a sense of multiplicitous being and becoming, but this is not a solely resistant space apart from the classist, racist and sexist world that Lugones grew up in. Indeed, it is also a site of the very transmission of fragmenting subjectivation, as Lugones herself recalls when naming how she was socialized into “arrogant perception” (Lugones 2003, 78). In my estimation, Anzaldúa and Lugones speak of the same logics of the messiness of fragmentation and multiplicity in their attempts at dismantling it through its transformation rather than an externalizing
disavowal of fragmentary logics and optics. Lugones’ analytic distinction between multiplicity and fragmentation does not lead to the self-contradictory “this is a good impure part and that is a bad pure part.” But this distinction does help to avoid reducing the processes of becoming to only an iteration—and at best subversion—of inheritances of fragmentation, as seems to be the case in Butler. Anzaldúa’s embracing of her vulnerability, as a staying with the pain and messiness of it all, is the key to the transformation—or relearning—of the impure, creolized multiplicity (mestizaje). Instead of the reactive defensive police-operation of judging the internalized metaphors of the “lazy” Mexican in herself and others (Anzaldúa 2009a, 122), this transformation allows Anzaldúa to be responsive to her human and more-than-human environment. In vulnerability, the response-enabling worlds are in the making in the dismantling of the response-debilitating worlds of reactivity and fragmentation.

To return to Butler: although they try to account for differential socio-political vulnerability, their unhappy marriage between Foucauldian subjectivation and the psychoanalytic model—that, as I argued, to borrow Wynter’s phrase, continues to “overrepresent Man as if it were the human itself”—makes it difficult to separate a general sense of constitutive dispossession from socio-historical forms of domination: being subjected to a language “not of one’s own making” does not differentiate between, for example, growing up with English and the words “girl” and “boy” on the one hand, and legacies of colonial boarding schools and other genocidal policies of severance from other languages as a penal colonial-racial mode of subjectivation on the other hand. This distinction is important, but I do not mean to say that Butler is right about certain regimes of subjectivation but is blind to others. Instead, what Anzaldúa draws our attention to, is a better analytic frame to understand the effects of fragmentation and subjectivation and the resources to resist and transform them.

The parts of Anzaldúa that became sites of subjection—vulnerability-turned-into-powerlessness—are precisely the parts that she is able to work through, reclaim, reintegrate and reinvent: where the wound is there the healing is also. She embraces her vulnerability and with it the pain and messiness of border-subjectivity, thereby transforming the internalized structures of

112 Sometimes intimated with terms like the “colonial difference” or the “color line,” although there will not be the “right word” that will cover the multiplicity of regimes of subjectivation and the multiplicity of stories and storying that work through and transform their haunting legacies.

113 Anzaldúa calls this the “Coyolxauhqui imperative:” “Coyolxauhqui is my symbol for the necessary process of dismemberment and fragmentation, of seeing that self or the situations you’re embroiled in differently. It is also my symbol for reconstruction and reframing, one that allows for putting the pieces together in a new way. The Coyolxauhqui [sic] imperative is an ongoing process of making and unmaking. There is never any resolution, just the process of healing” (Anzaldúa 2009b, 312).
oppression into a source of empowerment and change. Building and rebuilding, claiming and reclaiming spaces where vulnerability can thrive, opens to responsive and response-able co-becoming that recreates and reinvents the relation to a plural past. Reclaiming and integrating what has been disavowed is a different mode of immanent becoming of subjectivity than the subversive iteration of the single story of power and subjection that Butler presents, allowing for an ethics of responsive relationality to the plural past and one’s more-than-human environment. The open-ended structure of subjectivity remains in a responsive relation to the coextensive plural past (Al-Saji 2019) in ways that are not reducible to the processes of subjectivation. The transgenerational intelligence of the body, sexuality, spirituality and culture, cannot be reduced to the technologies of subjectivation even when the former’s modality or incarnation is never separate from the latter.

Vulnerability is not the regrettable fact of existence that requires us to avoid harming others and to maintain a (mostly) negatively defined social bond of fragile interdependence. Vulnerability itself denotes a multiplicitous way of relating to self, other, and world, that the regimes of subjectivation fragment and penalize. This is not a return to a psychoanalytic theory of liberation of the repressed: decolonial feminist work on temporality, storytelling, reintegration, creative reinvention and response-ability provides pathways to think outside the liberatory psychoanalytic (e.g. Marcuse 1974) vs. genealogical (Foucault, Butler) alternatives. As both Anzaldúa and Shildrick remark in different contexts, the opening up to vulnerability is not straightforwardly a “good thing” and the closure of shutting down a “bad thing:” it is always necessary to protect one’s boundaries, but they must remain porous and the capacity to let go of them is also a condition of our existence as risky open-ended co-becomings with multiplicitous differences and others (Anzaldúa 2009e, 88; Shildrick 2002, 101). Transforming the combative ego-protection through disavowal of vulnerability means unlearning reactive ego-defense and relearning responsive relationality: learning to relate to one’s own feelings, needs and desires is simultaneously a prerequisite to attune and open to someone else’s feeling, needs and desires; this response-ability for the Other’s response-ability means an open-ended co-becoming, a “letting oneself be altered” (Gilson 2014). There is an important but subordinate place for reactivity within the encompassing structure of responsivity: by being attuned to oneself and one’s environment, one learns to defend against abuses of relationality. Anzaldúa highlights “the need for psychological armor (picture un nopal) to protect their open, vulnerable selves from negative forces while engaging in the world” (Anzaldúa 2015, 155), whilst understanding that transformation and becoming can only occur through a reclaiming of one’s vulnerability and the creation of spaces and communities where this is possible. This honoring of vulnerability of the Other in their multiplicity allows for a responsive relation to wounding, including vigilant reaction against hostile forces.
As a final stop in this chapter, I want to turn to Lykke’s *Vibrant Death: A Posthuman Phenomenology of Mourning* (2021). I turn to this not only as an illustration of a mode of philosophizing and enacting of an ethics of vulnerability, but also to utilize Lykke’s bridgework between decolonial and posthuman feminisms, including Anzaldúa and Braidotti as shared interlocutors. In particular, it allows to move beyond the opposition between vulnerability vs. affirmation by employing an immanent affirmative Spinozist ontology without the binary and normative framework of separating the right (joyful) type of affect from the wrong (sad) one. This allows to shift the helpful *potentia/potestas* conceptual pair away from the difference between joyfulness and sadness toward the more open, less normativizing pair of *response-enabling/response-debilitating*. The focus on death and grief further counters the paradoxical chrono-normative tendencies in some immanent philosophy that privileges futurity at the expense of a thick responsive/response-able relation to an open and plural past.

*Vibrant Death* emerges from Lykke’s experience of the loss of her life-partner and her journey of ongoing spiritual-materialist mourning practices that ensued, creating new assemblages and companionship with her beloved’s corpse and the fjord and algae where her beloved’s ashes are spread. Lykke positions her affective-philosophical intervention within posthuman feminist debates, in particular through Spinoza- and Deleuze-inspired feminist immanence philosophy. Lykke guides the readers on an affective, spiritual-materialist and theoretically rewarding journey of unlearning Western dichotomies of life/death and (chrono)normative models of “healthy mourning:” a personal and political journey of erotic co-becoming with her dead beloved. For our purposes, I focus on an early chapter called “The Excessive Mourner,” where Lykke introduces the “mourning I” as a situated queerfeminist figuration: Against psychiatry’s pathologizing of excessive mourning (from Freud to the DSM 5) and the sovereign subject of philosophy, Lykke argues that it is precisely through her commitment to the vulnerable and shattering experience of grief that she was able to unlearn Western presuppositions around life/death-binaries, and embark on an existential and philosophical journey of re-ontologizing and affectively attuning to death as vibrant. Lykke describes a “normative encounter” when she agrees to participate in a psychological study on grieving behavior after the loss of a partner (Lykke 2021, 39–41). She is confronted with a questionnaire that is clearly suggestive in what is deemed healthy mourning behavior and what is deemed pathological, i.e., to live your life in the present with an orientation to the future as opposed to be tied to the past through memories of the lost partner. Here the connection between healthy and unhealthy affect is connected to what queer scholars have theorized as *chrononormativity* (Freeman 2010), echoing the developmental model of the
sovereign subject and human history: just as superstitious belief in ghosts and the agency of the dead have to make way for a civilized scientific reality principle, the grieving subject must give up the “magical thinking” of relating to the deceased beloved, thus closing off one’s vulnerability to return to the proper boundedness of a sovereign self that is able to invest in self-directed futurity: “obeying the logic of the modern positivist reality principle forecloses any possibility for the mourning subject to contemplate the passed away beloved outside of chrononormative time” (Lykke 2021, 45).

From a normative psychological perspective, one could argue that it is precisely the excess of mourning that is “response-debilitating” here, and that “healthy” means returning to a responsive relation to the outside world. Such a view finds resonance in Freud’s early characterization of mourning as a withdrawal from the world after the loss of an object so that the external world feels empty (Freud 2006). But I would argue that it is not grief or mourning that is response-debilitating, but that it is precisely a response to a response-debilitating existential “cut.” Losing one’s beloved is not the loss of a single relation but a way of relating: shared memories, a shared (but not “the same”) way of understanding, mutual care, a shared life, etc. A responsive relation to each other, to the self, and to the outside world suddenly becomes mute, a “wall of silence” (Lykke 2021). Lykke’s commitment to stay with the pain of this process is what allows her to find ways of relearning modalities of responsivity and co-becoming that normative notions of personhood, death, and time foreclose. The extreme compartmentalization of death and mourning in the “West” are response-debilitating subjectivation technologies. Lykke’s book is one individual’s journey of unlearning such fragmentation and relearning to cultivate an ongoing responsive and response-able relation of co-becoming with the dead and the living. There is much need to reclaim and relearn collective modes of response-able co-becoming with the dead in the wake of Euromodern violence of exploitation of countless lives and the denial of the vibrancy of their deaths (Hartman 2008a; 2008b; Sharpe 2016; Milstein ed. 2017; Vázquez 2020). This requires unlearning of bounded sovereign/entrepreneurial selves and response-enabling structures for relearning vulnerability as openness to being altered in relational co-becomings.

Contra Braidotti, the foundation for affirmative ethics is not based on privileging certain affects over others that paradoxically can re-instigate chrononormativity. Contra Butler, the basis for ethical and political community is not negative or protective against inevitable violence and abuse. In positive terms, vulnerability is an existential condition of openness to being altered in co-becoming. This starts from a preceding relationality and is an argument for cultivating response-enabling structures of responsive/response-able sociality. And although this is outside the scope of this chapter’s argument, Lykke’s theoretical and experiential accounts of grief and death further challenge the humanistic and life-centered framework of Butler’s work on grief. The latter
focuses on the grievability of the lives that are lost (death as negation or nothingness), whereas Lykke reconceptualizes death to argue for its ongoing participation in vibrant more-than-human assemblages that are necessary for a planetary posthuman and decolonial ethics. Such a planetary ethic that Lykke argues for is not (only) a cognitive argument, but emerges from affective experience of grief and co-becoming, based on a committed staying with the painful openness of vulnerability.

Conclusion
In this chapter, I approached Butler’s use of psychoanalysis from a sociogenic perspective to situate (but not relativize) their theory of vulnerability. I argued that tropes of maturation and development, based on a specter of the sovereign self and understandings of selfish and hostile atomistic individuals, and bourgeois understanding of the oedipal family and mother-child dyadic relationality, resurface in Butler’s understanding of vulnerability and constitutive sociality. These notions bespeak a social reality of hierarchy and discipline that (re)produce the psychic life of such hierarchical power. The “psychic life of power” that Butler at times diagnoses so well cannot be “overrepresented” as if it were “the human as such” (Wynter) but is part of the myriad stories of fragmentation based on the Euromodern genre of Man, and must be understood as such. I suggest that a better way to understand Butler’s work is as a genealogy of structures that violate a shared existential vulnerability (albeit in infinitely differentiated ways) rather than a universal theory of existential vulnerability (reliant on Freudian and Kleinian psychoanalysis). In other words, genealogical and sociogenic work can tell stories of how vulnerability turns into powerlessness, not as a matter of private psychology (individual trauma) but as effects of hierarchical structures of society and their coextensive genre of the human. I have attempted to shift away from Butler’s negative conception of vulnerability and sociality in order to build a more affirmative ethics of vulnerability and sociality. The negative conception of vulnerability conflates it with (potential) violation. By introducing Lugones’ multiplicity/fragmentation and Braidotti’s immanent philosophy’s potential/potestas distinction, and reworking the latter in terms of response-enabling and response-debilitating, I tried to bridge the various feminist philosophical traditions for an ethical framework of response-ability that, negatively, does not reintroduce (chrono)normative features of the right type of subjectivity and affect, but cultivates our open-ended differential relation to the plural past that we can cultivate in unknown responsive co-becoming with the living and the dead, the human and the nonhuman, the unknown powers and pasts within our own bodies, in creative transformation of the regimes of subjectivation. The ethical and political projects need not be based solely on protection from violation (although this is necessary), but also, affirmatively
about cultivating spaces where vulnerability can thrive, and plural modes of responsivity and response-ability are (re)invented and (re)created.

By conceptually dissociating vulnerability from powerlessness, I tried to mobilize vulnerability as an affirmative basis for an ethics of relational co-becoming (response-enabling potentia), against Butler’s tendency to conflate it with our immersion into oppressive-yet-constitutive power-structures (response-debilitating potestas). The concepts of vulnerability/response-enabling potentia and powerlessness/response-debilitating potestas connect to Lugones’ conceptual pair of multiplicity/fragmentation. With these conceptual pairs, I hope to affirm feminist ethical frameworks that simultaneously keep in mind the differentially produced histories of fragmentation and cultivate an affirmative basis for relational co-becoming and coalitions. These two poles must always be understood in their immanent and impure entanglement and seek to analytically guide the ongoing journey of learning to unlearn (fragmentation) in order to relearn (multiplicity).

**Coda: vulnerability and masculinity: the case of Jordan Peterson**

Much of the work of unlearning or redefining masculinity involves a challenge to reclaiming vulnerability. Dominant notions of masculinity usually allow a limited range of emotions (mostly anger). The ideas of control, self-mastery and bourgeois responsibility are conflated with such repression of emotions—tucking away the full range of feeling, sensing and connecting to self, others and one’s environment (which involves the exposure and openness explored above). These feelings and desires do not disappear with such repression, but often lead to a gendered division of labor where female partners or relatives have to do much of the emotive care-work and attune to men’s implicit emotional states; or anticipate and manage to prevent feelings of rage and anger to manifest in dangerous ways. Often people remark that those socialized as girls and women would have more access to a wider range of emotions, but that misses the point about *whose* emotions a girl or woman is supposed to feel, attune to, and care for.114

Jordan Peterson is the champion of making the conservative case for traditional notions of masculinity as self-mastery. For Peterson, “responsible freedom” is in opposition to “immature chaos” (Peterson 2018, 119)—the gendered coding of feminine chaos/masculine order making abundantly clear the association with feminine or feminized immaturity having to be overcome.

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114 The notions of masculinity are also racialized in that the lack of autonomy in a racist society full of daily insults, humiliations and exploitation within racial capitalism’s structures have made the ideal of masculinity often unreachable for racialized subjects (I am thinking in particular of the US context and the Moynihan report). Being the patriarch or head of the household becomes where the ideal of masculinity has to be compensated (Hartman 1997).
through masculine self-mastery and imposition of reason and control. In a much less subtle reading than Butler, Klein or Freud, but which basically boils down to the same point, Peterson argues for the overcoming of humanity’s primary “violent, impulsive selfishness and the mindless greed and brutality” (Peterson 2018, 58).

Peterson taps into a source of shame and promises a manly way out: precisely not by learning to make these feelings teachers for knowledge of self and society (as in much feminist work in the second half of the 20th century, like Audre Lorde’s), but by doubling down on them: you are disgusting, you are worthless, you are an immature needy child who has to grow the hell up. From that place of shame from denied vulnerability, he offers a vision of escaping that sense of worthlessness, by a hardened sense of discipline that seeks to rise above a primary infantile uselessness and shamefulness: “Why should anyone take care of anything as naked, ugly, ashamed, frightened, worthless, cowardly, resentful, defensive and accusatory as a descendant of Adam?” (Peterson 2018, 53) In other words, one’s nature is indeed shameful, but one can overcome it through traditional notions of masculinity: toughen up, work hard, strive toward an unattainable ideal that would liberate oneself from one’s inherent shamefulness and faultiness. Maybe then one would cease to be haunted by the feelings of self-disgust and worthlessness. Yet, since this is always an uphill battle to an unattainable ego-ideal, the only thing that keeps one running are those ghosts of shamefulness.

As I argued earlier, the sense of responsibility that Peterson envisions is premised on Developmental Man’s disciplining and molding into a socially acceptable being, which relies on the denial of vulnerability: the will of the monstrous infantile nature has to be broken or bent to mold it into society’s image of respectable humanity. This produces a sense of shame for one’s being and Peterson the pedagogue insists that this is right: one ought to feel ashamed of who one is, so that one becomes motivated to improve oneself. He thus exploits the vulnerability of young men through a promise of overcoming shame through dignified maturity. The imperative of self-improvement and mature responsibility is driven by shame, stemming from a vulnerability denied. Armed to be a bound self in the image of the ego-ideal, there is no space for the vulnerable opening to the world. Peterson promises a heroic script of an autonomous man trying to conquer the outside (chaotic, feminized) world, which in fact means running away from one’s feelings of shame and worthlessness.

The fact that Peterson himself is often a highly emotional speaker does not seem to contradict his posing as a voice of reason that undermines the purely emotional feminized, immature leftist activists who lack reason and responsibility; this differentiation between rational speech being enhanced by emotion, and voices overdetermined by emotion as a sign of lack of reason, is phallogocentrism plain and simple. Whereas display of emotion from the
political enemy is a reason for ridicule and dismissal (an essential feature of their flawed being through natural propensity or lack of maturity), the authority of the bearer of the phallus/logos is erected through anger and sentimentality. This further illustrates Butler’s argument about the differential “frames” of recognizability and intelligibility, in which some forms of vulnerability can bolster certain subjects whilst being used to pathologize, essentialize or delegitimize others.

This continues the cycle of the gendered dynamics described above, and the necessary reactive logic of infesting others with the internalized shame of “infantile uselessness” to feel superior: the desire to be a single being or unified self who relies on this fragmentation of others shows why the genealogy of morality is a genealogy of (pure) identity.

Perhaps it is only appropriate to give the final word to James Baldwin, who was forced to work through the intertwined pathologies of whiteness and masculinity as a queer Black man who addressed and ultimately left behind the structural emasculation and castration that binds and abjects Black men to the values of Man’s masculinity (Baldwin 1985; Fanon 2008; Scott 2010). He did this not by running away from a sociogenically induced sense of self-loathing but by embracing his vulnerability and nakedness, further illustrating the intimacy between vulnerability and the erotic (alluded to above and in chapter 9):

[O]ne must accept one’s nakedness. And nakedness has no color: this can come as news only to those who have never covered, or been covered by, another naked human being. In any case, the world changes then, and it changes forever. Because you love one human being, you see everyone else very differently than you saw them before—perhaps I only mean to say that you begin to see—and you are both stronger and more vulnerable, both free and bound (…) a bondage which liberates you into something of the glory and suffering of the world. (Baldwin 1985, 461)
Vignette

A Navajo woman, survivor of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, whose name is not mentioned, recounts how she and her kin were taken from their communities to the genocidal institution. The Carlisle Indian School was premised on Lieutenant Richard Henry Pratt’s motto “kill the Indian, save the man” (perhaps the most concise definition of the descriptive statement of Man2). The institution functioned according to a strictly imposed gender-binary and gender-segregation. Within “the terrorizing logics of a society of normalization” (Morgensen 2011, 72), gendered and sexual possibility is straitjacketed into binary gender, in which manual labor and isolated domestic life were the civilizational ideals for the serviceable Indian against the backdrop of premature death. The Navajo witness mentions how a cousin, a nadle who was dressed as a girl, was assumed to be female and placed with the girls. The Navajo students protected their nadle kin, but during physical examination during an outbreak of a lice infestation this gender-nonconforming cousin was taken away: “They were very upset. He was taken from the school, and he never returned again. They would not tell us what happened to him, and we never saw him again. We were very sad that our cousin was gone” (cited in Morgensen 2011, 72). The fate of the nadle cousin is unknown. The inheritance of the nadle kin and resistant communities, of those who were not meant to leave any traces for settler colonialism to be completed, holds a memory of a future of queer decolonial liberation, propelling an affirmation of the plural past and its many uncontrollable futures.
PART 3: RE-CON-FIGURATIONS BEYOND MAN AND BEFORE THE CHILD

Chapter 8: Spectral Inheritance: The Spectral Heir and the Legitimate Heir

The celebration of difference will be meaningful only if it opens onto the fundamental question of our time, that of sharing, of the common, of the expansion of our horizon. The weight of history will be there. We must learn to do a better job of carrying it, and of sharing its burden. We are condemned to live not only with what we have produced but also with what we have inherited. Given that we have not completely escaped the spirit of a time dominated by the hierarchization of human types, we will need to work with and against the past to open up a future that can be shared in full and equal dignity.

–ACHILLE MBEMBE

Every generation confronts the task of choosing its past. Inheritances are chosen as much as they are passed on. The past depends less on “what happened then” than on the desires and discontents of the present. Strivings and failures shape the stories we tell.

–SAIDIYA HARTMAN

Introduction

This dissertation began with Developmental Man’s particular constellation of subjectivity, temporality and morality, and its undergirding logic of maturation: as an individual, atomistic or ontogenic figure, a pre-social Child’s egotistical will must be bent, broken or guided toward sociality and morality to develop into a mature self-governing subject. The developmental discourse of maturation governs the passage between a single asocial natural being and the civilized sovereign subject, a passage that is always unstable and biopolitically, geopolitically and intersectionally differentiated. The discourse of developmentalism and maturation suggest that the immature (pre)subject must attain morality through growing out of one’s pre-moral, uncultivated or savage nature—through the various apparatuses that ensure the proper development and maturation. Even in Judith Butler’s Kleinian interpretation of constitutive relationality, there are traces of such developmentalist discourse, arguing that the ethicality of the subject involves a coming to terms with immature narcissistic grievances. The temporality of developmental trajectory of the
individual (ontogeny) is put on the plane of the history of humanity (and vice versa): developmentalist discourses justify the subjection of most demographics, deemed incapable of self-propelled self-governance, thus requiring their subjection to patriarchal guidance and rule of fully mature civilized subjects.

In its various Enlightenment philosophical articulation, I pointed out how the figures of Man and Child are premised on the denial of multiplicitous preceding relationality and the preoccupation with establishing proper patriarchal foundations for the developmental trajectory of the individual. I relied on both Irigaray-inspired and Spillers-inspired feminists to address a foundational severance from the mother and systems of kinship or relationality, which, in their vastly different biopolitical and necropolitical situations, are at the foundation of precurring subjects in the service of Developmental Man. In the next chapter, I employ the figuration of the social-maternal-ancestral in an attempt to re-configure that which exceeds and precedes such patri-archal severance not as an original matri-archy but as an-arthic, anoriginary multiplicity, which nevertheless acknowledges a centrality to the maternal, understood however not in isolation but as always embedded in broader networks of relationality and sociality.

In this chapter, I work through the figuration of spectral inheritance as a response to figures of Man and Child, seeking to displace its constellation of subjectivity, ethics and temporality based on developmentalism and maturation with a different constellation of subjectivity, ethics and temporality. Instead of the developmental passages from immaturity to maturity, spectral inheritance holds an immanent trace of a multiplicity, which always implicates every relational being in a structure of response-ability toward the plural past. If Developmental Man is premised on severance and a chronolinear trajectory, spectral inheritance insists on the coexistence of the plural past in every present. This chapter poses the question of the temporality of response-ability, asking: what does it mean to have a response-able relation to the plural past? In chapter 6, I put Lugones and Levinas in a critical dialogue and suggested that responsability not only relates to the Other, but also to the past, in a process of unlearning and reconfiguration of the relation to the past’s plurality. This chapter continues that thread, with the figurations of spectral inheritance, the spectral heir and (unlearning) the legitimate heir. With the help of Alia Al-Saji and Derridean hauntology I understand the past as (i) coextensive with the present and structuring its field of possibility instead of as a no-longer; (ii) multiplicitous and pregnant with many virtual futures; (iii) that which simultaneously enables and debilitates responsivity. I argue with Al-Saji for an ethics and politics of the past that carefully attends to the structures of response-debilitation and engages in cultivating spaces for relearning to relate to the multiplicity of the past, which the chronolinearity of the “imperial timeline” (Azoulay 2019) and the chrononormativity of Developmental Man seek to
foreclose and relegate to the backward, non-existent or irrelevant. With Jacques Derrida and Karen Barad, I argue that spectral inheritance is simultaneously an ontological (or, rather, hauntological) and ethical category: our existence is a structure of response to and through the multiplicity of the past, which implies an ethics of doing this in a response-able way for response-enabling pluriversality. Finally, I (re)turn to the figures of the legitimate heir, who seeks identity on the imperial timeline and desires the legitimacy of Developmental Man through appeal to lineage or possession, and the spectral heir, who is committed to the ongoing unlearning of investment and implication in Developmental Man and relearning to inherit differently in responsive and response-able relation to and with the ghosts. For this, I turn to Édouard Glissant, Karima Lazali, Frantz Fanon and Fred Moten. The figure of the legitimate heir seeks to name the investments in being a unified sovereign self (Lugones) or a single being (Glissant/Moten), which stem from the histories of fragmentation and severance explored in the previous chapters. The socio-genealogical examples suggest that appeals to legitimacy stem from embodied inheritances of histories of fragmentation and response-debilitation; desiring to be a spectral heir is about learning to live well with the ghosts, to continue to transform legacies of debilitation. Needless to say, this is not (merely) a matter of individual choice but requires socio-political structures and restructuring for breathable and response-able worlds.

**Alia Al-Saji: Colonial duration and the ethics of reconfiguration**

I turn to Al-Saji for understanding the past as a multiplicity that coexists and insists in the present, which both highlights the differentially distributed debilitating weight of the past as well as maintaining countertendencies for other futures. From this conception of temporality, I build the argument for subjectivity as a structure of haunting with Derrida and Barad. Al-Saji’s decolonial and feminist philosophical work focuses on temporality, racialization and colonization, in relation to an ethics of the past. She argues that the past “coexists with the present and is reconfigured along with it, in a process I liken to kneading or folding dough” (Al-Saji 2018, 332). The past is not defined as closed off and behind us, but “as an interconnected and internally differentiated whole—a network or whole of relations” (Al-Saji 2018, 342). The past, as “whole of relations,” thus alters with every present: “if the past is a whole of relations, then this relationality shifts with the passage of the present” (Al-Saji 2018, 342). The past, as co-extensive with the present, is inhabited and inherited differently by different subjects. “Haunting the interstices of the present and structuring its joints, this past is differentially remembered, cognized, and felt by differently positioned subjects” (Al-Saji 2018, 337). This means that the colonization of time is not merely representational but also the affective space and phenomenal field that structures the realm of action (Fanon) or “critical
responsivity” (Al-Saji 2014, 145; Al-Saji 2021). With the concept of “colonial
duration” she demonstrates

how the colonial past is not left behind, how it coexists with the present (in
affect, sequela, institution, and structure); but also the ways colonialism
recalcitrantly adapts, rephrasing itself in different guises, as it continues to
saturate our present. Most importantly, I mean to evoke how the longue durée
of colonialism and racism makes a difference for our experience: how it weighs
more heavily, submerges and debilitates some of us, while buoying up others.
(Al-Saji 2023, 4)

As I argued in the opening chapters, understanding coloniality and racism as
“temporal formations” (Al-Saji 2021, 177) rather than a spatially fixed
geopolitical system allows one to avoid the slippage from critique of coloniality
to certain identity-claims as the basis for decolonization. This is not to deny
geopolitical differences or global North/South distinctions but avoids the
equation of geographical and epistemic position (see chapter 2). It emphasizes
how colonial duration implicates everyone from different subject-positions,
with an unevenly distributed “affective weight” (Al-Saji 2018) of its debilitating
formations. From the onto-political argument of colonial duration, Al-Saji
argues for an ethics and politics of the past that interrupts racialized time and
makes it hesitate, opening a space from which a critical responsivity to and
reconfiguration of the multiplicity of the past can be performed (Al-Saji 2014).
The notion of the past being reconfigured in every present is an ontological
perspective that implies an ethics of response-ability for our relationship to that
past: if ontologically we continually rearrange the open-ended relationship to
the past that in turn shapes us and coexists in every present, then the ethics that
follows is learning to become responsive and taking response-ability for that
relationship.

This ethic of the past calls for “resistance at the level of the past” by
“reconfiguring its relations” (Al-Saji 2020, 103). This formulation breaks with
the modernist tropes that frame anticolonial resistance as either merely a
nostalgic dream of an impossible return to a prior state or the creation of the new
from a tabula rasa. Instead, the view of the past as multiplicitous and coextensive
with the present offers a critical outlook on how the present is shaped by colonial
duration that structurally debilitates the lives of most and forecloses the virtual
futures that the plural past harbors. A critical reconfiguration of the “whole of
relations” would include the work of care and mourning addressing the open
wounds of colonial and racial debilitation instead of perpetuating the response-
debilitating colonial formations that bog down the damnés (Al-Saji 2021; 2023;
Sharpe 2016). This decolonial temporal ethics and politics is the labor of
opening a critical and responsive relation to the multiplicity of the past that
colonial duration seeks to delegate to a closed off pastness.

Two important influences of Al-Saji’s understanding of colonial
duration (Al-Saji 2020) and racialized time (Al-Saji 2021) are Henri Bergson
and Frantz Fanon. Al-Saji follows Bergson’s concept of *durée* and puts it to critical ethical and political usage in her concept of colonial duration. Bergson, despite his own colonial-racial commitments (Al-Saji 2019), is one of the few European philosophers whose work on temporality is put in productive conversations with anticolonial, decolonial and Indigenous approaches to temporality that reclaim and rework non-Euromodern ontologies (Diagne 2011; Rifkin 2017). Against the dominant linear, mechanical or mathematical approaches to time, Bergson’s duration “carries the past with it in relational and nonlinear ways …” The duration of pastness continues to push on, or weigh down, the present but in differential and affective ways” (Al-Saji 2020, 99). Duration is “a kind of multiplicity” and “nonlinear system of relations” that “forms the virtual atmosphere, milieu, or texture of our lives; it insinuates itself into the present as past …” the past is a structuring dimension according to which we perceive and live (Al-Saji 2020, 101; emphasis original). From this, she argues simultaneously for the unevenly distributed “affective weight of the past” through colonial duration’s long durée and ongoing formation of debilitation, and for the ethico-political imperative of a critical reconfiguring of the relation to the multiplicity of the past in such a way that it transforms debilitation into breathable and responsive worlds:

A past in continual movement, *immanently reconfigured through its own duration*. This past remains incomplete: because it is haunted by the memory of tendencies, diverged from but not actualized—traces of what might have been—and because it is open to the creation of possibility, when the circle of the social imaginary is disrupted, so that hitherto foreclosed meaning-making ripples through time. (Al-Saji 2020, 102; emphasis original)

Through Fanon, Al-Saji explores “racialized ways of being in time,” i.e., how racialization and colonization of time are inhabited and inherited. Fanon describes the overdetermination of his own possible actions in a white world as always arriving “too late” (Al-Saji 2021). The racialized habits of perception imply a racialization or colonization of time that fixate the being of the racialized Other so that the latter’s every movement is re-inscribed in the hermeneutical trap of racialization: “the historico-racial schema constitutes a racial past within which it places the racialized subject, at once displacing other pasts” (Al-Saji 2021, 181). Fanon describes his attempt at becoming actional and always forced back into reactivity through this overdetermination that fixes him to an imagined past of “the bush” and a thousand stories and anecdotes that the white gaze attaches to his “epidermalized” body (Fanon 2008). This connects Fanon’s embodied lived experience to the fate of other damnés under the long durée of colonization. Al-Saji points out how Fanon implicitly evokes the *code noir* to describe his own lived experience, thus connecting his experience to the enslaved: “I had tried to escape without being seen, but the whites fell on me and hamstrung me on the left leg” (cited in Al-Saji 2023, 15).
Al-Saji follows the interconnected histories of debilitation (Puar 2017) and racialization, emphasizing how the right to maim is a constitutive part of histories of enslavement and colonization. She carefully works through the intertwined histories of racialization, debilitation and disability without, importantly, collapsing one into the other (Al-Saji 2023). These ongoing histories of debilitation continue to structure the phenomenal field and “racialized ways of being” in myriad ways. Fanon explores this through the figure of muscular tension in the colonized, as the embodiment of the ongoing histories of fragmentation and debilitation (Fanon 2004). In a similar vein, Darieck Scott pays particular attention to “Fanon’s muscles” to understand the ways these racialized ways of being are inhabited: “even if it escapes conscious recollection, [the burning past] lives on as a memory of the body, in the contracted muscles of the face” (Scott 2010, 75). Both Scott and Al-Saji attend to the debilitation, abjection, and mutilation, not as an attempt to transcend or overcome the debilitating past but to reconfigure the relation to it as a way of opening to a different future: Debilitation continues through its own disavowal—the denial of the weight of the past and the ways in which colonial duration structures the present and bogs down differently positioned subjects unevenly. Bearing witness to the embodied legacies of debilitation interrupts colonial duration through which the virtual multiplicity of the past can reconfigure the present differently. Against colonial duration that closes off the plural past, the theory-praxis of bearing witness attempts “an ‘attentive’ reconfiguration of the past, a caring-remembering” (Al-Saji 2018, 339), drawing out the alternative tendencies that dwell in the virtual multiplicitous past for breathable and response-enabling futures.

Al-Saji frequently employs the language of haunting, designating the virtual multiplicity that colonial duration seeks to close off, from which different futurities can emerge through critical and attentive reconfiguration. This invites a bridge between her Fanonian-Bergsonian approach to temporality and Derridean hauntology, which also concerns itself with the nexus of temporality and ethics, implying an ethics not of conjuring away or overcoming, but of living response-ably with the ghosts that simultaneously constitute and puncture the present.

**Hauntology: Response-ability to the plural past**

The figuration of spectral inheritance seeks to develop this ongoing open-ended relation to pastness by arguing that subjectivity is a structure of inheritance that always-already implies an ethic of response-ability. The figuration of the spectral heir points to this temporal structure of non-substantive subjectivity: subjectivity is the structure of inheritance, an embodied enactment of a past that was never present. Instead of a moral discourse of mature subjects who have transcended there natural immature, infantile and animal inclinations and
thereby can take their individual responsibility, the immanent ethics of spectral inheritance insists on the irreducibility of response-ability as part of the temporal structure of inheritance. Rather than abdicating any individual responsibility, the ontological/hauntological structure of inheritance thus implies an ethics of response-ability:

The concept of responsibility has no sense at all outside of an experience of inheritance (...) It is assigned to us through and through, as an inheritance. One is responsible for what comes before one but also before what is to come, and therefore before oneself. (Derrida cited in Yeğenoğlu 2012, 214)

Response-ability becomes an immanent ethico-ontological category, which both requires response-enabling conditions (the paradigm of ethics of vulnerability and radical care, chapter 7) and transforms those conditions, with an ethico-political imperative to enhance the response-ability of others (chapter 6). Spectral inheritance builds on hauntology’s implied nexus of the structure of subjectivity, ethics and temporality, understanding subjectivity as a structure of the haunting of the plurality of the past. Hauntology, in French a homophone of ontology, points to the constitutive present-absences that embed and puncture any ontology. Haunting is, in a way, ontological, yet always exceeds and challenges the project of ontology (understood as grasping the totality of reality). The following discussion of inheritance in Derrida is indebted to Samir Haddad (2013), Meyda Yeğenoğlu’s discussion of inheritance in relation to European postcolonial memory (2012), and Karen Barad’s ethico-onto-epistemic reading of hauntology through quantum physics (Barad 2010).

The question of spectrality and inheritance are, Derrida states, one and the same. Inheritance is at the same time a necessary structure and an ethical injunction. One cannot choose to inherit. There is no possible negation or negativity in inheritance; even when one seeks to renounce, one is nevertheless responding to that inheritance, within the positivity of its structure. Inheritance seems ontological in that it is the very core of one’s being: “our being is inheritance, the language we speak is inheritance” (Derrida and Stiegler 2002, 26). And: “Inheritance is never a given, it is always a task. It remains before us” (Derrida 2012, 67). Simultaneously being “our being” and “a task,” the structure of inheritance is a paradoxical circle of the descriptive and the prescriptive. Whether one consciously or unconsciously ignores, denies, selects, celebrates one’s inheritance, one always takes up and reaffirms the inheritance in one way or another: “Inheritance implies decision, responsibility, response and consequently, critical selection, choice” (Derrida and Stiegler 2002, 69). Inheritance shows the ethical dimension of the notion of différence as an injunction that must remain spectral. It “marks a place and a time that doubtless precedes us, but so as to be as much in front of us as before us” (Derrida 2012, 19). The past that gives one’s being without being given, is simultaneously futurity itself: it is the task ahead that one reaffirms. One can never possess an
inheritance, but in the reaffirmation of one’s inheritance one enacts its, alters it, transforms it, and leaves open the structure of inheriting:

Let us consider first of all, the radical and necessary heterogeneity of an inheritance, the difference without opposition that has to mark it, a “disparate” and a quasi-juxtaposition without dialectic (…) An inheritance is never gathered together, it is never one with itself. Its presumed unity, if there is one, can consist only in the injunction to reaffirm by choosing. “One must” (il faut) means one must filter, sift, criticize, one must sort out several different possibles that inhabit the same injunction. (Derrida 2012, 18)

The past is ahead and remains open through new configurations with time as the “whole of relations” (Al-Saji 2018), as an ethical call or injunction of responsability to the past as “a task before us.” Ontology as hauntology pertains to the trace-structure of différence: the past that is inherited but was never present is reconfigured. In this account of performatively taking up the past in a different way, the past is constantly differing-deferring in that present enactment: precedence enables the unprecedented. Barad, reading quantum physics as hauntology, concludes:

The past is not closed (it never was), but erasure (of all traces) is not what is at issue. The past is not present. “Past” and “future” are iteratively reconfigured and enfolded through the world’s ongoing intra-activity (…) The world “holds” the memory of all traces; or, rather, the world is its memory (enfolded materialization). (Barad 2010, 260)

This places “us” in the midst of “co-existing multiplicities of entangled relations of past-present-future-here-there” (Barad 2010, 264) and the multiplicitous ghostly past that knows no closure or erasure but partakes in new materializations. From this temporal entanglement, Barad moves to an understanding of ethicality and responsibility:

Time can’t be fixed. To address the past (and future), to speak with ghosts, is not to entertain or reconstruct some narrative of the way it was, but to respond, to be responsible, to take responsibility for that which we inherit (from the past and the future), for the entangled relationalities of inheritance that “we” are, to acknowledge and be responsive to the noncontemporaneity of the present, to put oneself at risk, to risk oneself (which is never one or self), to open oneself up to indeterminacy in moving towards what is to-come. (Barad 2010, 264)

Ethicality is woven into the fabric of the world; human and nonhuman action is part of that cosmic ghost dance. Being is thus understood as a becoming through the haunting of a plural past, as a becoming-with-the-ghosts.

Spectral inheritance is an in/voluntary structure of response-ability for the past that produces a non-substantive subject that takes up the plural past, which haunts and constitutes subjectivity. In the in/voluntary taking up of this response-ability to/through the past, as the selection and transformation of inheritance, lies the openness of the future, of futurity itself. This radical
openness of the past-as-inheritance as the condition for the openness of futurity problematizes the imperial timeline (Azoulay 2019) that seeks to enclose the past as a before and no-longer. This imperial ordering of time, as the closure of the past, debilitates responsivity. Below, I employ the figure of the legitimate heir as naming the investment in Developmental Man’s identity-imperatives that occur through and repeat Man’s response-debilitating chrononormative and chronolinear temporality. From the investment and implication in legitimate inheritance, I move in non-binary fashion toward the spectral heir, as a different investment of unlearning and relearning: (re)learning to be spectral heirs implies a listening, which shows a relational implicatedness across time and space beyond timelines and identitarian borders, where we practice response-ability by cultivating structures and modes of being that enable responsivity—relational flourishing—in the major and in the minor. This implies learning to live well with the personal/political ghosts, and a co-becoming with the plural sources of potentia that persist despite, insist within and ek-sist outside of the response-debilitating histories of fragmentation and severance.

The legitimate heir

The figure of the legitimate heir seeks to show the perpetuation of response-debilitating cycles through investment in the fragmented world of Developmental Man; this investment is itself a result of fragmentation and severance. The spectral heir figuration, in contrast, attempts to move with and through it as a critical theory-praxis of response-ability to and through the plural past, thus reconfiguring the whole of relations.

The figure of the legitimate heir is in reference to Glissant, who understands the “legitimacy of filiation” (Glissant 1997, 51) to be at the heart of Western mythology: “In the Western world the hidden cause (the consequence) of both Myth and Epic is filiation, its work setting out upon the fixed linearity of time, always toward a projection, a project” (Glissant 1997, 47). The patrilineal legitimacy of filiation also drives the West’s colonial/imperial project, “representing the principle of colonization itself” (Ambroz 2022, n.p.). Glissant argues that other cosmogenic myths (e.g. Buddhist, Aztec) do not base their legitimacy on patrilineal descent, suggesting that in the West this comes from the “philosophies of the One” (Glissant 1997, 47), which contain the embryo of an understanding of a single, linear universal history, whether it be human history or (Darwinian) natural history. The

115 “Myth” is understood not as a genre but as an imaginary constitutive of practices of worlding, closely related to Sylvia Wynter’s notion of the “science of the Word” and cosmogenic narratives (see chapter 4; Wynter 1989) or James Baldwin’s “system of reality” (Baldwin 1985, 408). Glissant understands the West not as a location but as a project: “The West is not in the West. It is a project, not a place” (Glissant 1989, 2). My usage of Euromodernity follows this interpretation.
dismantling of the logic of the One through attentiveness to the poetics of relation is central for Glissant’s move from uni-versal time and history to a multiplicity of temporalities and histories based on relation rather than filiation (Glissant 1997; 1989). He argues that the myth of the legitimacy of filiation has consequences for the understanding of an individual’s belonging to a community. Based on the legitimacy of a lineage, the myth of filiation “contains a hidden violence that catches in the links of filiation and absolutely challenges the existence of the other as an element of relation” (Glissant 1997, 50). The figure of the non-relational, unaffiliated outsider must be either assimilated or annihilated (Glissant 1997, 49).

The consequences of the colonial logic of affiliation continue after political decolonization, as psychoanalyst Karima Lazali (2021) argues. Lazali begins by analyzing the ongoing psychic, social and political effects in Algeria of the symbolic erasure at the hands of French colonialism:

The colonial practice of unnamning bodies and land could have no other effects but this. It imposed itself on the bodies and places of the autochthonous populations while stripping the land of its historic and linguistic past. Dispossession is thus complete, triggering a widespread phenomenon of depersonalization. The relation between the sacred and the profane, the living and the dead, the visible and the invisible, material and immaterial were all upended. This shows the scale of colonialism’s destruction of the symbolic order. It didn’t so much repress history as preclude it, which is not say erase it irremediably. In clinical terms, this translated to the active blanking out of language, names and history. (Lazali 2021, 54)

Lazali discusses the symbolic violence as an extension of the physical violence of mutilating and making disappear the bodies of Algerian people. The impossibility of mourning the disappeared and the incorporation of loss within the social fabric produces the unresolved tension of the impossibility of remembering and the impossibility to forget. The silencing of the unforgettable is part of coloniality’s design “to mutilate bodies and memory,” which “gives rise to a troubled and confused relation to the past” (Lazali 2021, 70). The physical violence and symbolic severance lead to a need and attempt to restore what has been violated and erased. But, in this attempt at recovery, the same colonial logic unfolds: in the colonial imposition, the belligerent Other becomes the enemy that threatens one’s existence. Defending and reclaiming an identity then becomes the reaction against the Other. This defensive reactive logic of

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116 “African cultures (…) despite the ‘chain’ of Ancestors, do not seem to me to obey the filiation’s hidden violence. The same is true of our heterogenous societies. Creole tongues, mother tongues vary too much within them to ‘be conjoined,’ to be prized as an essence or to be valorized as a symbol of either the mother or the father” (Glissant 1997, 60).
identity pitted against the enemy repeats in post-Independence Algeria and leads to internal divisions in the name of unity and identity. In this way, colonial trauma and the troubled relation to the past continues the cycles of persecution and division in the name of identity and unity:

In the imaginary, the foreigner remained cast as the enemy and as a consequence, only the self-enclosed community (…) guaranteed safety. From this sprung a persecutory reasoning that saw in difference the murder of the self and/or the Other. The rise of conspiracy theories and their accompanying acts of persecution comes from this fraught relationship to the foreign. (Lazali 2021, 83)

The myth of filiation (and the related logic of fraternity) repeat the “hidden violence” against the foreign element as the non-relational Other. In the name of recovery from colonial severance, the same murderous logic is repeated in the name of unitary, pure identity that requires the assimilation or annihilation of the non-relational enemy-outsider. Lazali explores the reactive “illusion of recovery” in the wake of colonial trauma by examining the writings of Jean El Mouhoub Amrouche about the need to create a national identity after political decolonization. Amrouche describes the violence of colonialism as a loss of ontological foundation: “The subject comes to contest his [sic] own identity, he no longer knows who he is as he becomes accustomed to his fragmented state (…) no being in the world can do without a legitimate name” (Amrouche cited in Lazali 2021, 95). The uprooting of mind and body begins at a very young age with the colonial schooling, “at the earliest stage of education (…) The colonized child has no parents, he [sic] has no ancestors, the country where he was born has no history” (cited in Lazali 2021, 95). Amrouche grounds the project of restoring a “strong ontological foundation” and creating a national identity by implementing a unitary national language:

We must first of all guarantee that this man [sic], in the depths of his being, has a strong ontological foundation, which is to say that he has a right and a direct path to his heritage via the possession of a language, the same language that makes him, since we all owe our existence to language. This is the case both on the level of conscious memory and, on a much deeper level, with involuntary memory and archetypes. (…) The words of this language must resonate for him on every level, and in its whole range of meanings, the semantic depths of this language must be felt by him in the depths of his being. Words should in a certain manner take shape within his being and not merely just what his mind, or what his memory, consciously elects and uses. This is what should be the national language. (Amrouche cited in Lazali 2021, 96)

Lazali agrees with Amrouche’s intent to repair the colonial traumatic uprooting of identity. However, Lazali continues, “the craze for possessing and ‘having’ [fuels] the fantasy of being a master of language rather than a product of it. The right intuition transformed into a totalitarian ideology” (Lazali 2021, 96). The severance from Algerian patrimony and inheritance, the loss of names and
symbols, produce the fantasy of mastery over patrimony and inheritance, as a nationalist project that can be built by men from the ground up. The “fantasy of being a master of language” represses the pluralism of tongues and inheritances that must be rectified and unified to forge a pure national identity and a solid ontological foundation. To build a strong ontological foundation becomes a masculine nation-building project that believes in mastery over what Lazali calls the linguistic “arche-trace” through which human beings are initiated in the world and that resonates and reverberate in their being. In this sense, the totalizing logic of the ontological foundation continues to sever the plural and impure inheritances that will always exceed the boundaries of the defined and projected national language and identity.

To move from the colonial logic of the legitimate heir to the spectral heir, I want to develop the theme of language, oppression, heritage and im/pure identity through Moten’s affirmatively critical reading of Fanon. Moten’s reading of Fanon might not do Fanon’s views on language and pidgin justice (see Al-Saji 2023, footnote 71), but the reading remains instructive for the desire for legitimacy and being “a single being” as opposed to the spectral heir who, in Glissant’s and Moten’s terms, consents not to be a single being.

The spectral heir: unlearning the legitimate heir

Fanon begins Black Skin, White Masks with the question of language, ontology and colonization: “To speak means being able to use a certain syntax and possessing the morphology of such and such a language but it means above all assuming a culture and bearing the weight of a civilization” (Fanon 2008, 1–2). Colonization severs the ties of the colonized with their heritage and enforce the identification through the colonizer’s language: “All colonized people—in other words, people in whom an inferiority complex has taken root, whose local cultural originality has been committed to the grave—position themselves in relation to the civilizing language” (Fanon 2008, 2). Cutting the colonized off from their languages and enforcing a relation of mimicry to a white civilizational standard directly involves the infantilization of subjected subjects through the maturity-trope:

It is said that the black man likes to palaver, and whenever I pronounce the word “palaver” I see a group of boisterous children raucously and blandly calling out to the world: children at play insofar as play can be seen as an initiation to life. The black man likes to palaver, and it is only a short step to a new theory that the black man is just a child. (Fanon 2008, 10)

Fanon illustrates the paternalism and infantilization and instilling of inferiority by comparing the encounter with a German or a Russian and a Black man:

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117 E.g. different dialectics of Arabic, as well as the structural oppression of Tamazight.
When I meet a German or a Russian speaking bad French I try to indicate through gestures the information he is asking for, but in doing so I am careful not to forget that he has a language of his own, a country, and that perhaps he is a lawyer or an engineer back home. Whatever the case, he is a foreigner with different standards. There is nothing comparable when it comes to the black man. He has no culture, no civilization, and no “long historical past.” (…) Whether he likes it or not, the black man has to wear the livery the white man has fabricated for him. (Fanon 2008, 17)

Blackness in the colonial world signifies a lack of culture and standard. Fanon tragically and ironically describes the orientation of colonized subjects toward the colonizer’s language to gain recognition as someone as a bearer of culture. No matter the mastery of the colonizer’s language, Fanon observes the persistent infantilizing approach of racialized/colonized subjects by white French subjects in the latter’s use of pidgin. The paternalistic disrespect of the white French person who addresses a Black person in pidgin indicates this fundamental lack of respect for the heritage and status of the Other: Blackness signifies the absence of legitimate heritage, history and culture. But here Moten detects an ambivalence in Fanon. In his far-reaching investigation of internalized oppression and critique of the politics of recognition, Fanon nevertheless seems to perpetuate the colonizer’s sense of evaluation when he explicitly disavows pidgin. According to Moten, Fanon dismisses pidgin as a simplifying, imprisoning language that reveals the lack of civilization or culture. Moten warns against “the no less carceral effects that attend the disavowal of pidgin that often attends the righteous refusal of its less than vulgar imitation” (Moten 2018, 218). Moten is interested in the poietic effects and world-making power of pidgin that exceeds the colonial standard of an original language and cultural heritage: “What’s at stake here is the priority of anoriginally insubordinate, jurisgenerative, as opposed to juridically systemic, linguistic experimentation. Speaking “gobbledygook” to a black man is insulting if it takes pidgin for gobbledygook, if such a sclerotic understanding, and the imprecision that
follows from it, imagines pidgin to be something other than a language of study.118 (Moten 2018, 217)

By embracing pidgin’s generative and poietic character, Moten also embraces the terrifying severance from which pidgin sprang but cannot be reduced to. It provides a radical opening of a becoming outside the strictures of patrimony and the desire for identity through legitimate inheritance. Embracing the poiesis of loss becomes an unlearning of the desire for identity through patrimony, the desire to be a unified, single being: “if there is something lost it is oneself (...) one’s standing, (...) one’s patrimony, which is to say one’s delusionally self-made single being. Having lost one’s father, one also mourns the loss of one’s heteronormatively derived dignity” (Moten 2018, 243). The refusal of the unified self, the illusion of a single being, the desire for a pure identity as a reaction to the fragmentation machinery that negates one’s being and identity, unlearns the (desire for) legitimacy of patrimony. Giving “consent not to be a single being” embraces the violated pluralism that continues to be world-making despite the catastrophic and ongoing histories of severance and fragmentation that seek to control its relational poiesis by assimilation or annihilation.

Spectral inheritance as general structure of subjectivity shows the entanglement of ethics and ontology—the necessity of inheriting as responding, selecting, deciding, acting: response-ability as ethico-ontological category dwells with the impure multiplicitous past in both its response-enabling and debilitating modes without the certainty of truth or morality. Throughout the dissertation, I analytically divided the multiplicity of our inheritances into two: the inheritances of debilitation and fragmentation that produce powerlessness and perpetuate cycles of oppression (potestas), and the inheritances that nurture responsive relationality and vulnerable co-becoming (potentia). The experience of powerlessness feeds the transgenerational cycles of fragmentation and oppression while the embodied experience of respected vulnerability nourishes the pluralism within the self as empowering resource (potentia).119 For the spectral heir figuration, however, it is important to bring them back together in

118 “Study,” for Harney and Moten (2013) refers to a sociality beyond intellectual endeavor. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Fanon’s discussion of pidgin occurs within the context of the plethora of daily humiliations of everyday racialized encounters.

119 As I argued above, this framework does not consider affirmation or vulnerability as an opposition (Braidotti 2009) but claims that respected vulnerability is the lived experience of a more-than-personal and more-than-human inheritance that is the resource of affirmation. Tapping into this re-source (as the inheritance of the social-maternal-ancestral) enables learning to live well with the ghosts of fragmentation, and to participate in pluriversal world-making praxis based on respect. Without this inner re-source and orientation, an ethics of affirmation can easily become another moral transcendental ideal or “external directive” (Lorde 2007).
their impure impurity and entanglement. Moten and Glissant emphasize the multiplicity of inheritances from which the poetics of relation spring, even when the terror of severance means they are indistinguishable: there is no retrievable heritage separable from the subjection to the relations of white supremacy in slavery and colonization. Survival and modes of resistance bear witness to the multiplicitous inheritance and the plural past.

Consent not to be a single being means losing one’s being in impure impure multiplicity. The individual, collective, social and political inheritances of powerlessness and vulnerability are always-already entangled. The empowering inheritance of potentia/pluralism/vulnerability remains an impersonal resource through which one can continue to unlearn the reactive cycle within the system of fragmentation, and can (re)learn to live well with the ghosts. Paraphrasing Nietzsche’s “we are experiments: let us also want to be them!” (Nietzsche 1989, 191[453]): we are spectral heirs—let us also want to be them!
Vignette

Lewis Gordon recounts the story of Harriet Bailey and Frederick Douglass. Working on the plantation 12 miles away from where her son worked as a child, Bailey secretly traveled the distance in the late evenings to steal away time with her son, having to return before dawn so that she is not noticed to be missing. Despite the enclosures of the brutal conditions of slavery seeking to violently foreclose the openness of any future outside of its own cold dehumanizing economic arithmetic, we witness love and political action that open and retain a futurity outside of the enslaver’s world. Gordon speculates how the love and care that Douglass received through Bailey’s actions introduced Douglass to a system of value and self-worth beyond and outside of the value system of the enslaver, in which his only value is an instrumental one as a commodity. The love and care sustain a human world, which teaches that another world is possible and is in fact always-already there, underneath the totality of a system of negation and subjugation. It “nurtured a revolutionary spirit” and Douglass’ commitment to freedom and abolition (Gordon 2020, 28). Gordon insists that this is not the story of Douglass the great abolitionist (alone); Bailey’s revolutionary mothering becomes the exemplar of political action: not knowing the outcome of her actions, either for herself or her son, she committed herself to an action, thus opening a future beyond (and underneath) the enslaved present. Her political action is not instrumental: not knowing that Frederick Douglass would play such a key role in the abolitionist cause, she nevertheless took action. “Yet, she acted” (Gordon 2021, 29). Saleh Abdelaziz builds on this interpretation, further shifting the usual emphasis on Frederick Douglass’ battle with Mr. Covey as the moment that he achieved an internal freedom through active resistance against his oppressor, to the love of the damned of the earth that nourishes and undergirds the fight for liberation (Abdelaziz 2024). Liberation is fueled by the caring praxis and inheritance of a spirit of sociality that exceeds the economy and value-system of the enslavers. He recalls Saidiya Hartman’s definition of abolition: “not only as the not-yet, not simply as the vent for which we are waiting, but as the daily practice of refusal and waywardness and care in the space of captivity, enclosure, and incarceration. How does the song inside the circle go? We are the ones we have been waiting for” (Hartman 2016, 214). From the quotidian to the grand praxes of liberation, the minor and the major, the less illegible and the more legible, the story of Bailey and Douglass tells a story beyond their political action, bearing witness and thereby passing on a revolutionary spirit that in-sists (underneath), ek-sists (outside) and per-sists (despite) the catastrophic present.
Chapter 9: The Social-Maternal-Ancestral

To her we owe our lives, and from her comes our ability to endure, regardless of the concerted assaults on our, on Her, being, for the past five hundred years of colonization. She is the Old Woman who tends the fires of life (...) who weaves us together in a fabric of interconnection (...) the one who Remembers and Remembers.

–PAULA GUNN ALLEN

But, that’s what Édouard Glissant is leading us towards when he talks about what it is “to consent not to be a single being.” And if you think about it, it is a sort of filial and essentially a maternal relation. When I say “maternal,” what I’m implying there is the possibility of a general socialization of the maternal.

–FRED MOTEN

Introduction

This chapter introduces the figuration the social-maternal-ancestral, as response-enabling inheritance of a past that has never been present, which persists, in-sists, and ek-sists despite and through Euromodern patri-archal response-debilitating inheritances of severance and fragmentation. I draw on Alexis Pauline Gumbs, Julia Kristeva (read with Ewa Ziarek and Fanny Söderbäck), Elizabeth Grosz, and Cynthia Willett for rethinking the maternal, in conjunction with M. Jacqui Alexander on the ancestral through Audre Lorde’s concept of the erotic. Before turning to these interlocutors, I explain what I mean by the multi-layered temporality of persistence, insistence and existence. Then, I briefly return to this dissertation’s positioning somewhere between Butler and Lugones, relating the social-maternal-ancestral to discussions of colonial difference. This chapter is necessarily the most fragmented. It does not seek to give a comprehensive definition of the social-maternal-ancestral as much as it is an attempt at finding different ways of naming and/as engaging a constitutive relationality that always partakes in the openness of world-making. In this acknowledgement and exploration, the exercise partakes in the (re)creation of new relation: As figuration, it attends to a certain power of re/con-figuring and attempts to attune to and enhance this power. The point is not to enclose it in definition, but to attempt to figure into focus a force that may infuse and shapeshift different contexts and reconfigure networks of relation. As a preliminary note, to avoid any misunderstanding, I will repeat my commitment to a feminism that must necessarily be queer, antiracist and decolonial, and address the question of how a reconfiguration of the maternal can avoid the repetition of phallogocentric, anti-queer and transphobic discourse. The social-maternal-ancestral figuration at once
acknowledges the various feminist attempts (be it so-called continental, Black, queer, Indigenous, decolonial, etc.) of reclaiming and reinventing alternative constellations of subjectivity, ethics and temporality outside of developmental models, whilst immediately taking heed of feminist concerns of re-entrenching certain essentialist identities, connecting it to particular bodies, roles and institutions. Especially at a moment where conservative appeals to women’s rights are mobilized for anti-trans, Islamophobic and white supremacist purposes, any attempt at reconfiguring the maternal needs to critically respond to such mobilizations. As many have pointed out, patriarchal mobilizations of the maternal always connect it to the natural; the social-maternal-ancestral acknowledges sociogeny, detaching the maternal from particular identities, bodies and roles (opposed to for example the “mother-child dyad” as foundational for individual psychological development), and instead poses a collective response-ability for always recreating and reinventing response-enabling sociality committed to multiplicity, difference and opacity. Of course, all critical feminist mobilizations of rethinking the maternal and mothering are inseparable from a critique of essentialist definitions of motherhood, womanhood, the family and nature—distinguishing, for example, between the experience and the institution of motherhood (Rich 2021) or between the revolutionary caring praxis of mothering outside of the white supremacist institutional recognition of motherhood (Gumbs 2016). In these various reconfigurations of the maternal, a rethinking of subjectivity, ethics and relationality is closely connected to the question of temporality. Söderbäck, for example, locates the controversies around the maternal in the inherited dichotomies of nature-woman-immanence vs. culture-man-transcendence with its temporal division between cyclicality and linearity (Söderbäck 2019, 8). Whereas Beauvoir uses these binaries as the scaffolding for women’s emancipation, Söderbäck argues that a critical reworking of the question of the maternal must entail an alternative notion of time outside of this maternal-cyclical/paternal-linear dichotomy. By engaging with Kristeva and Luce Irigaray, Söderbäck develops her notion of revolutionary time based on the maternal as “perpetual movement of return,” which intends “to retrieve the very body that was repressed in order to construct the linear-cyclical dichotomy and paradigm” (Söderbäck 2019, 8). The multidirectional temporality of the “perpetual movement of return” is critical of recourses to the maternal as origin or as stable ground. In the terms set up/borrowed for this dissertation: the question of and obsession with origins (arche—commencement and command) remains on patri-archal grounds. The response to patri-archy is therefore not matri-archy (mothers and women as first principle) but an-archy (the absence of
a first principle):¹²⁰ “All beginnings point to yet another beginning” (Söderbäck 2019, 4). The temporality of “perpetual movement of return” thus has no origin or claims to the maternal as “some static and stable ground” (Söderbäck 2019, 185), but points to the generative multiplicity of non-origin, connecting renewal and reinvention—again returning to this dissertation’s terminology—to and through a temporality of spectral inheritance (see previous chapter) or ancestrality (see discussion below). However, the temporalization of the maternal and the recourse to ancestrality could still be interpreted as claims to a biological essentialism of bodies and genealogies. Here it is helpful to note that etymologically, ancestrality (Latin: ante-cessor) refers simply to “one coming or going before:”

The name “ancestor” usually designates someone from a temporal “before” who at the same time in a certain sense prevails in the present. An ancestor is a forerunner who still remains operative through a relation of belonging and reciprocity, as is marked by the present tense. (…) Even in its earlier uses it is not necessarily restricted to biological lineage but can also designate source and origin in a more indirect sense. (Ruin 2018, 66)

Within the Latin etymology, the appeal to origins and foundations does play an important role. It seems that in various Indigenous hunter-gatherer relational ontological approaches (and many other Indigenous approaches for that matter), ancestrality does not necessarily have this connection. Hans Ruin turns to Sylvie Poirier, who defines ancestrality as follows, based on her work on Indigenous relational ontologies:

By ancestrality, I am referring to worlds where ancestors and spirits of deceased relatives are existentially coeval with the living and communicate with them in various ways (…) As a process, ancestrality is connected and articulated with the relational self with meaningful places and events.¹²¹ As an acknowledgement of those who were here before, of those who left knowledge and some sort of imprint of their passage, ancestrality remains a major component of relational ontologies. (Poirier 2013, 56)

To the extent that ancestors have designated stable origins or foundations, I depart from its usage by referring to the hauntological, an-archical figuration of spectral inheritance. I nevertheless cite Ruin and Poirier to argue that its biological-genealogical interpretation is of Euromodern origin that bespeaks the

¹²⁰ An an-archy that is not based on the foundational “murder of the mother” that Irigaray finds at the heart of Western philosophy (Irigaray 1988; Willett 1995).
¹²¹ In this dissertation I do not explore the key component of how this relates to space and place, so crucial for an environmental consciousness that harbors futurity through an acknowledgement of the past and embeds it in sociality and storytelling. For this, see Wildcat (2005), Ghosh (2022) and Haraway (2016).
biocentrism of Developmental Man.\textsuperscript{122} By separating ancestrality from biological genealogy and the Euromodern ruses of a universal nuclear family, I insist on ancestrality as a queer figuration of transgenerational relation-making irrespective of lines of legitimacy, as spectral heirs.\textsuperscript{123} Alexander, discussed in more detail below, establishes the link between heteropatriarchal colonization of temporality and bodies, which the perpetual movement of return, renewal and reinvention of the ancestral ties addresses, unlearns and to a certain extent undoes (Alexander 2005). In short, following Indigenous, decolonial and (other) queer approaches, I understand ancestors and kinship as modes of queer multidirectional temporalities of reinvention of sociality (Simpson 2017; Ilichenko 2024).

**Persistence, insistence, ek-sistence**

The social-maternal-ancestral is not (i.e., it has no presence) but per-sists, insists and ek-sists in a structure of spectral inheritance.

*Persistence:* I borrow the term *per-sistence* from Ariella Aïsha Azoulay’s *Potential History* (2019). Azoulay argues that imperial formations and what she calls the *imperial timeline* produce the past as a space of closed off non-possibility, which seeks to override and write off as past a socio-political world of the commons. This shared common world nevertheless persists,

\textsuperscript{122} For 18\textsuperscript{th} to early 20\textsuperscript{th} century biocentric and developmental genre of Man, queerness is a sign of atavism and backwardness (Gill-Peterson 2018). In a paradox that even Freud could not explain away, the biological (nuclear) family had to be a universal and transhistorical reality, but at the same time heterosexual monogamous marriage producing legitimate heirs was a civilizational achievement. In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud needs to square his theory of the universal structure of the Oedipal family with the obvious fact that most often kinship-relations are far more complex and irreducible to blood-relations: “the kinship terms which two Australians apply to each other do not necessarily indicate any consanguinity, as ours would do: they represent social rather than physical relationships” (Freud 1950, 8). Recall that Freud is discussing the Arrernte, who within Euromodern racist biocentric science were considered the most primitive of all contemporaries. But whilst acknowledging this, Freud notes that this is a replacement of the “real blood-relationship by totem kinship” (Freud 1950, 7; emphasis added). Freud salvages universal myth of the Oedipal family based on genealogy and blood-relations, as well as the myth of the stupid savage who somehow errs in transferring the “real” biological blood-relations to the imagined social totemic structure. For the contradiction of the simultaneous transhistorical universality and validity of the nuclear family based on the particular of the Victorian family, see McClintock (1995) and Vázquez (2020). For how the idea of a pre-patriarchal matriarchy was scientific consensus for Victorian scientists believing in evolutionary-developmental progress, but was anxiously dropped and suppressed as main hypothesis during the suffragette movement for its revolutionary potential (instead of it marking a comfortable stage of lack of civilization, now it contained the promise of the non-universality of patriarchy!), see Knight (1995).

\textsuperscript{123} See also Elizabeth Freeman on “junk inheritances” and “queer ancestrality” (Freeman 2010).
disobeying the imperial organization of time, space and the body-politic according to victor’s histories and national borders (Azoulay 2019). The notion of potential history relies on the refusal of the imperial technology that produces the past-as-past, seeking to rewind to the moment of imperial destruction of other worlds (or worldly sovereignty124 based on care for a shared world, as opposed to imperial sovereignty). For example in 1948, to claim that what had been destroyed then and there—a world of cohabitation, where being a Palestinian Jew was not an impossibility—is not a history that is over and done with, as the imperial shutters would suggest by producing it as past, but a potential that one can return to as a viable and persisting option: “Potential history provides a foundation for the right not to be perpetrators that Israeli Jews ought to claim as their own in order to make such a world possible again” (Azoulay 2019, 433). The temporalities of worldly sovereignty persist despite the imperial sovereignty’s political and epistemic violence that denies the existence of other worlds by separating it as past from the imperial present and future:

though the unstoppable movement [of imperialism] seeks to forcefully relegate them to the past, these modes of life have never completely disappeared, and it is against their persistence as competing options in the present that constituent violence is relentlessly exercised, attempting every time to impose its outcome as the transcendental condition of politics, of art, of human rights. (Azoulay 2019, 33)

Unlearning imperialism is the way to return to the potential of those persisting worlds of worldly sovereignty and co-citizenship. In this vein, persistence emphasizes how Euromodernity can never fully usurp other modalities of life even when the latter is inseparable from the catastrophic unfolding of the former.

Insistence: I use the term insist in relation to Bergsonian duration. Duration understands being as a becoming “that carries the past with it in relational and nonlinear ways” (Al-Saji 2020, 99). Duration entails a “past that was never present” that nevertheless “remains operative, neither closed book nor completed being. The duration of pastness continues to push on or weigh down, the present but in differential and affective ways” (Al-Saji 2019, 99). Gilles Deleuze describes the Bergsonian past as an insistence and consistence:

124 “Worldly sovereignty refers to the persisting and repressed forms and formations of being in the world, shaped by and through intimate knowledge of the world and its secrets, of its multiple natural, spiritual, political, and cosmological taxonomies preserved and transmitted over generations and logical taxonomies preserved and transmitted over generations and shared among those entitled and invested to protect them. Imperial sovereignty consists of the massive expropriation of people’s skills so as to transform them into governable subjects in a differential body politic” (Azoulay 2019, 388).
[The past, far from being a dimension of time, is the synthesis of all time of which the present and the future are only dimensions. We cannot say that it was. It no longer exists, it does not exist, but it insists, it consists, it is. It insists with the former present, it consists with the new or present present. (…) when we say that it is contemporaneous with the present that it was, we necessarily speak of a past which never was present, since it was not formed “after.” Its manner of being contemporaneous with itself as present is that of being posed as already-there, presupposed by the passing present and causing it to pass. Its manner of coexisting with the new present is one of being posed in itself, conserving itself in itself and being presupposed by the new present which comes forth only by contracting this past. (…) each past is contemporaneous with the present it was, the whole past coexists with the present in relation to which it is past but the pure element of the past in general pre-exists the passing present. (Deleuze 2014, 107–108; emphasis added)]

Bergson’s duration is further elaborated in this chapter with Grosz and in the previous chapter with Al-Saji.

_Ek-sistence_: I borrow the Heideggerian term ek-sistence (“to exist, to stand outside the origin,” Dussel 1985, 214) from Enrique Dussel’s _Philosophy of Liberation_ (1985) and read it through the latter’s concept of exteriority. Dussel calls exteriority “the most important category for philosophy of liberation” (Dussel 1985, 40), which is foundational for the later development of the concept of “colonial difference” and “coloniality of being” (Maldonado-Torres 2007; 2008). Dussel attempts to break with the totality of Eurocentric philosophy by demonstrating its historico-political grounds of emergence and its reliance on European conquest of the Americas and the enslavement of Africans. The periphery becomes the exterior space to the system that the totality of Euromodernity at once relies on and disavows. This exterior space holds the potential for revolutionary overthrow and the possibility of liberation. But, as Dussel cautions, this exteriority is not a “beyond:”

The category of exteriority (…) is misunderstood when what is “beyond” the ontological horizon of the system is thought of in an absolute, total way without any participation in the interior of the system. To avoid this misunderstanding, exteriority must be understood as transcendental interior to totality. No person as such is absolutely and only part of a system. All, including even those who are members of an oppressing class, have a transcendentality with respect to the system, interior to it. (Dussel 1985, 47)

In short, it is an “outside created by the inside” (Tlostanova 2017, 59). As I argue with the help of Al-Saji, these concepts must not be understood spatially but temporally: Euromodernity as temporal formation that has no spatial outside but is also never complete it in its attempted totalization. As geospatial concept, it almost always leads to problematic appeals to identity and positionality for a
political ontology. In this sense, the social-maternal-ancestral *ek-sists* (stands outside of) Euromodernity, even when it only manifests in the impurity of inheritance of the entirety of the past: there is no separating the social-maternal-ancestral from Euromodern inheritance, only its structure of impurely and spectrally inheriting and reconfiguring to it; in an attempt at undoing the unevenly distributed affective weight of Euromodern response-debilitation.

The following two sketches illustrate what led me to the understanding of the *persistence, insistence and ek-sistence* of social-maternal-ancestral. In the ethnographic decolonial film *One Table Two Elephants* (Heland and Ernston 2018), which thematizes social and environmental (precisely in their irreducible entanglement) colonial legacies and decolonial responses in Cape Town, Bradley van Sitters is introduced, who is (re)learning a Khoi language, a language he did not grow up with. “I may not learn [the Khoi language] perfectly, but I learn it anyways,” he shares. The first thing he learned from his teacher was a song, which he translates as “oh mama, how I miss you, how I long to see your face…” The song is a lament and lullaby that was created by children who were separated from their families in different train compartments, Van Sitters explains. The separation of the generations was part of the colonial division of labor, with children and adults being put to different types of work. The song follows the rhythm of the locomotive on the tracks, which is the sound that the children would listen to, since it was the only thing that still connected them to their parents. The separation of the generations “broke the intergenerational storytelling,” Van Sitters continues. But from that severance of the intergenerational story, from a story of loss and longing, a song emerges; a broken fragment that becomes the beginning of Van Sitters’ relearning of a Khoi language, story and culture, and thereby retelling, remaking and reweaving what was fragmented and severed. The rhythm of the train becomes the rhythm of the song: the locomotive is often seen as read as the ultimate expression of the project of (Euro)modernity, as a conquest of time and space based on a racist dichotomy of humanity and history on the one hand and Indigenous people and nature on the other (Césaire 2014, 36), imposing a particular temporality/temporalization and space/spatialization that breaks different relational understandings of time, space, history and nature. This temporal-spatial imposition is part of the colonial-capitalist division of labor that disciplines bodies in the name of a single history of civilization. But this project of Euromodernity can never achieve its closure: the locomotive breaks the time of the Other, but the Other’s time, space and story becomes reconfigured in the

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125 In the case of Dussel, see Maldonado-Torres (2008). For the case of Mignolo, see chapter 2.
126 The following paragraph is taken (in a slightly reworked version) from Hordijk (2020).
very rhythm that undermines it. The rhythm of the locomotive becomes the rhythm of a memory, a song that holds an impossible memory and carries the promise of a future different from the envisioned end-station. In this retelling, it reveals something that persists (it never went away), insists (the virtuality of the past that allows for the new futural response-ability even when colonial structures debilitate that response) and ek-sists (outside of the Euromodern fragmentation and ordering of time, space and bodies based on severance of the generations and from the environment: the song is inside captivity but not contained by it).

Secondly, I point to the influence of Saodat Ismailova’s work devoted to Central Asian matristic Indigenous shamanistic traditions that throughout history have had to shapeshift through various ways of conquest and transculturation (Tlostanova 2012), notably Islamization and later Soviet modernization. As Madina Tlostanova writes, “Central Asian culture does not erase its previous layers and transversal influences, merging and mixing them instead with the newer and stronger attractions but never completely rejecting one in favour of the other” (Tlostanova 2022). Although I cannot do justice to the work of Ismailova here, I simply want to acknowledge her influence on the aesthetic rendering of a multi-vectoral temporality of persistence/insistence/ek-sistence. Something persists despite and through these historical transformations; it insists within these historical formations and remains a virtual reservoir of multiplicity, the relation to which is never fully closed. The reinvented traditions (or, understanding tradition as open-ended reinvention) draw its strength from and maintain the response-enabling relation to the multiplicity of the past, manifesting in response-able relations to human and nonhuman others; and it ek-sists from the point of view of the totalizing attempts of modernization.

Social-maternal-ancestral and the colonial difference

The figuration is both indebted to and a critique of (some articulations of) Lugones’ decolonial feminism. In this dissertation, I argued against Butler’s all-encompassing processes of subjectivation, which reads vulnerability primarily as exposure to violence and subjugation, leading to what Wynter calls the overrepresentation of Man.127 For Butler, subjectivity emerges through subjection to power and norms. The possibility for ethico-political change lies in a subversive immanent reiteration of those norms without there being a place outside of it to inhabit or draw from (Butler 1993). It seems to me that this is

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127 This is not inherent to the theory of subjectivation, as the theoretical and ethnographic discussion of subjectivation as simultaneous subjection and enabling of Šaba Mahmood (2012) shows; Mahmood’s work adds layers of complexity that exceed the discussion at hand.
where Lugones’ intervention is most needed, but also finds its limit. Contra the Foucauldian or Butlerian understanding of power and resistance, Lugones insists that:

[in our colonized, racially gendered, oppressed existences we are also other than what the hegemon makes us be. That is an infra-political achievement. If we are exhausted, fully made through and by micro and macro mechanisms and circulations of power, “liberation” loses much of its meaning (...).

(Lugones 2010, 746)

For Butler, there is no outside to gender-norms, only a bending of their seemingly stable set of rules. For Lugones, gender is inseparable from colonial imposition and the source of resistant response lies elsewhere: It emerges from “worlds of sense” (Lugones 2020, 34)—of habit, ritual, and community, drawing on and testimony to “the power of communities of the oppressed” (Lugones 2010, 746). Lugones shows that the important Nietzschean-Foucauldian-Butlerian point about power being productive should not lead to the overrepresentation of one history, story, or articulation of power (as subjection, potestas, fragmentation) and erase other worlds of sense from which response-able response emerges (impure multiplicity in opacity). However, at times it seems that Lugones leaves behind her commitment to impure multiplicity and fixes her ground in a particular tradition or collective standpoint or subject-position. Kelly Oliver’s critique of Butler has a similar aim of distinguishing between histories of subjection and hierarchy on the one hand and ethical subjectivity (figured through witnessing, responsivity and response-ability) on the other hand.128 Importantly, however, Oliver’s figuration of witnessing as a relational structure and resource of responsive and response-able subjectivity is not inherently tied to subject-position: although subjectivity and subject-position can never be separated, they must not be conflated either. Witnessing thus pertains to subjectivity across subject-positions and cannot be ontologically annexed to a particular positionality. It is in this sense that I introduce the figure of social-maternal-ancestral, as trace that infuses all subjectivities across different subject-positions. Shifting away from the geospatial articulation of coloniality and colonial difference, the temporal articulation of response-enabling inheritance avoids connecting too closely to a particular position or tradition.129 As a temporal rather than geospatial or

128 In Witnessing, Oliver also engages critically with Lugones but (mis)reads her solely as a pure identity-thinker, missing Lugones’ distinctions between purity/impurity and fragmentation/multiplicity (Oliver 2001).

129 As argued above, this is not to deny the importance of geopolitical power-differences between the Global North and Global South, but about avoiding a Huntington-like mapping of the world (see chapter 2; Mignolo 2000).
geopolitical articulation, it persists and insists despite and through histories of Euromodern colonization. This is not to undercut Lugones’ shifting to resistant traditions as the privileged ground for resistance and worlding otherwise. Many communities continue to acknowledge and honor what precedes response-ably and thereby keep open the relation to the multiplicity of the past, as means of survival, reinvention and re-existence. A political and epistemic commitment that starts there—a privileging of the views from the underside (Maldonado-Torres 2008)—is necessary for the possibility of socio-politico-environmental breathable worlds against Euromodernity’s defuturing (Fry and Tlostanova 2021). Different communities have different ways of maintaining a responsive relation to response-enabling inheritances. Whatever one’s positionality, its resources can never be fully usurped. In Lugones’ terms, it is the source of multiplicity underneath all fragmentation and hierarchy. Even though the coloniality of gender framework does not always make explicit space for this, it would be a misreading if multiplicity were tied to certain traditions of the oppressed only, with subject-position determining whether one is on the side of fragmentation or multiplicity.

To restate: Butler is at risk of collapsing the differences between the response-debilitating and the response-enabling, between powerlessness and vulnerability, even when they rightly insist on the productivity of power and the inseparable entanglement of the interplay between them. Lugones, on the other hand, is at risk of entrenching one absolute divide by adopting the framework of the colonial difference. The social-maternal-ancestral keeps in view the difference(s) between response-enabling inheritances and genealogies of response-debilitation (contra Butler), but also to insist on its irreducibility to—although inseparability from—subject-position (with Oliver and in part with/against Lugones). Whereas this figuration explores response-enabling inheritance, the figurations of spectral inheritance and the spectral heir highlight the impure impure inseparability of response-enabling and response-debilitating inheritances, of multiplicity and fragmentation, of vulnerability and powerlessness, aiming at an ethical affirmation of living with the ghosts (both enabling ancestors and the haunting legacies of severance and fragmentation in their inseparable entanglement) and critical co-becoming with them. This spectral ethics is an ongoing unlearning of a moral approach of purification, exorcism and judgement, “treating good and evil as material features of the world that can be encouraged or eliminated like bacteria in water” (Gordon 1999, 23).

**Traces/Spectrality/An-archy**

As a spectral inheritance that persists, insists and ek-sists, the social-maternal-ancestral refers to a trace-structure that Kristeva explores in her theory of the
maternal-semiotic. Kristeva theorizes the trace of the maternal as a generative force of multiplicity and impurity, exceeding all attempts at subjective mastery or integration (Kristeva 1980). She remains wedded to a psychoanalytic schema, a framework that this dissertation is critical of. “[F]aithful as she is to the Freudian model of individuation, [Kristeva] inscribes what we might call matricide as a necessary condition for subject formation. The little child must separate from the mother in order to gain access to discourse” (Söderbäck 2019, 192). Kristeva introduces the maternal-semiotic as a prelinguistic and presymbolic source that continues to generatively haunt the symbolic and the subject. From the sociogenic perspective and critique of the civilizational figure of the Child, I argue that the organization of subjectivity around matricide and severance bespeaks a particular logic of Euromodern Developmental Man’s metaphysics that is not universal. That said, Kristeva’s insistence on the anarchical trace-structure of the semiotic-maternal as haunting any symbolic but never manifestly present remains essential:

Kristeva demands that we read the semiotic chora neither as an alternative, more authentic origin (such an origin is indeed only a fantasy) nor as an alternative independent position within the symbolic, but as traces of alterity and the heterogeneity operating within the linguistic and psychic economy. (Ziarek 1992, 98)

Kristeva’s reconfiguring of the maternal thus cannot serve as stable ground or pure identity (Söderbäck 2019) and remains spectral. As Ziarek writes, “it is impossible to occupy that maternal position (…) any attempt to transform the maternal body into a coherent signifying position is a fraud (…) the maternal body, then, becomes paradoxically a nonsite, an impurity” (Ziarek 1992, 99). This means that “an alternative feminist discourse on maternity can be cleared only after rigorous interrogation of the cultural representations of motherhood” (Ziarek 1992, 100). From that injunction, it is necessary to read Kristeva alongside and through Black feminist, decolonial and queer critique (Söderbäck 2019); and sociogenically, so that it challenges the universality of the oedipal scheme of individual development and the structure of the family (Fanon 2008; Spillers 2003).

I follow Kristeva in her argument that this “outside” is not prior to, but emerges in and through the matricidal separation (severance).131 Although this

130 And further: “The maternal trace clouds the ‘purity’ [of the phenomenological reflection and the cogito] and questions the possibility of a separate unitary identity closed upon itself” (Ziarek 1992, 100).

131 Within the context of this dissertation, the challenging of the universality of the opposition between the semiotic-maternal and symbolic-paternal is part of a critique of the universal claims of psychoanalysis. I prefer to speak of different socio-genealogies of severance (in the plural) rather than postulating it as a universal structure.
certainly warrants more discussion than I can provide here, I agree with the readings that argue for a questioning of the universality of the opposition between the semiotic-maternal and symbolic-paternal: there are myriad ways of acknowledging the precedence and response-enabling inheritance of the social-maternal-ancestral,132 yet any symbolic form to some extent fragments and encloses the generative trace (purity-thinking): I think this is what Lugones was also after in analytically separating multiplicity from fragmentation, arguing that the latter can never usurp the former, but that multiplicity never attains status as origin or presence (Lugones 2003). It nevertheless avoids a universalization of severance and acknowledges the existence and argues for the cultivation of symbolic modes that leave space for haunting impurities as opposed to social and symbolic formations that seek to master and enclose them. With Alexis Pauline Gumbs and Cynthia Willett, I approach the (constitutive) externality of the maternal trace not as something that is always-already outside the paternal-symbolic but as something that is nourished and transmitted in everyday praxis of mothering.

**Inter/multi-generational praxis, transgenerational inheritances**

Unlike Kristeva, Gumbs, building on the foundational work of Hortense Spillers, highlights the always racialized and classed category of motherhood: “motherHOOD is a status granted by patriarchy to white middle-class women, those women whose legal rights to their children are never questioned, regardless of who does the labor (the how) of keeping them alive” (Gumbs 2016b, 22). The ambivalent status accorded to motherhood is inseparable from histories of property and the bearing of legitimate heirs and built on exploitable and exclusion of others from that status, to maintain white reproductive futurism. Gumbs separates motherhood from the queer, revolutionary and quotidian praxis of mothering, which she defines as the daily intergenerational care work of making a hostile world an affirming space for another person who is growing mentally, spiritually, physically, and emotionally (...). Mothering is a queer practice of transforming the world through our desire for each other and another way to be. (Gumbs 2016c, 116)133

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132 Some of which are touched upon in this chapter, especially with regard to Alexander below; see also Allen (1992), Marcos (2006), Gimbutas (1999), Ismailova (ed. Bloemheuvel 2023) and Tlostanova (2022).

133 And: “MotherING is (...) the name for that nurturing work, that survival dance, worked by enslaved women who were forced to breastfeed the children of the status mothers while having no control over whether their birth or chosen children were sold away. Mothering is a form of labor worked by immigrant nannies like my grandmother who mothered wealthy white kids in order to send money to Jamaica for my mother and her brothers who could not afford the privilege of her presence” (Gumbs 2016, 22).
Crucially, Gumbs separates the labor of mothering from any specific gender, body or identity, using the word mother “less as a gendered identity and more as a possible action, a technology of transformation that those people who do the most mothering labor are teaching us right now” (Gumbs 2016b, 23). Although mothering emphasizes the quotidian/revolutionary praxis over the (social-)maternal(-ancestral) inheritance, it is this labor of mothering, which allows for the transmission of response-enabling inheritance of the social-maternal-ancestral despite and through the systems, inheritances and legacies of fragmentation. Importantly, Gumbs connects this intergenerational praxis to a transgenerational temporality that acknowledges the precedence of endless generations of mothering, through which queer revolutionary transformative futures are possible: “The practice of mothering that inspired us to create this book is older than feminism; it is older and more futuristic than the category ‘woman’” (Gumbs 2016a, 9). It involves finding symbolic expressions to acknowledge that transgenerational inheritance, legacy and potential by honoring who came before. And the acknowledgement of the labor of mothering always implies a social question and demand of remaking social worlds and collective response-ability instead of placing the burdens on individuals who can be judged to “succeed” or “fail.” Amidst and through the acknowledgement of the preceding and transgenerational inheritances of mothering on the one hand, and the demand of remaking worlds of sociality conducive to mothering and relational flourishing of all, there is the work of self-transformation through a critical and care-ful praxis of unlearning: “all of us breaking cycles of abuse by deciding what we want to replicate from the past and what we need urgently to transform, are m/othering ourselves” (Gumbs 2016b, 22).

Willett also examines care work and nurturing practices as foundational for subjectivity and ethics. Breaking with patriarchal genealogies of subjectivity and morality (in for example Hegel, Nietzsche and Freud), which “define manhood as the negation of the sphere of the mother and understand the rebirth of the self into manhood through rituals of separation” (Willett 1995, 170),

\[134\] Recall Gumbs’ definition of queerness (against versions of queer theory that consider any combination of queerness and mothering an oxymoron): “our definition of queer is that which fundamentally transforms our state of being and the possibilities for life. That which is queer is that which does not reproduce the status quo” (Gumbs 2016, 116).

\[135\] “This book [Revolutionary Mothering] cannot include all of the generations that have practiced mothering on this planet, but we find it important to honor at least the generation of work that precedes this project (Gumbs 2016, 9).

\[136\] “[I]n order to participate in and demand a society where people help to create each other instead of too often destroying each other, we need to look at the practice of creating, nurturing, affirming, and supporting life that we call mothering” (Gumbs 2016, 9).
Willett proposes a maternal ethics that does not dismiss or integrate/sublate (aufheben) the pre- and postnatal scene of childhood but instead makes this embeddedness within the always-already or precedence of sociality—a responsive relationality with the environment, with caregivers that carry, hold and enable growth as increasing response-ability). This recuperation of the maternal does not point toward an isolated mother-child dyad that sustains a patriarchal division of space and labor (of which the isolated mother-child dyad is a result) but emphasizes the irreducible broader sociality of relations of care, irrespective of bloodlines (Willett 1995). Instead of morality and sociality being achieved through discipline (Developmental Man’s trajectory away from selfish, brutish nature), or maturation as overcoming the mother-child dependency, Willett argues that ethics develops from “cultivating the social eroticism that can find its roots in the relationship between nurturers and child” (Willett 1995, 8). She argues for a “subjectless sociality” (Willett 1995, 18), a sociality that precedes subject-formation rather than being a developmental achievement.137 Sociality and social eros, unlike in Kristeva, continue to be the source of ethics and resist the patriarchal rituals of separation and structures of severance. Willett turns to Fredrick Douglass and Black histories of abolitionist resistance on Turtle Island to argue for its ongoing response-enabling power for remaking subjectivity and ethics through the “expressive sociality of song and dance” rather than moral or intellectual transcendence, overcoming or self-negation (Willett 1995, 170).138 Willett is also careful in separating her articulation of maternal ethics from patriarchal gender-roles and stereotypes, avoiding the glorification of figures of the mother or the mother-child dyad. Nevertheless, despite these important conceptual building blocks that I am drawing from (responsive sociality and its resistant legacies and possibilities), Willett maps ethical responsivity too closely onto developmental psychology’s findings of a normal, normative or optimal development (see chapter 2). As I argued with the help of Bloem (2021) in chapter 4, relational ethics and the category of responsivity and response-ability must be detached from any hint at what the right type of response ought to be, and, from Oliver’s Levinasian definition of responsibility as being response-able for the Other’s response-ability (ability to respond), responsivity must stay committed to multiplicity, difference and opacity. That said, Willett helpfully combines the inquiry into an-archical sociality as an ethical space of/through the erotic. This concept she borrows from Lorde. A discussion of Lorde’s notion of the erotic in relation to

137 “Already in the womb, the fetus participates in the rhythms and tones of subjectless sociality” (Willett 1995, 18).
138 Douglass’ insistence that he learned the meaning of freedom from the songs of the enslaved (and not from his reading) is an illustrative counterpoint to the anti-blackness of Levinas’ distinction between humanity proper and the “unseriousness” of song and dance (see chapter 6 and Moten 2018).
Alexander will show how it relates to the “ancestral” and the transgenerational inheritances already alluded to through Gumbs and further worked out below with the help of Elizabeth Grosz and Alexander.

**Embodied inheritances**

Mothering is needed for the transmission of the social-maternal-ancestral, but it is also a bodily inheritance that no severance or fragmentation can completely usurp. Elizabeth Grosz’ work on the body and time also argues for the inheritance of what precedes as the stuff that makes us and our worlds. Grosz highlights the material, embodied inheritance that connects everyone to a time before the self. The materiality of inheritance contains both a cosmological and a maternal element: she investigates “the elements through which all living things are born and live, a cosmological element; and of the specific body, indeed a chain of bodies, from which we come, a genealogical or maternal element. Life is this double debt” (Grosz 2004, 2). In a feminist mobilization of Bergson, Grosz argues that the entirety of the past insists and subsists in every present. As I explore further with Alia Al-Saji and the spectral inheritance figuration, the past in its multiplicity does not cease to exist but insists as the virtual; rather than being ontologically closed, as virtual, it allows for different reconfigurations of its multiplicities, thereby able to produce different and unpredictable futures:

> Instead of the past being regarded as fixed, inert, given, unalterable (…) it must be regarded as inherently open to future rewritings (…). The past is never exhausted in its virtualities, insofar as it is always capable of giving rise to another reading, another context, another framework that will animate it in different ways. The past, in other words, is always already contained in the present, not as its cause or its pattern but as its latency, its virtuality, its potential for being otherwise. (…) Rewriting, re-inscribing the past is a way to activate these possible futures. (Grosz 2004, 254–255)

Grosz’ emphasis on the body and the materiality of the inheritance of the past adds an important dimension to the emphasis on mothering and response-enabling sociality. The body in the present as a concentration of both cosmic and maternal or genealogical inheritances of the virtual plural past is a reminder that we truly do not know what a body can do: possibilities of response, resistance (Lugones 2003), marronage (Fick 1991; Vergès 2021), escape-routes (MacCormack 2020), fugitivity (Harney and Moten 2013), waywardness (Hartman 2019) can never be determined and fully foreclosed, despite the Euromodern structures of severance and fragmentation.

Although this chapter argues for the irreducibility of response-enabling inheritance, it must not be forgotten that it is precisely this openness of the past that is under attack through colonialism and racialization, where history and time become response-debilitating. This leads to how the past weighs differently
on differently positioned subjects (Al-Saji 2019; 2023). Histories of resistance speak to how this debilitation can never achieve a full closure of that plural past, and in critical reconfiguration for making murderous worlds of fragmentations breathable (or committing to exit that world because it does not allow for breath). These unwritten futures that the virtual plural past contain are remade in social worlds and at times persist in the body when all sociality is denied:

History produces not only the forces of domination but also the forces of resistance that press up against and are often the objects of such domination. Which is another way of saying that history, the past, is larger than the present, and is the ever-growing and ongoing possibility of resistance to the present’s imposed values, the possibility of futures not unlike the present, futures that resist and transform what dominates the present (…) The resources of the previously oppressed (…) are not lost or wiped out through the structures of domination that helped to define them: they are preserved somewhere, in the past itself, with effects and traces that can be animated in a number of different contexts and terms in the present. (Grosz 2004, 254; 256)

The emphasis of sociality as (an)originary or an-archical thus means that the social-maternal-ancestral simultaneously requires the sociality of multigenerational and intergenerational care for its transmission, but is at the same time embodied, which enables responsivity, lines of flight and world-making despite fragmentation and severance. It is what maintains a responsible relation to the multiplicity of the past and prevents that multiplicity to be completely closed off through the imperial/racialized time of Developmental Man.

The erotic and the ancestral

Whether in the social eroticism of the nurturing relation, social expressions of dance, song, ritual, or in other embodied habits and rhythms, Gumbs, Willett and Grosz argue for response-enabling resources that are both given through external sociality and through internal embodied resources. This empowering inheritance is the link between inner orientation and social transformation, which is a focal point in Lorde’s work. Reading it in conjunction with Alexander brings the nexus of subjectivity, ethics and temporality back together, as Alexander reads Lorde’s erotic through the category of ancestry.139 As explored in chapter 7 with Lykke, Anzaldúa and Baldwin, vulnerable co-

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139 References to the erotic emerge from a Black and queer feminist tradition and are usually in reference to other women*/outsiders. I write these lines not from a position of identification but nevertheless one from implication. Leaving open the relationship between the erotic and differently situated subjects, I am convinced of its importance also for the work of unlearning (unconscious investment in) whiteness and redefining masculinity (see also references to James Baldwin in the Coda to chapter 7).
becoming is intricately linked with what Lorde calls the erotic. The "nakedness" (Baldwin 1985, 461) of vulnerability loosens reactive self-defensive identity, tapping into resources more ancient for a becoming-otherwise. Lorde links the power of the erotic to ancestriality. Alexander further fleshes out this link between vulnerable, creative co-becoming to embodied resources from the past, configured as the ancestral, as the source of pluralism that enables resistance and response, survival and thriving.

For Kristeva, the semiotic-maternal is a "nonphenomenological trace" (Ziarek 1992, 98). This nonphenomenological trace can nevertheless be connected to a phenomenology of the erotic (Lorde 2007; Kimoto and Willett 2020) as a way of tapping into its transgenerational and ancestral response-enabling inheritance. In their phenomenological reading of Lorde’s erotic, Kimoto and Willett explain that the erotic is made possible by both the revolutionary resistant and the quotidian care-work of generations that have preceded and constitutes its bond: “the erotic as a lifeforce connects first-person embodied experience to the shared genealogy of women with whom we live and who lived before us” (Kimoto and Willett 2020, 117). The temporality of the erotic, like Gumbs’ revolutionary mothering, multiplicitous and multidirectional, connects the embodied present to ancestriality and through that source contains unknown creative futurities. Lorde explores the dimension of the erotic in all aspects of life, refusing a profit-driven “racist, patriarchal, and anti-erotic society’s” distortion of the erotic and its limitation to the bedroom (Lorde 2007, 59). “[W]hen we attend to our everyday, life-sustaining, and joy-affirming practices as erotic experiences, they are newly enlivened with meaning. (…) Ultimately (…) the erotic is how we care for ourselves and others” (Kimoto and Willett 2020, 117).

For Lorde, the erotic is a “source of power and information within our lives” that “provides energy for change” by learning to live from within outward, in touch with the power of the erotic within ourselves (…) allowing that power to inform and illuminate our actions upon the world around us (…) then we begin to be responsible to ourselves in the deepest sense. For as we begin to recognize our deepest feelings, we begin to give up, of necessity, being satisfied with suffering and self-negation, and with the numbness which so often seems like their only alternative in our society. Our acts against oppression become integral with self, motivated and empowered from within. In touch with the erotic, I become less willing to accept powerlessness, or those other supplied states of being which are not native to me, such as resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression, self-denial. (Lorde 2007, 58)

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140 “[E]ros as a visionary force carries her back to ancient African spiritual and ancestral sources and forward to queer couples, flourishing workers, and the intersectional politics of struggle and solidarity” (Kimoto and Willett 2020, 116–117).
The erotic as inner strength is the embodiment of the ability to be responsive, the possibility to create new relationships of vulnerable co-becoming. Like Anzaldúa, Lorde’s revolutionary legacy is to reclaim the power of the erotic from a situation and world that wants to destroy or exploit her, a world that undermines her vulnerable being/becoming. Although reactive defensiveness is also necessary for her survival, Lorde knows that this reactivity ultimately reproduces the fragmentation and would kill her and her sister* outsiders. Gumbs describes Lorde’s legacy when she writes:

In an essay on the impact of internalized oppression between Black women, she offered: WE CAN LEARN TO MOTHER OURSELVES. I have designed multiple workshops with this title and I still don’t know what it means. Except that love is possible even in a world that teaches us to hate ourselves and the selves we see waiting in each other. Except that in a world that says that we should not be born, and that says “no” to our very beings everyday, I still wake up wanting you with a “yes” on my heart. (…) all of us breaking cycles of abuse by deciding what we want to replicate from the past and what we need urgently to transform, are m/othering ourselves. (Gumbs 2016b, 19; 22)

Alexander turns to the erotic to further explore the connection with preceding generations of love and struggle that sustain everyday survival and flourishing, and can ignite transformative change, which informs my usage of the term ancestral. It acknowledges the inner orientation, transformative empowering resource as a gift from what has and who have preceded. The erotic connects to embodied memories;141 erotic memory-work, Alexander explains in reference to the legacies of This Bridge Called My Back, has less to do with “going back” but more with a different relationship to time: “There is a difference between remembering when—the nostalgic yearning for some return—and a living memory that enables us to remember what was contained in Bridge and what could not be contained within it or by it” (Alexander 2005, 278). Alexander understands colonization as the colonization of memory, time, the body and the implementation of all the hierarchies of body, mind and spirit. She argues that processes of colonization have aimed at the usurpation and fragmentation of the erotic:

To this process of fragmentation we gave the name colonization, usually understood as a set of exploitative practices in political ideological and aesthetic terms, but also linked in minute ways to dualistic and hierarchical thinking: divisions among mind, body, spirit; between sacred and secular, male and female, heterosexual and homosexual; in class divisions; and in divisions between the erotic and the Divine (…) Since colonization has produced fragmentation and dismemberment at both the material and psychic levels, the

141 “So much of how we remember is embodied: the scent of home; of fresh-baked bread; of newly grated coconut stewed with spice (we never called it cinnamon), nutmeg, and bay leaf from the tree (not from the bottle)” (Alexander 2005, 277).
work of decolonization has to make room for the deep yearning for wholeness. (Alexander 2005, 281)

Colonization is understood as an attack on the understanding of the body as a spiritual vessel that is a “mediator between the world of the living and the world of the dead,” which must be mastered and transformed into “movable property—chattel—and as repository of sin” (Alexander 2005, 293). The work of decolonization, for Alexander, entails reconnecting to the sources of the erotic.\footnote{Importantly, this memory-work is not anthropocentric and a reclaiming of erotic and re-membering a different relation to Time entails relearning to relate to environmental temporalities: “Rocks hold memory. Land holds memory (…) The live oaks will tell us (…) stories when we listen. (…) Water always remembers” (Alexander 2005, 284–285).} The spiritual-political practice of decolonization requires an undoing of the imposed linearity of time and relearn an erotic temporality that is embedded and indebted to the ancestral: “the embodiment of the Sacred dislocates clock time, meaning linearity, which is different than living in the past or being bound by tradition (…) linear time does not exist because energy simply does not obey the human idiom” (Alexander 2005, 309). This work “does not conform to the dictates of human time, but it needs our courage, revolutionary patience, and intentional shifts in consciousness so that we can anchor the struggle for social justice within the ample space of the erotic” (Alexander 2005, 283). Alexander refers to Vodou as ritualization of bodies that under the most severe forms of severance and fragmentation maintained the multiplicitous ancestral memory and relation to the spirits, which both sustained survival under colonial fragmentation and a source for its overthrow (Alexander 2005, 297). Further, she points to quotidian rituals and ceremonies of acknowledgement to ancestrality—gestures of “mutual exchange and (…) giving thanks and asking to be sustained” (Alexander 2005, 307)—is a response and a cultivating response-ability to the past that enables and nourishes one’s plural self, orientation and response-ability in the midst of and entangled with the response-debilitating structures of fragmentation. The power from within is not an isomorphic interiority but stems from an experience of sociality and relationality, which is not the foundation but an an-archic transgenerational gift of precedence.

This is in stark contrast to Euromodern configuration of the erotic and developmental temporality. In conclusion and by contrast, I briefly explore Alexander’s argument about the connection of colonization of bodies, memory and ancestral time, to the trope of Developmental Man that I called the inheritance of stupidity: Enlightenment philosophy’s and Euromodern metaphysics’ colonization of time and history and the racialized order of the world is connected to this attack on ancestriality. I will follow Ruin’s tracing of
the concept of ancestors in philosophy and anthropology as a backdrop for his argument that takes “ancestrality (…) as a basic existential-ontological predicament and as a root phenomenon of human historicity” (Ruin 2018, 81). In 18th and 19th century evolutionary and developmentalist thinking, European scientists were preoccupied with (racially) mapping the stages of mental evolution in human history, with religion occupying a central place in this linear development (with either Christianity or secular science being the pinnacle). Within this “hierarchical-evolutionary value scale,” ancestor worship was “codified both as an expression of primitiveness and as an original position within the evolution of human spirituality” (Ruin 2018, 64). This is the reason that Hegel places Africa (minus North Africa, which he does not consider Africa proper) outside of the philosophy of history. Africa is “the land of childhood” (Hegel 1956, 91) that is characterized by “[having] no knowledge of the immortality of the soul [Seele], although specters [Gespenster] are supposed to appear” (cited in Ruin 2018, 69). The 1908 Encyclopedia of Religion reads: “It reflects the usual feeling of savage and barbaric man toward his kinfolk who have passed into the other world” (cited in Ruin 2018, 64). The civilizational present was thus defined in contradistinction with the atavistic belief in ancestors and ghosts. From Hegel to Freud, human development was considered a “linear progression of refinement in terms of relating to the dead, where the supposedly rational cultivation of the dead in historical awareness emerges as a supreme spiritual task in itself” (Ruin 2018, 760). The case of Freud is particularly relevant, as it directly connects the alleged atavistic primitiveness of ancestrality to the erotic. In Freud’s linking of the psychic development of the Child and the lack thereof in “primitives,” the development of sociality and morality occurs by repressing the erotic; the latter is understood as a purely egotistical force that produces its own fancies and superstitious worldview. This is because thought is connected to the pursuit of an asocial and pre-social pleasure-drive, which is unable to face the reality-principle: “It may be said that in primitive men the process of thinking is still to a great extent sexualized” (Freud 1950, 77). Freud cites Marett approvingly: “It is almost an axiom with writers on this subject, that a sort of Solipsism, or Berkleyanism (as Professor Sully terms it as he finds it in the Child), operates in the savage to make him refuse to recognize death as a fact” (cited in Freud 1950, 105). Thus, from the failure of the reality-principle and the pleasure-driven superstitions, “[s]pirits and demons (…) are only projections of man’s own emotional impulses” (Freud 1950, 107). Freud links the creation of spirits, “man’s first theoretical

143 This is why Hegel considers slavery, despite being an evil in itself, justified in the case of the African, because it helps “the African” to “mature” (Hegel 1956; Ruin 2018, 68).
144 For how the normativity of the reality-principle and the disavowal of living with the dead and the ghosts continue in contemporary psychology, see Lykke (2022).
achievement,” to the emergence of restriction of the erotic: “the creation of spirits (…) seems to have arisen from the same source as the first moral restrictions to which he was subjected—the observances of taboo” (Freud 1950, 108). This is why Kimoto and Willett’s observation that “whereas for Plato and Freud, the sublimation of the erotic accounts for creative activity, for Lorde, the erotic itself is creative energy” (Kimoto and Willett 2020, 116), is significant. Whereas for Freud the erotic pertains to the fundamentally asocial insular desires of the Hobbesian individual, in Lorde the erotic is also a social energy, enabling connection and response with others on the basis of consent.  

Alexander’s rightly points to coloniality’s interrelated attack on the body, memory, spirit, ancestality and temporality, and reclaims the response-enabling powers of the erotic as sensory, spiritual-political, and mnemonic decolonial work. What Developmental Man must sever is reclaimed, rewoven and reconfigured for the work of worlding otherwise/elsewhen.  

With Lorde, the emphasis on differences is a way to allow for their existence and go against their fragmentation. Lorde often uses the metaphor of bridge-building as a way of connecting to differences that enables their co-existence and relational flourishing: the bridge respects the difference that it bridges. What I read in both Lorde and Alexander is a wider appeal to such bridge-building, necessitating a form of responsivity and response-ability even and especially from within the response-debilitating systems of fragmentation, division and hierarchy. These “shifts in consciousnesses” (Anzaldúa 2015) connect the ethics of response-ability from an inner orientation to a transgenerational source of empowerment that persists, insists and exists despite the histories of fragmentation and severance. Without this spectral inheritance of the social-maternal-ancestral, there would only be the cycles of fragmentation and oppression—the genealogies of the violent production of subjectivities that only find an answer in individualistic self-styling (Foucault) or subversive repetition (Butler). The impossibility of the completion of the Euromodern project of severance from the social-maternal-ancestral means that there are multiplicitous past resources to tap into for resistance, re-existence and making other worlds, not as past or future utopias but as a spectral inheritance, the embodiment of a relational memory that exceeds the inheritance severance and fragmentation.

145 “And use without consent of the used is abuse” (Lorde 2007, 58).
Conclusion

Decolonization must mean attending to ghosts, and arresting widespread denial of the violence done to them.

–EVE TUCK AND C. REE

If you know whence you came, there is really no limit to where you can go.

–JAMES BALDWIN

Spectral inheritance asks what it means to inherit the catastrophic worlds of Developmental Man in a response-able way as an ongoing work of unlearning and co-becoming through a responsive relation to the plural past. This dissertation drew on various (feminist) philosophies to address how the past, in response-debilitating and response-enabling ways, forms subjectivities in different-yet-connected ways. Putting into dialogue Wynter and Nietzsche, Lugones and Levinas, Butler and Anzaldúa, and building on Al-Saji, Oliver and many others, I proposed different concepts and figures to address the “haunting legacies” (Schwab 2010) and the “affective weight of the past” (Al-Saji 2018) in Euromodernity. Using Wynter’s theory of the genres of the human and the overrepresentation of Man as scaffolding, I proposed to understand the hegemonic genre of Euromodern Man as Developmental Man, whose lethal civilizational binaries of humanity and inhumanity operate through the maturity-trope: Discourses of im/maturity—and the severance from the social-maternal-ancestral they are premised upon—have divided and continue to divide between the mature self-governing sovereign subjects and the immature subjects who need external governance, as well as always pertaining to the imperative of having to become fully mature/sovereign to prove one’s worthiness. The concepts and figures of severance, the maturity-trope, fragmentation, powerlessness, reactivity, the civilizational figure of the Child and the legitimate heir addressed the “weight of the past” in the wake of Developmental Man as it is inherited in different ways. At the same time, it is not (only) a critique or negation of Developmental Man, but an affirmation of the plurality of the past that allows for a worlding otherwise/elsewhen. Worlding otherwise/elsewhen reclaims and relearns a responsive relation to the plurality of the past, despite Man’s attempt at a chronolinear developmental trajectory that attempts a closure of the past and an erasure of its multiplicity. Indeed, from the understanding of temporality as spectral inheritance, the entirety of the past is coextensive with the present holding multiple tendencies and different futurities, with the legacies of Man’s (uni-versalizing) project weighing down differentially on different people and blocking a response-able relation to the past’s multiplicity. It is therefore not a question of who comes after Man (Thiele 2021; Azoulay 2019), but of critically and creatively inheriting in ways that allow “to exit the world
The concepts and figures of the spectral heir, multiplicity, the plural past, the social-maternal-ancestral, vulnerability, response-ability, are always in excess of Developmental Man and aimed at the undoing and unlearning of the inheritances of this figure of Man. In Part 1, my sketch of Developmental Man showed how it is premised on hierarchy, the denial of vulnerability and an atomistic ontology, which occurs through *severance* from the constitutive web of sociality and relational worlding (the inheritance of the capacity for the latter I called the social-maternal-ancestral.) I approached the question of exiting Developmental Man through (queer)feminist ethics of response-ability, vulnerability and care (Part 2) and through the figurations spectral inheritance and the social-maternal-ancestral (Part 3), reconfiguring the nexus of subjectivity, ethics and temporality away from the logic of development and maturation that organizes Euromodern subject-formation, temporality and morality-systems.

This conclusion reflects on the multiple threads—temporality, subjectivity, ethics in and in excess of Developmental Man—of this dissertation and looks back on the experiment in decolonizing methodologies in relation to my own position as a writer.

**Developmental Man and the socio-genealogy of identity and morality**

This dissertation began considering the role of discourses on development and im/maturity for Euromodern understandings of subjectivity, ethics and temporality (chapter 1). This showed how an atomistic ontology and linear-developmental temporality are part and parcel of the notion of the human, which justifies and makes desirable the severance of children from a fabric of sociality—community, culture, language, land, etc. Building on Wynter, I called this the Developmental genre of Man (chapter 3). The focus on development and im/maturity allows for a more complex understanding of the binaries of nature/culture and savagery/civilization, as an always violently produced unstable boundary that is negotiated and enforced in different ways on different population groups according to race, gender, class, sexuality, dis/ability, etc. The inquiry into the civilizational figure of the Child shows how the theorization and governance of the human is based on severance, figuring the human as an atomistic being separate from community and their constitutive relational sociality, which needs to be subjected to a higher paternal authority (hierarchy as the primary blueprint of relationality, as necessary for maturation), whose vulnerability is fundamentally denied through a foundational disrespect for young life—no matter whether the infantile is figured as monstrous or as a lilywhite innocence. The civilizational figure of the Child emerges as a natural being who must be subjected to civilizational discipline for “his” maturation into sovereign civilized subjecthood.
The figure of the Child serves as paradigmatic for vulnerability requiring care (Cavarero 2016). But from within a critique of Euromodern Developmental Man, we can see how the discourses of immaturity mark children and many others for forms of subjectivation and subjection that range from the infantilizing modes of governance to the legitimized exploitation, theft and genocide. I turned to (queer)feminist ethics of vulnerability and care as responsive alternative to the discourses of sovereign mature subjects based on the atomistic and hierarchical ontologies, which produce Child and Man. Developmental Man is premised on its very disavowal: From Enlightenment thinkers like Immanuel Kant to Nazi-pedagogue Johanna Haarer and conservative public intellectual Jordan Peterson, there is a consensus that one must not “give in” to the “demands” of the Child and instead enforce one’s own authority through disciplinary means to ensure the Child’s proper development into respectable adulthood. The will of the Other can only be figured in terms of a struggle for dominance (obey or be obeyed, be a slave or a tyrant), and the will of the immature Other is to be broken, bent or guided. This is particularly the paternal prerogative, which opposes itself to the purported softness of mothers and servants who overly indulge the Child, thus thwarting a child’s “proper” development into heteronormative adulthood.

The importance of an affirmative ethics of care and vulnerability based on constitutive sociality displaces the maturity-trope and its frames of sovereignty, self-governance, and infantilizing governance of immature others. Discourses of immaturity and development mark most people as lacking in Man’s ideal of mature self-governance, which exposes them to modes of governance ranging from infantilizing care (for which the Child remains the paradigmatic figure) to necropolitics of assimilation and genocide (residential schools, and genocidal warfare; also see postface below). The response-able vulnerable ethics of care based on the cross-reading of Lugones, Oliver, Lykke, Anzaldúa, Butler, Hedva and others, affirms non-sovereign constitutive relationality free from the developmental logic of im/mature subjects in/capable of self-governance. It is based on affirmation and honoring of people’s vulnerability with a care ethic that attempts at being response-enabling for the relational flourishing of all. This is why I found it important to investigate the remainders of the maturity-trope and developmentalism in Butler’s conception of subjectivation (through their emphasis on Freudian and Kleinian psychoanalysis), in order to mobilize it for an exiting of Developmental Man, and not as an overrepresentation of (deconstructed) Developmental Man.

**Severance from the social-maternal-ancestral**

Severance, or severance from the social-maternal-ancestral, implies an individual or atomistic ontology that undergirds Developmental Man, making a human or nonhuman animal ontologically separable from its constitutive
relations and environment, as well as holding a civilizational-moral imperative of a trajectory of maturation to move away from savage worthlessness to civilizational respectability. The story of the Harlow-experiments is illustrative: rather than reading it as scientific proof of the constitutive sociality of mammalian life, the experiments’ design and scientific reception are a testimony of severance, namely the very idea of severability of beings, an individual ontology that can only manifest itself as and through response-debilitating violence: severance is the premise for the scientific “proof” of attachment as a pure, decontextualized result or knowledge. The cover illustration of this dissertation gestures towards the haunting effects of these experiments that psychology textbooks like to put to rest and turn into a tale both of a severable, context-free truth about mammalian nature and simultaneously a lesson in changing ethical standards of research. In an effort to acknowledge and stay with the tortured monkey’s haunting, rather than contain them into a square box of psychology textbook frames that perpetuate the confinements of Harlow’s torture chamber, this work continues to care for and honor their disavowed vulnerability. Severance is the premise for the Euromodern figure of the Child to emerge, as a separate entity who needs to be governed, disciplined, protected, and guided to ensure its proper development into respectable maturity—or into a serviceable immaturity through e.g. a racialized working class or women giving birth to legitimate heirs of the race and/or family. Whereas for a limited class of people, the telos of this trajectory is the mature, individual self-governance and self-mastery, the various racialized, gendered, ableist, classist, etc. discourses turn the im/maturity of the Other into the disputable and manageable matter of who can be raised to which level and in which ways they can be serviceable to the civilizational project of Man.

This perhaps abstract formulation of severance serves to draw attention to the foundational and ongoing violence in Euromodernity of severing people and especially children from their communities, languages and cultures in the name of civilization, improvement and development. This comprises not only the genocidal histories of colonial residential schools and other militarized disciplinary institutions for children, lethal bordering practices like the ones at the US-Mexico border that detain and separate children from their families, mass incarceration, but also the various legal and illegal, practices of removal of children due to alleged unfit mothers/parents, and il/legal transnational adoption networks that steal children that are precarious (qua available) due to their geopolitical positionality.

Severance makes it thinkable, justifiable and desirable to sever children from their communities and all other kinship-ties either in the name of Man (in for example “Kill the Indian, save the Man”) or in the name of the (civilizational) Child who needs to be saved from unfit mothers or put in more “deserving” families for the sake of the ethnic-racial make-up of a nation. Euromodernity’s legacies of violence are inseparable from this foundational
severance. Severance is patri-archal: it is the violent claim towards mastery and control over origin, which means tearing the multiplicitous an-archical relational fabric to create a being in the image of Man. Engaging such a critique of severance opens the feminist question of how to theorize a relational and social ontology that does not repeat this violence, yet does not entrench a natural ontology and role of the mother that would repeat the patri-archal violence of fragmented identities. Developmental psychology and attachment theory’s emphasis on the mother-child dyad reproduces a normative standard based on a naturalized and desirable state of available mothers, placing the burden of the proper development of the Child squarely on mothers producing feelings of guilt for failing to live up to the natural/ideal standard. The figuration of the social-maternal-ancestral is thus a negation or critique of any tying of the maternal to the natural, or the maternal-natural function, whilst holding onto a relational ontology of constitutive sociality. From Gumbs’ critique of the institution of motherhood and an embrace of an ethics of care as acts of mothering, the response-enabling daily acts of care are disconnected from any gender, and always implicate a wider sociality and conditions that enable or debilitate such responsivity. The connection to ancestrality explored the resources of the past generations built on mothering that runs in our bodies as a capacity to (re)create responsive relation, and enables to resist and persist in the hostile worlds of severance and fragmentation (see also chapter 9).

I argued with and against Wynter to mobilize the understanding of sociogeny not as a quasi-behavioristic approach to symbolic codes of identity and morality, but as scenes of subjectivation of children (chapter 4). This allows for taking subjection and severance of children as a hermeneutical key to understand our differential sociogenic becoming (a lesson drawn from, yet a critique of developmental psychology). Moving away from understanding the formation of (Euro)modern subjects in terms of specific symbolic sociogenic codes grafted onto a universal binary neurobiological structure, the specific Euromodern dis/figuring of the Child molds and orients subjectivities towards a reactive self-definition of pure identities based on hierarchy and dichotomous othering. The next chapters employed Nietzsche’s genealogy (chapter 5) and Lugones’ work (chapter 6) to explore conceptually and psycho-existentially what type of subjects such severance, subjection and subjectivation push towards: Nietzsche speculates on how violence onto the body (which I link to the severance and hierarchical subjection of children) induces a state of powerlessness, from which a reactive, self-defensive subject or soul is crafted who defines the self in reactive opposition to another, that is, I am X because you are Y. Nietzsche highlights how the emergence of a pull toward pure identity-claims go hand-in-hand with transcendental moral claims. This allows for a genealogical embedding of Wynter’s sociogenic symbolic codes of identity and morality (instead of universalizing the structure of this symbolic code), as
well as gesture toward an excess and an otherwise of the reactive formation of Man, which took its root in powerlessness.

Lugones’ sketch of the modern subject through her conceptual pair of multiplicity and fragmentation illustrates the reactive typology of Developmental Man. The (idea of a) unified, sovereign self can only exist reactively through a hierarchical fragmentation of others. Euromodern response-debilitating violence is constitutive of modern subject-formation, not an accident that throws an otherwise normal development off course. Lugones explores this as fragmentation—systems of hierarchization based on categorical purity-thinking in socio-political and psychic systems (what Fanon would call sociogenic)—at the phenomenological level. Fragmentation turns multiplicitous and impure differences into a hierarchy of pure, discrete differences: gender and sexuality become pure identities from which value and worth are determined; race designates inherent features, tendencies or serve as markers of superiority or inferiority; etc. The violence of fragmentation is social and psychosexistential, constitutive of the formation of the self (both an insight of sociogeny and genealogy). As said, fragmentation is constitutive of modern subject-formation—identity-categories such as to race, gender, sexuality, class, dis/ability, religion, intelligence—and are operative at the level of embodied perception. But fragmentation can never fully exhaust or contain multiplicitous, non-hierarchical difference, which always finds its way to participate in a worlding otherwise/elsewhen despite yet within the fragmented world of Developmental Man. The fragmented worlds are such that they weigh down differently on differently situated subjects. As Baldwin understood whiteness and the creation of the N—, Black(ened) people are made to carry the burden of white selves that need to believe themselves to be White, to see themselves as legitimate heirs to a race or civilization (Baldwin 1985). The desire to be a single being, a unified self, a legitimate heir, requires the fragmentation of others that perpetuate and exacerbate an unevenly distributed weight of the past. The explorations of temporality and/as inheritance, through Al-Saji, Derrida and Barad, point to the coexistence of the past and its weighing down on/in the present (chapter 8). This means that transgenerational injustices are affectively transmitted and carried differently; the reactive logic of fragmentation push toward further fragmentation, which makes different more precarious groups and individuals carry most of the load so that some can forge their sovereign unified self. Fragmentation takes these identity-parts as discrete ontological entities that define and determine the value of people hierarchically, operating consciously or unconsciously in a fragmented perception that Lugones analyzes in various forms, fueled by the Nietzschean reactive moral and identitarian logic of I am X because you are Y.

The desire for such an identity, and the social pressures and demands to become one, are captured by the figuration of the legitimate heir (chapter 8). Patriarchal history is shot through with preoccupations of reproducing
legitimate offspring that can carry the name of the father (and establish proper paternal arche to repress maternal origins). Recall that when Father Le Jeune meets the relatively gender-egalitarian and (non-nuclear) kinship structures based on communal raising of children based on their autonomy where the very idea of an illegitimate child is nonsensical produces all sorts of anxieties and moral outrage in him. The mission to civilize and Christianize is to impose a patriarchal family-model where the father is guaranteed the knowledge of his legitimate offspring who carry his name, legacy and property. I take this figure of the legitimate heir to name the modes of investments in a proper, single, unified, legitimate selfhood that stem from the socio-genealogies of Developmental Man. Nietzsche’s analysis of the nexus of transcendental morality and pure identity as stemming from violence and powerlessness producing a reactive typology helps shed light on what kind of subjects are produced in the name of Man. It begins with and perpetuates the cycles of (response-debilitating) violence and powerlessness, producing particular modes of subjectivation that require hierarchical moral judgements of others to substantiate one’s own sense of self. This Euromodern obsession is explored in postcolonial contexts that repeat the violent legacies (recall Lazali’s analysis of independent Algeria in chapter 8). The work of undoing and unlearning these investments in Developmental Man, through Lugones and Moten among others, pave the way for the figure of the spectral heir who dwells with the haunting in an ongoing process of unlearning and response-able negotiation with the “haunting legacies” (Schwab 2010) that co-constitute but do not exhaust or enclose subjectivity.

The spectral heir and response-enabling inheritance
How does the figuration of spectral inheritance aid the unlearning of the maturity-trope and participate in worlding otherwise/elsewhen in the wake of Developmental Man? Spectral inheritance is an attempt at refiguring the nexus of subjectivity, temporality and ethics, displacing the maturity-trope, as an alternative figuration to Developmental Man; as such, it emphasizes not only the response-debilitating inheritances but underscores the plurality of the past and its resources for worlding otherwise/elsewhen against, despite and yet inseparable from the uni-versal and chrono-linear developmental trajectory of Euromodern Man. Next to the concepts and figures that serve a socio-genealogical engagement with the response-debilitating “weight of the past,” the concepts of response-ability and vulnerability, and the figures of the social-maternal-ancestral and the spectral heir, aim at engaging response-enabling resources that despite the onslaught of Developmental Man, per-sist, in-sist and ek-sist, making the cycles of response-debilitating violence never a closed circle but always sustained and punctured by modalities of relationality and relation-making that it cannot contain or control. Inheritance highlights the fact that in
every possible way we do not have a past or possess a heritage, but that we are what we inherit, we are the past. Taking this as central means a fundamental collective response-ability in unlearning and remaking within the debris of the catastrophic world in the image of Developmental Man. The emphasis on the spectrality of inheritance also insists that the past does not determine any identity or future: Developmental Man, despite its catastrophic violence of severance and fragmentation, cannot dictate the future and contain the excesses that break out of its scheme. It seeps through even in the most violent of situations. Spectral inheritance means that response-ability to and through the past is the ontological (or hauntological) condition that makes subjectivity inherently a question of (immanent) ethics. From such an understanding, response-ability is not only in relation to the Other but also toward the past, which involves the unlearning of the response-debilitating inheritances that close off other futurities and the active cultivation of response-enabling modes of working that allow for unchartered queer becomings: the openness of futurity means a different relation to the past in its plurality, and requires the socio-political conditions for doing so. It is a relearning and reclaiming of the ontological/hauntological condition of response-ability to the plural past, which is in jeopardy through the linear-developmental trajectories of Euromodernity based on severance.

Lugones, Al-Saji, Azoulay and Nietzsche all point toward the plurality of inheritances that exceed the violent inheritances of Euromodernity (chapters 5, 6, 8). Severance, as foundational for Developmental Man, attempts to put this plural past into the dustbin of history as ahistorical nature or anachronistic primitivism. Al-Saji points to the multiplicity of tendencies that arise from the plural past, and understands the racial-colonial formations of Euromodernity as debilitating these tendencies toward other futurities. Lugones insists on how fragmentation can never fully usurp or exhaust multiplicity and her ethics is about a reclaiming of impure pluralism as a space for relating to each other and the world differently, to co-build alternative worlds that coloniality seeks to erase or prevent. Nietzsche also points to an earthly immanent ethics of affirmative forces that are stronger than the moral identitarian revenge onto the infliction of suffering. He himself interprets this in a biocentric and phallocentric manner not quite challenging the atomistic or individual ontology (despite his complex theory of drives that decenter the ego or rational self) and maintaining a strong investment in natural hierarchies. In this move, despite his self-representation as rebellious free-thinker, Nietzsche simply subscribes to the naturalization of racial, gendered, classist an ableist hierarchies of 19th century biocentrism. But the distinction between ethics and morality, and the affirmative and reactive forces, remains highly relevant: the earthly affirmative forces (ethics) can be re-signified in terms of relational responsivity that response-enables unchartered flourishing and becoming: instead of the warrior who imposes and expands his will and thus changes the earth’s course, it is embedded
relational responsivity that allows for a becoming-otherwise of self, Other and world. The activity/reactivity dichotomy is thus replaced by the conceptual pair responsivity/reactivity. The daily acts of responsive care enable responsive co-becomings as opposed to reactive self-defensive identity. The recent interest in mushrooms in posthuman feminist scholarship that emphasize webs of relationality suggest a corrective to the Deleuzo-Guattarian figure of the (virile, expansionistic) rhizome to the figure of the mycelium network, privileging relational embeddedness over the masculine expansionist “activity,” which remains a Nietzschean legacy also in Deleuze’s and Guattari’s philosophy. The figure of the mycelium network captures the constitutive sociality and originary relationality that is never to be transcended to attain individuality, but needs to be honored for reconfigurations through response-enabling co-becomings. Lugones’ notion of multiplicity and the figure of social-maternal-ancestral gesture towards this world-making relationality as a resource that runs in our bodies and is nourished in the daily acts of mothering. The supplementing of the potestas/potentia pair with/as response-debilitating and response-enabling insists on the always relational and embedded nature of any activity. In other words, it is better understood as responsivity within a web of relations that always implicates a wider sociality for its materialization. This avoids the Nietzschean interpretation of activity as might is right, enabling a connection between the ethics derived from (or implied by) an ontology of radical immanence with the feminist Levinasian ethics (response-ability for the Other’s response-ability).

Response-ability as unlearning
Response-ability is therefore a key term: an ethico-ontological (or hauntological) category, it takes our very being as a structure of response to and through the plural past, undermining any substantiated being but arguing for a thickly textured becoming that is a process of recreation, reweaving, reconfiguration and reinvention (chapter 8). As a concept for feminist ethics, response-ability has the Levinasian dimension of being response-able for the Other’s response-ability (chapter 6). The feminist emphasis on rewriting responsibility as response-ability always implies its relationality dimension, as opposed to the Euromodern bourgeois idea of responsibility as the moral duty of a mature unified self-governing sovereign subject who has gained mastery over external relations instead of being immersed and contaminated by them. This discourse of individual responsibility of the mature self has participated in liberal and neoliberal discourses premised on the denial of the weight of the past that turn response-debilitated subjects responsible for their own social, economic and political position. Through Lugones, I understand that this response-ability cannot move beyond the fragmented identity-categories (with Levinas we see a doubling down on them in the very gesture of making them
irrelevant to his ethics) but through the slow process and shared praxis of *unlearning*. This unlearning does not strip historicity and specificity to arrive at a purely ethical scene, but the process itself is a communal one of co-becoming and worlding otherwise within and against the sedimented and constitutive structures of fragmentation. Unlearning stays with the thick historicity of the self, Other and the shared world(s), and reconfigures the relation to the past for other futurities. Lugones’ exploration of the face-to-face shows that the social fragmentation is at work in and constitutive of embodied perception. The point is not to move beyond it, but to stay committed to the ongoing unlearning for the sake of a different co-becoming and worlding, which does not transcend but exceeds the fragmented world of Developmental Man. It is thus not an overcoming of the past, but a tapping into the resources of the multiplicity that resides in the past (that is fragmented and obscured through Developmental Man), and a relearning of having a response-able relation to that plural past. Response-ability, as unlearning and vulnerable co-becoming, is thus not only to the Other but also to and through the Other of the past, the past’s plurality. The multiplicity of the past is sometimes theorized as resistant spaces from oppression rooted in traditions and cultures that precede and exceed colonization. Although I agree with this, I tried to avoid pinning down any particular culture or location as the site of resistance, which risks repeating the fragmented logic that it sets out to dismantle. The figuration of the social-maternal-ancestral is meant to cut across the colonial difference, acknowledging a multiplicity that undergirds all systems of fragmentation, as a response-enabling inheritance that persists (endures despite coloniality), insists (counter-tendencies that are carried within and are coextensive with it) and exists (are outside of the Euromodern civilizational project).

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**Impure impurity**

The conceptual pairs that I have laid out in this dissertation serve to critically name and unlearn the legacies of Developmental Man (the left column) and to rename and reclaim inheritances that exceed and escape it, enabling us to maintain practices of response-able worlding despite the uni-versal project of Developmental Man. Nevertheless, as I have insisted throughout, they need to be understood in their mutual contamination and “impure impurity,” that is, they are only analytically separable (chapter 2). It would perpetuate the fragmentary, reactive identitarian logic of purity to maintain that one can separate certain purely response-enabling practices from response-debilitating ones. This would amount to a transcendental morality-system, instead of a non-systematic immanent ethical plane of relational co-becoming. *Impure impurity* has thus been a key epistemological and methodological thread that runs through all the figures and concepts in this dissertation. Butler would agree that this relationality is always ambivalent, insisting on subjectivation’s interplay between subjection and enabling agency. I nevertheless argued for the separation of powerlessness and vulnerability to avoid their reliance on psychoanalysis (chapter 7). This, I argued, leads to an overrepresentation of Developmental Man, which mistakenly generalizes and universalizes Euromodern modes of subjectivation; maintaining the analytic distinction despite their real contamination allows for such a critique that insists on an ongoing ethics of unlearning. Although the second column seeks to name inheritances that run deeper than the forces that seek to contain them, it displaces any notion of a natural origin or state. This critique of the natural can both be drawn from the genealogical and the sociogenic tradition.

**Socio-genealogies**

In their different ways, Nietzschean genealogy and Fanonian sociogeny confronted the metaphysical illusions of the origin and nature for the possibility of creating a new creative, unbounded humanity (chapter 2). Nietzsche’s genealogy radicalized evolutionary theory by dislodging it from either a natural state or civilizational telos, leaving us only with the various embodied experiments without any fixed model of human nature: there is only the sequence of historical accidents and experiments. Fanon confronted how recourse to Nature is a racialized discourse that always ensnares racialized people on a hierarchical-evolutionary scale between immature unevolved being and white humanity. Facing the dangerous nonsense of his colleagues’ racial theories about different people’s intelligence and inclination to laziness or violence, Fanon insisted on always starting from the socio-political systems of power that produce subjects in their various conditions. I have shown how developmental psychology maintains a model of an original evolutionary state of nature to argue for the ideal development of the individual. Without a
whole sale rejection of contemporary science of neurobiology and childhood trauma, I have argued that genealogy and sociogeny are crucial for reinterpreting them to avoid a normative image of Man or Child that could be modeled after a natural and ideal state of development. The recourse to natural origin and ideal developmental trajectory would make the violent legacies that are carried disproportionally by some bodies a matter of “aberration” or “brokenness,” whilst entire industries continue to promise to sell the perfect development to certain childhood subjects. Starting from our historically produced selves that carry Euromodern violence differently calls for a collective reshaping and reworking of shared inheritances, not a horizon of creating nonhistorical perfect conditions so that an ideal childhood development can unfold for everyone (chapter 4). Further, the methodological choice to read genealogy and sociogeny together did not aim to provide a new totalizing theory of subject-formation that combines culture, nature, society and history, but is in the spirit of the multiplicity of worlds and knowledges: its aim is to participate in and enable more ways of storytelling, rather than offering a single story to override others.

Writing as a spectral heir: unlearning, disciplinarity, methodology

Methodologically, this text has been an experiment in spectral inheritance. Writing in an interdisciplinary gender studies department and with decolonial epistemologies provided a vantage point that humbles philosophy as a discipline and challenges the very notion of disciplinarity. From this different vantage point, the aim has been less to produce a piece of scholarly expertise within a discipline, but to bridge, weave and translate different philosophical discourses that often remain separate. As spectral inheritance, it attempts to affirm a discipline’s legacies and tools without making it an exercise for and within the discipline, hopefully allowing for relational epistemological coalitions. This stems from an epistemological and political commitment, articulated in Sandoval’s Methodology of the Oppressed, to undo the separation of certain critical discourses and work toward dialogical (or “multi-logical”) ways of writing. In the coalitional and dialogical spirit of Sandoval’s Methodology, I attempted to bring together (Nietzschean and Butlerian) genealogy and (Fanonian and Wynterian) sociogeny. Feminist figurations as method further experiments with critical and creative relation-making theorizing, both as a critical praxis of inheriting the past thickly as well as its critical-creative reconfiguration for other futurities (chapter 2).

It is common for a dissertation to present itself as a legitimate heir of a particular thinker, concept, and/or discipline, and demonstrate mastery over a clearly delineated field. In short, it means to pose oneself as a unified, single being. This experiment has attempted to suspend these conventions, not aiming to become a legitimate “Nietzsche-expert” or a “Wynter-expert,” hopefully offering fertile ground for coalitional modes of knowledge and multiplicitous
storytelling. My hope is that it partakes in a generational challenge of decolonizing the curriculum and redefining canonicity. Based on the principles of spectral inheritance, response-ability and unlearning, it does not reject but aims at re-relating to canonicity, challenging the boundedness of canons and disciplines, selecting and choosing to bring together thinkers and theories that often remain separate.

The transdisciplinary methodology of Fanon, Gordon, Sandoval and especially Wynter, also encouraged me to attempt a dialogue with contemporary developmental psychology, using sociogeny to critique the Euromodern tropes of developmental psychology and employing developmental psychology to counter Wynter’s mechanistic interpretation of sociogeny. Perhaps it would have been a more logical choice to turn to psychoanalysis to counter Wynter’s mechanistic understanding of neurobiology, as Mariott has convincingly done in a defense of Fanonian sociogeny (Mariott 2011). But, following Wynter, I attempted to experiment with shaking up the usual suspects of references to psychology in critical theory/philosophy, which tends to rely on an established set of references from outside of its own discipline. Of course, the strong sense of literary tradition and responsiveness to intellectual inheritance is key to humanities research, yet it runs the risk of the closure of the experts’ legitimate inheritance at the expense of other interdisciplinary dialogues.

By cross-reading and inter-weaving genealogy and sociogeny, Nietzsche and Wynter, Lugones and Levinas, Butler and Anzaldúa, etc., I attempted a work of inheritance as impure, selective and critical affirmation. This entails a wholesale rejection of disciplinary approaches to philosophy of figures like Levinas and Nietzsche that pretend that Lugones, Wynter, Anzaldúa and Fanon are irrelevant to that discussion. It rejects that continental philosophy references are self-sufficient and only need elaboration from within. Importantly, this is not an argument of equivalence or relativism: it neither pins down authors to geopolitical location or identity (cf. critique Mignolo in chapter 2), nor does it claim that Lugones or Wynter need Levinas or Nietzsche—although I do firmly believe that the opposite is true; the decolonizing work of unlearning wherever one stands (epistemically, geopolitically, intersectionally) does not imply such equivalence. From my standpoint, however, it would have been in bad faith to take up the question of decolonizing epistemology by “purifying” my references, (pretending to) simply leave behind citations and styles of thinking that I inherit from what is usually labelled as continental philosophy. In short, the questioning of the purity of inside/outside made way for an attempt at embracing an impure process of unlearning and relearning. I have tried to follow the non-linear relational mode of the spectral heir of taking up a multiple inheritance differently, in a way that seeks to be a response-enabling praxis for coalition and re-weaving. For this reason, I found it important not to try to shed certain formative influences like Nietzsche’s, but to resituate this influence by also asking what type of investments and implications
this influence carried. This means drawing on his productive legacy for an immanent ethics and ontology, but without dislodging it from Nietzsche’s cultural imaginary, as well as the figure of Nietzsche in the cultural imaginary. This means investigating notions of masculinity and refusing to ignore the biocentric racial and gendered hierarchies that circumscribe his writing. My hope is that the figuration of the spectral heir at the methodological level allows for coalitional approaches between different epistemic traditions, subject-positions as a mode of cultivating situated knowledges.

The figures of the legitimate heir and the spectral heir thus also apply at the methodological and disciplinary level: this is not a demonstration of maturity and mastery over a particular field of discourse, but an attempt at a staying true to my own multiple inheritances through critical selection that allows for critical co-becomings from the multiplicity of inheritances. The ethical principle for this process is the ongoing commitment to unlearning.
hello my name is haya and i will write my will now.

1) my money: 45 for my mother, 5 for Zeina, 5 for hashem, 5 for my grandma, 5 for aunt heba and 5 for aunt mariam, 5 for uncle abdo and auntie sarah

2) my toys and all my stuff: for my friends; zeina (my sister), deema, menna, and amal

3) my clothes: to my uncle daughters and if there’s anything left, donate them

4) my shoes: donate them to the poor and vulnerable... after washing it of course <3

–HAYA’S WILL

Palestinian children come into a world where their firm foothold has already been stolen. Literally, they cannot be set down upon ground, upon land, that is their own to claim as home. The land on which a child takes their first steps and first learns to walk is literally shifting terrain open to daily and unlawful seizure; it is a slippery terrain even as they haltingly stand upon it; it has already been taken, or is under threat of being taken.

–NADERA SHALHOUB-KEVORKIAN

As I am finishing the manuscript, a genocide is unfolding in Palestine. During the late November pause, at least 15000 Gazans have been killed among which at least 6000 children and 4000 women; around 1.7 million people out of the 2.3 million population within one of the most densely populated strips of land have been displaced; at least 36000 have been injured and more than 6,800 people are missing; in the West Bank the structural violence against Palestinians by settlers and the army has increased dramatically; around 1200 Israelis were killed on 7 October 2023 (Al Jazeera 2023; UN 2023). In Gaza, hospitals, schools, refugee camps have been targeted; water, electricity and fuel have been cut; most hospitals have ceased to function, there is no clean drinking water, a pressing food shortage, and there is widespread outbreak of disease. Western leaders continue to support the Israeli onslaught and many countries have censored and cracked down on pro-Palestinian, anti-genocide protests. In parts of Germany, it is prohibited to use the word “genocide” in relation to Israeli’s onslaught on Gaza. Since 7 October, many countries are going through a dramatic upsurge in antisemitism, Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism. On the one hand, this event

146 The hand-written will of a young Gazan martyr, presented at a teach-in with Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian on 20 October 2023. الله يرحمها.
is a rupture, whilst at the same time illuminating and clarifying the underlying structures that have been in the making for decades and centuries. It pries open what to many started to be mistaken for a state of normalcy, showing that this has always been a state of emergency.

It may be unwise to end a conclusion, a process of looking back on a multiple-year project, on something that is currently unfolding with no end in sight. But some events are so disruptive that it demands stance for an commitment to a future of decolonization and liberation. Allowing suffering to speak is the condition for truth, to paraphrase Adorno, and our generation has to stay true to this event and stay committed to stopping it and redressing its multigenerational response-debilitating legacies. A decoloniafially inclined dissertation in particular, which deals with the inheritance of generations of violence with a particular focus on the imbrication of a civilizational figure of the Child and the structural attack on actual children in Euromodernity, that would remain silent on this would be in bad faith. Whilst I do not want to fall prey to the women-and-children-narratives that distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate victimhood—further dehumanizing Palestinian men—I find it unavoidable in this context to discuss the unfolding genocide and ethnic cleansing from this perspective.

The civilizational Child

In the name of civilized humanity, we witness the murder of many thousands of children. To little avail, people in the streets around the world who stand up against this genocide, desperately try to evoke the figure of the Child to make Palestinian lives count as human, to bring Palestinians into the “frames” of recognizable and grievable humanity—only to see it ignored in the media or distorted as terror-loving, antisemitic hate-groups. Especially in the streets of Stockholm, in the country that prides itself on being a champion of children’s rights, the chant “stop bombing Gaza’s children” (sluta bombar Gazas barn) is one that is heard most loudly and most frequently. After the media heavily distorted the initial protests that featured a majority of people of color and many speeches and chants in Arabic, the subsequent protests deliberately avoided speeches in Arabic, in an attempt to appeal to Swedish white respectability so as to be more effective. The media distortions nevertheless continue. Especially in Germany, protests demanding a ceasefire and awareness for the Palestinian plight is structurally distorted, perniciously equated with antisemitism and in certain places outrightly forbidden, presenting slogans like “from the river to the sea” and “intifada” as “clear calls to murder Jews” (ein klarer Aufruf zum Judenmord) (ZDF 2023). In a stern TV report, a CDU-politician denounces how

147 Or, more truthfully, in Lindqvist’s words; “Right up to 1966, Swedish parents had the right to thrash their children” (Lindqvist 2012, 18).
people bring their small children to the demonstration who are thus purportedly politically indoctrinated by their supposedly militant, irresponsible parents; “I just feel sorry for these children” (mir tun die Kinder nur Leid) (stern TV 2023). The bitter irony of his bad faith self-deception seems to escape him: in a situation in which calling out the murder of thousands of children meets extreme levels of censorship and is structurally erased or turned into a hate-crime, the concerned politician worries about the political indoctrination of innocent children in Germany. The implication is that Arab children are bereft of an innocent (apolitical) childhood, and that they are being politicized, radicalized, socialized into hating Jews by their abusive antisemitic parents; the same discourse that frames Palestinian children as “always already a ‘potential terrorist’” (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2019, 9). The narrative that Arab children are raised to hate Jews, participates in placing Palestinian children outside of the frames of the civilizational Child, bringing them always-already intertwined with the discursive frame of barbarians who have to be murdered for the sake of civilized Man’s future, or are simply the ungrievable collateral damage. Children born in an open-air prison, growing up amidst bombardment, in a space of fear and anxiety where there is no safe place to turn to, not to mention the structural and arbitrary murder, imprisonment and abuse of minors in the West Bank, do not have the ambivalent luxury of such an apolitical childhood of innocence. The racial interpellation of Jewish and Muslim children in Europe equally places them outside of the illusion of an uncontaminated childhood rid of any politics where they can develop into mature adults who can then enter the political realm. Sociogeny dispels the illusion of such an apolitical childhood. Genealogy dispels the myth of a natural ideational developmental trajectory from child to adult. Gazan children, growing up in a space of terror with no safe place to go, are witnesses to and participants in the socio-political reality that subjects and subjectivates them. Their very becoming is marked by multigenerational response-debilitating violence. The past is concentrated and insists in their bodies, weighing them down, debilitating them. The salty water they drink does not distort their physical constitution, but constitutes their embodied becoming; the trauma they carry does not deny them their childhood, but is their childhood becoming. Their becoming is an attuning to a rhythm of breath and muscular tensions of fear and flight, amidst a reign of terror that allows a few hours at most for catching one’s breath. Generations of occupation, debilitation and humiliation and the long durée of an imperial-civilizational past that make possible this relentless bombardment, is shouldered by and carried in their embodied becoming: this is a world of powerlessness sprung from generations of genocidal violence in the name of the figure of Man that they are subjected to and have to pay the price for. They carry the acute and historical trauma; we are all implicated in making them carry the “affective weight of the past.” But they do not only inherit these transgenerational cycles of response-debilitating violence. They are not determined or defined by it. Spectral
inheritance always insists on the plurality of the past that is inherited. In the improvised ways of survival, care and mothering one another, they hold on to a different inheritance through which they exist and resist within the catastrophic present and enact different breathable futures that the bombs and fences seek to suffocate. People gathering in their homes so that if (when?) they are bombed at least they will be together; children writing down the names of their siblings on their arms to be remembered and identified if (when?) they are murdered; reviving old techniques of making bread; celebrating a wedding in the midst of displacement at a shelter, which can easily become a target; the care for those who lost all their relatives; the stealing away of spaces of mourning and grief within the intervals of bombing and displacement; the celebration of the released children from Israeli prisons even when Israel explicitly prohibited and penalized public expressions of joy upon their release; continuing to play together with whatever is left in the rubble; remaining responsive to the living and the dead under conditions of utmost response-debilitation, the multiplicity of the past is kept alive against the grain of debilitation and destruction.

Response-ability to the plural past

After the Shoa, in different ways and to different degrees, the Netherlands and Germany have assigned themselves a particular position of historical responsibility for the “weight of the past,” which has translated into an unconditional support for the state of Israel. Whereas the figure of Man prior to the Shoa was premised on the dehumanization and in its Nazi-instantiation ultimately on the eradication of “the Jew,” the post-war reconfiguration of “the West” redefined itself as a “Judeo-Christian” inheritance. What we see today is the entrenchment of those camps of the legitimate heirs of Judeo-Christian Man and its Barbaric Other, where the pretense of the protection of Jewish life qua state of Israel, an equation which simultaneously decides and limits what Jewish is and ought to be, translates into another genocide. In the name of anti-fascism and countering antisemitism, liberals and fascists converge in support for yet another genocide perpetrated by a fascist government. In Germany, memory culture has shown itself to be a bad faith projection of their own historical and deeply institutional antisemitism onto Arab and Muslim minorities, popularized under the hashtag #Imported Antisemitism, and regularly recounted by politicians.148 An uncanny interpretation of “never again” leads to the policing of dissident Jewish voices and bodies, the targeting of Arab voices and bodies and the silencing of intellectuals from the Global South; in this violent collective enactment of a Good and pure Identity, old racisms abound in the name of anti-

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148 For example by CDU-politician Friedrich Merz: “Germany cannot take in more refugees; we already have so many antisemitic young men in our country” (Maksan and Serrao, 2023).
racism and fighting antisemitism. The criminalization of pro-Palestinian support and of any critique of the state of Israel disfigure the countries’ historical responsibility by doubling down on old racisms and defining who belongs and who does not to the nation and to the shared values of Man. As especially people of color claim the streets to delink from the genocidal West, the fascist Freedom Party in the Netherlands achieved a landslide victory in the elections. This party is vocal about its unconditional support of Israel and has called the war on Gaza a “battle between Civilization and Barbarity.”

For many, Jewish life is unthinkable outside of a relation to an inheritance of the Shoa; the commitment to honor this, to create and sustain conditions where Jewish becoming can be in a responsive relation to the past, ensuring a world where another Shoa is unthinkable—these principles of a culture of memory and a politics of memory need to be cherished and fought for every day, by each and every one. But this traumatic memory of powerlessness and terror is horrifically abused when it is exploited and weaponized to forge or support a sovereign power based on a pure, unquestionable ethno-nationalist identity, which claims sole legitimacy over memory and land, a sovereignty that others have to pay the highest price for. By claiming to be the legitimate heirs to a land, a unified sovereign self is forged based on the denial of a multiplicity of pasts, identities, beliefs and opinions that coexisted (and insist!) on that land. The claims to a pure identity are maintained in the language of transcendent morality: a struggle between Humanity and Barbarity, Light and Darkness, Good and Evil. The binary civilizational language shows the inner link between transcendental systems of morality and the construction of pure identities: the language of transcendent morality legitimizes the claims of the legitimate heir, which serves to justify the violence that is necessary to sustain its fragmented world of sovereignty. Deleuze warns against the transformation of historical terror into transcendent evil, which is bound to pass on the inflicted violence onto another:

The conquerors had just suffered the worst genocide in history. The Zionists turned this genocide into an absolute evil. But turning the worst genocide in history into an absolute evil is a religious and mystic approach, not a historical one. It does not stop the evil. On the contrary, it propagates it, inflicting it on other innocents. (Deleuze cited in Zalloua 2017, 19)

The same transcendentizing of evil happens in the weaponization of the 7 October attacks, turning it into an ideological battle between the Good Self and the Evil Other. A fascist government exploits the collective trauma of powerlessness and genocide, promising a sovereign and secure identity purified from an external threat of the Other.

Through the promise of sovereignty, security and a pure, unified identity, the affective weight of the past is weaponized to perpetrate another genocide; through the illusion of reactive safety premised on the containment,
destruction and expulsion of the Evil Other, the weight of the past gets heavier and heavier and is falling down onto Palestinians who are crushed under its weight.

To turn the spectral inheritance—always demanding an ongoing responsive relation to the past and memory with the dead—into a property or identity of the legitimate heir is to legitimize an identity based at the expense of others. Today we once again see the ultimate conclusion of this fact. As legitimate heirs of a perpetrator-history, Germany, and as legitimate heirs of victim-history, Israel, the fragmentation and dehumanization of others is proclaimed with good conscience (though in bad faith) and violently enacted to the point of eradication. The fact that humanist liberals and good Christians in the “West” deem the demand “ceasefire now” a radical and dangerous one (or even “structurally antisemitic”), shows—once again—the utter depravity of the Euromodern figure of Man, condoning and supporting the death of those who fall outside of its frames, persecuting and demonizing those who seek accountability and justice. The bad faith operations of those who refuse to witness this genocidal truth of Euromodern Man violently enact a collective fantasy of Western humanity qua White and Good as the last illusions of its credibility are crumbling in front of our very eyes. As Césaire and Fanon have long known, as well as people around the world resisting colonization of the planet in his name since 1492, the truth of Man is the exploitation and genocide of the human (and nonhuman) others that are excluded from Man, the damnés. They are the truth of this world of Man (Fanon 2004, 13; Wynter 1994). With an urgency that never left, we need to heed Wynter’s call for the unfinished project of decolonizing this figure of Man to move toward the human. Once more, we need Fanon’s words:

Now, comrades, now is the time to decide to change sides. (…) Let us leave this Europe which never stops talking of man yet massacres him at every one of its street corners, at every corner of the world. (…) This Europe, which never stopped talking of man, which never stopped proclaiming its sole concern was man, we now know the price of suffering humanity has paid for every one of its spiritual victories. Come, comrades, the European game is finally over, we must look for something else (…) Let us decide not to imitate Europe and let us tense our muscles and our brains in a new direction. Let us endeavor to invent a [human] in full. (…) For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must make a new start, develop a new way of thinking, and endeavor to create a new [human]. (Fanon 2004, 235–239)

Ancestral dreams of a common world

As I have argued, the “new” human that Fanon and Wynter call for, is not so much “new” but involves an inheriting differently, a reconfiguration of the relation to the past to redress its unevenly distributed weight and to (re)create response-enabling worlds based on a response-able relation to the past’s
plurality. Avi Shlaim and Ariella Aïsha Azoulay recall that the historical construction of an Israeli identity has not only relied on the expulsion, murder and dehumanization of non-Jewish Arabs, but is also based on the hierarchical fragmentation of Jewish identities, distinguishing between Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Jews, as well as the discrimination against Ethiopian Jews (Shlaim 2023; Azoulay 2019). Azoulay recounts how in her parents’ generation her grandmother’s Arabic name was suppressed by her parents for them to escape the racism and accomplish an assimilation to a modern civilized Israeli identity. Azoulay refuses this identity and fights to reclaim her ancestors’ dreams and reality of a common world where Muslims, Jews and Christians co-existed: “Before 1948, there was nothing extraordinary in this pair of words: ‘Palestinian Jews’” (Azoulay 2019, xiii). She refuses to identify as an Israeli in the name for the pluralism that resides in the past, in her ancestors’ worlds that she inherits. She 

[refuses] to accept that our predecessors’ dreams—not necessarily our parents’, but their parents’ or grandparents’ can no longer be ours, as if the three tenses of past, present, and future that separate us and fix us in different eras were not invented exactly for this purpose. (Azoulay 2019, xiv) 

An ancestral dream of plurality that persists, insists and exists despite (yet through) the worlds of Man, its legitimate heirs and its damned others, of sovereign pure identity and transcendental morality. The past flares up once again in the unfolding catastrophe of the present: whereas the imperial powers and the self-deluding legitimate heirs of Man seek to double down on the imperial Euromodern definitions of humanity and history according to its pure binarisms, Palestinians, anti-Zionist Jews and others all over the world are refusing this colonially sanctioned universal memory and shake up to reconfigure the multiplicity of the past for a different future. This struggle against genocide and racism (including antisemitism and Islamophobia) is taking place on fragile grounds. As much as protestors clearly distinguish between antizionism and antisemitism, countering the pernicious equation, this distinction has little bearing on Jewish communities facing increasing levels of hatred, intimidation and threats. In a similar vein, Gazans are not served by the non-performative distinction between Hamas and Palestinians; where the transcendental evil is shifted to the specter of “Hamas” thereby justifying the bombing of everyone and everything including residential homes, hospitals, schools, shelters, and the targeted murder of journalists and academics—attempting to murder the possibility of bearing witness, of archiving, of narration and of storytelling.

In the midst of this impure impurity, we nevertheless need to make a stance: stay committed to unlearning the fragmented identity-categories that distort the calls for justice and freedom for all, turning them into religious, ideological or ethnic conflicts that pits one identity against the other. Azoulay’s
ancient dream of a shared common world of pluralism persists in today’s fragmented world. This dream holds on to the multiplicity of the past, which breaks the reactive chain of powerlessness and fragmentation and enables everyday acts of response-enabling care and mothering despite Man’s attempted severance and fragmentation of this multiplicity. The indestructible improvised ways of Gazans continuing to persist, resist and care for each other, nourish a different inheritance, an inheritance “more ancient and more futuristic” (Gumbs 2016, 9) than any claim to pure identity, older and more futuristic than Man, that persists, insists, exists, and will outlive Man. This is an inheritance that no fence can contain, no bomb can kill; if there is hope for any breathable futurity, it is in these acts of mothering, caring, responding, resisting, fighting and witnessing. It may not keep them alive, and our commitment to a breathable future for all must be in the company and heavy dwelling of our murdered kin. Our murdered and struggling siblings urge us to fight for a response-able world of “never again.” For the sake of all Palestinian and Jewish kin, for the sake of everyone but especially those who are burdened disproportionately with the weight of Man’s genocidal legacies, for those who live and die in his wake, and for the sake of our nonhuman kin, for the sake of a world of multiplicity not crushed under the weight of Man’s murderous identity and morality-claims: if any other future is possible, then it is this response-enabling inheritance of the plural past that is kept alive in the daily improvised ways of survival, care and mothering, which holds the ancestral memory of such a future of freedom for all.
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Sammanfattning på svenska


Drawing on continental and decolonial feminist philosophy, *Spectral Inheritance: Unlearning the Maturity-trope* addresses the centrality of the notions of “maturity” and “development” in discussions of human subjectivity, temporality and ethics. Building on Sylvia Wynter’s framework, the dissertation proposes to read the Euromodern genres of Man in *developmental* terms. The notion of im/maturity organizes who is capable of sovereign self-governance and who must be governed. By analogy with a normative developmental model of a racialized figure of “the Child,” immaturity-status is assigned to populations and demographics deemed incapable of self-governance. This invention of the civilizational figure of the Child is central to Developmental Man’s atomistic ontology, which is premised on hierarchy, the denial of vulnerability and the severance from a constitutive web of relationality. Such severance is embedded in histories of colonization and separation of children from their communities in Euromodernity and the transgenerational inheritances thereof.

In dialogue with Sylvia Wynter, Alia Al-Saji, María Lugones, Judith Butler and others, this dissertation proposes *spectral inheritance* as an alternative reconfiguration of the nexus of subjectivity, ethics and temporality. Displacing chrononormative developmental tropes of maturation, spectral inheritance acknowledges the coexistence of the plural past in a structure of reinvention, reconfiguration and response to and through its haunting. It insists on unlearning the response-debilitating legacies of Developmental Man and relearning a response-enabling relation to the plural past. Employing feminist figurations, Fanonian sociogeny, genealogical theories of subjectivation, and engaging feminist theories of response-ability, this text is an exercise in such spectral inheritance, asking what it means to inherit the catastrophic worlds of Developmental Man response-ably as an ongoing work of unlearning and co-becoming through a responsive relation to the plural past.

This is the doctoral dissertation of Ruben Hordijk, supervised by Prof. Madina Tlostanova and Dr. Edyta Just.

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