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The Red Mask of Sanity

Paul Robeson, HUAC, and the Sound of Cold War Performance

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That's why you were a Commie, Oscar, because you were batty. It was the only philosophy that would appeal to your crazy mind.

—“Mike Hammer” in Mickey Spillane’s *One Lonely Night* (1951)

I know I am paranoid. But you know, any black man who is not paranoid is in serious shape. He should be in an asylum and kept under cover.

—Richard Wright to Ollie Harrington (in Rowley 2001:491)

When Paul Robeson purportedly stated at the 1949 Paris Peace Conference that it would be “unthinkable” for blacks to fight in a potential war against the Soviet Union (Duberman 1989:242), he was vilified in the US as a mentally unstable traitor. While the US press in general dubbed Robeson as un-American, the *New York Times* claimed he suffered from “twisted

thinking” (in Cygan 2002:90) and columnist Earl Brown called him “just plain screwy” (in Duberman 1989:343). The House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) held special hearings to give “members of his [Robeson’s] race” the “privilege” of “the expression of contrary views” to the “disloyal and unpatriotic statements” (in Duberman 1989:359) Robeson had uttered, indicating both that blacks now bore the responsibility of denying that his views were representative and that the American power structures feared that they were. Paul Robeson, the former stage and screen star, had once been the best-known African American in the nation, having garnered adulation for his cinematic performances in the title role in Eugene O’Neill’s *The Emperor Jones* (1933) and as Joe in *Show Boat* (1936), as well as for his acclaimed stage performance in the title role of *Othello* (1943), the longest running Shakespeare production in the history of Broadway.¹ Yet, the former all-American football player, attorney, and son of an escaped slave had gone from singing in support of War Bonds and appearing with the Vice President in the 1940s to being the “most persecuted man in America” (Bourne 1999).

Although Robeson had been monitored by the FBI since the early 1940s, the response to his 1949 comments initiated what would be, for him, over a decade of continuous FBI surveillance, mob violence, and blacklisting. This decade of supervision and turbulence finally culminated in the seizure of Robeson’s US passport, leaving him at one point “the only living American against whom an order has been issued directing immigration authorities not to permit him to leave the continental confines of the United States” (in Duberman 1989:444). Robeson’s vocal activism against the US repression of African American freedom at home and against American imperialist and colonial actions abroad brought him the ire of the federal government. Taken as part of a broad-based Afro-American struggle against American imperialism, the political critiques of the US in Robeson’s speeches and at his concerts in Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Soviet Union led the State Department to determine that such performances were “contrary to the best interests of the United States” (in Robeson [1958] 1988:63). In this context, Paul Robeson’s performances emerged as a domestic site for the waging of the cold war. Moreover, discourses of performance and its relationship to American citizenship regulated such symbolic and material battles.

A signal performance by Robeson was shaped by his infamous Paris remarks and the political “psychoanalysis” that followed: his appearance before the House Committee on Un-American Activities in 1956. My interest here is not to present a psychoanalytic reading of Robeson through his performances in order to determine if he really was “mad.” Rather, through investigating his HUAC appearance as part of a performance culture that configured cold war America, I argue that a politicized discourse of psychopathology operated as a part of the discursive formations that regulated cold war culture. Within cold war culture, discourses of differences were

1. As one measure of Robeson’s influence on theatre, Lois Potter coins the phrase the “Robeson effect” to attend to the sea change in how *Othello* was politicized by Robeson’s performance. The “Robeson effect” is so strong that Potter divides her book into two sections: “*Othello* before Robeson” and “Robeson and after” (2002:105).

Figure 1. (facing page) Paul Robeson psychoanalyzes the state before HUAC in 1956. (© Bettman/CORBIS)

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articulated with those of treason. Madness, Communism, homosexuality, theatricality, and blackness and their articulation became key elements in a semiotics of disloyalty. Paul Robeson and his performances became the foremost sites where these elements were seen to coalesce. His detractors pathologized him by linking his alleged madness and status as an actor with his Communist sympathies and activism for civil rights and anticolonial movements. And yet, Robeson used the occasion of his HUAC hearing to mobilize performance to challenge the produced crisis culture that underwrote the postwar racial capitalist practices of the US at home and abroad. Tracing the antitheatrical discourse that connected race, madness, and Communism with performance reveals how these discourses crystallized in the controversies surrounding Paul Robeson. At his HUAC hearing, Robeson disrupted these formulations by enacting a performance that destabilized the constitutive conventions of cold war discourse and imperialist policies.

Confining Madness, Containing Dissent

The postwar period in the US is often referred to as both the “age of anxiety” and the “age of the expert.” Anxiety in American culture was experienced across the political spectrum—the specter of Communism, anti-Communism, nuclear annihilation, the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan in the guise of White Citizen Councils, suburban conformity, and the rise of the National Security State have all been identified as causes of this national malady. These conditions produced the context for a “‘mushroom growth’ of psychoanalysis in America,” as psychoanalytic psychiatry became a “big business and a smooth one,” selling the belief that any medical ailment had a psychiatric basis (Hale 1995:284, 288).² With warnings in popular magazines that “possibly the most startling discovery of this generation is the fact that your personality can literally kill you,” many heeded the admonition to “learn to depend on doctors for analysis and treatment of emotional and social problems” and to “open [their] heart[s] to [their] doctor” (283, 284). American culture was rife with narratives of the mentally ill and their heroic psychoanalysts who magically cured them. Some recent critics have contended that these popular narratives of anxiety were an expression of dissent—of revolt against the “dehumanizing” qualities of a conformist American culture (Henriksen 1997). However, such narratives were also part of an ideology that encouraged the translation of political and social problems into individual, personal ones, and emphasized coping and adjusting, rather than social and political transformation. Subsequently, these individualizing coping strategies “undermined the potential for political activism and reinforced the chilling effects of anticommunism and the cold war consensus” (May 1988:xxv). Tellingly, Nathan G. Hale Jr. says of this era that, “Freud was replacing Karl Marx as a social guru for many American intellectuals” (1995:291).

The popularization of psychoanalysis was markedly different from the hip, libidinal version of it that emerged in America’s first sustained encounter with Freud in the 1920s (Hale 1995:295; see also Douglas 1995). Postwar Americans were introduced to a “sanitized” version of Freud that emphasized “reconciliation with other traditional social values [...] and] enhanced a sense of restraint” (Hale 1995:295). In addition, psychoanalysis retrenched its pathologization of homosexuality in the face of the Kinsey report and worked to maintain stable gender roles as a national security imperative. This “psychoanalytic state” opposed its “traditional” sexual and gender identities to the purported gender and sexual “confusion” experienced in the Soviet Union, emphasizing its contested relation with Communism in psycho-symbolic terms.

2. See also Ellen Herman’s study, which details how the psychiatric industry’s boom was supported by the US government’s use of “psych ops” (psychological warfare) during WWII and the cold war, as well as by the use of therapists to treat WWII soldiers (1995). Ron Robin’s *The Making of the Cold War Enemy: Culture and Politics in the Military-Intellectual Complex* (2001) describes how the government’s contracting of social scientists (especially those hired by the RAND Corporation) depended on racist prejudices of “the enemy” in developing cold war psych ops.

American cold war psychoanalysis also directly served the interests of the state by encouraging adjustment and accommodation in opposition to activism, as well as conformity to norms instead of self-exploration. Psychoanalysts, like the foreign policy gurus in the Truman and Eisenhower White Houses, were experts to whom the public was encouraged to defer. As such, the federal government and psychoanalytic psychiatry shared a critical goal—the elimination of dissent against American political order. The cold war psychoanalyst served as a *de facto* arm of the state, since both the psychoanalyst and the state worked to police the acceptance of cold war norms. As Robert Corber explains, “In the era of the expert, the police had become obsolete and the psychiatrist had superseded them” (1993:188–89).³

The policing function of the cold war psychoanalyst is particularly evident in the use of psychological discourse to explain and contain political dissent. In his best seller, *The Fifty-Minute Hour* (1954), the popular psychoanalyst Robert Lindner describes the case of the blue-collar Communist Party (USA) member, Mac, whose domineering grandmother had caused him to become “afraid of his penis” (1954:74).⁴ Once Mac and Lindner successfully complete a course of therapy, however, Mac learns that he was using his party membership as “a weapon, a tool for revenge” against his grandmother, and that in fact “the Party *was* his neurosis” (78). Finally cured, Mac was now free of political dissent. As Lindner says, “Mac quit the Party. He no longer needed it” (78). Thus, not only do coping and adjustment stand in for political dissent, but the expression of political dissent itself also seems to call forth the need for therapy in order to expel it. As Ellen Schrecker explains, “So thoroughly had the 1950s transformed political dissent into psychological distress that almost any kind of left wing activity could be considered a sign of mental illness” (1998:152).

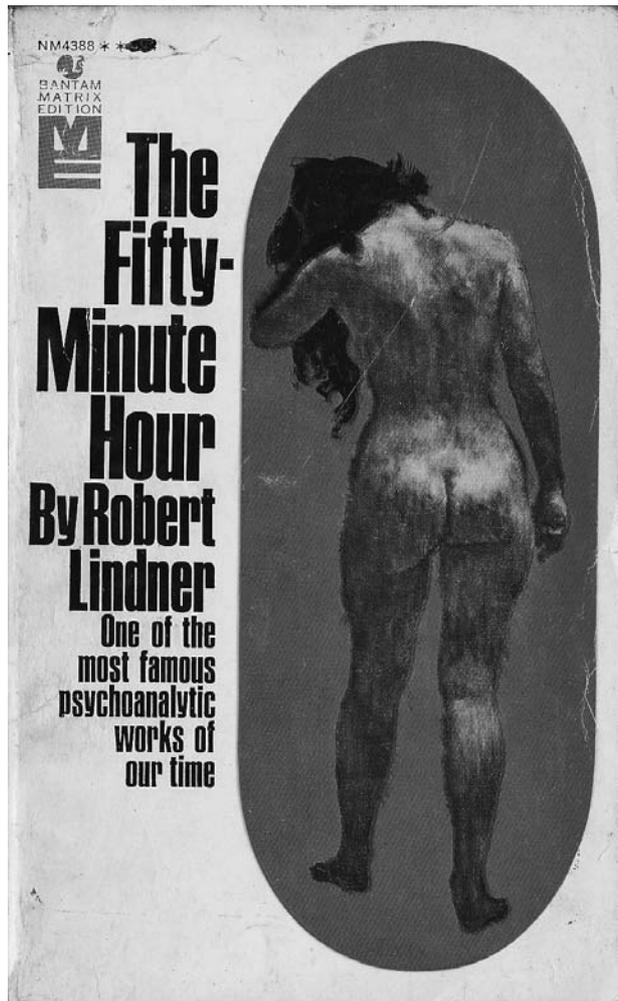


Figure 2. *The Fifty-Minute Hour* (1954), the best-selling book by Robert Lindner, identified Communism as an expression of neurosis to be cured by psychoanalysis.

3. While the Freudian psychoanalyst held the privileged position in the image of the heroic doctor, any kind of psychotherapist came to represent this figure. Representations of psychotherapists in film, TV, and magazines often played fast and loose with such distinctions, allowing for slippages in terminology. The “psychiatrist” was assumed to be a Freudian psychoanalyst—but he might also end up ordering Electro-Convulsive Therapy (ECT) or “electric shock” treatment.
4. Lindner was also the author of the 1944 case study of a “psychopath,” *Rebel Without a Cause: The Story of a Criminal Psychopath* ([1944] 2003), upon which the film of the same name was based (see also Koestler [1943] 1967).

In the discursive formation of anti-Communism, dissent was conscripted as an expression of mental illness, so much so that the terms became practically interchangeable.

Robeson's performance at the Paris Peace Conference brought just such conclusions from numerous professionally amateur, yet politically vicious "psychoanalysts." NAACP chairman, Walter White, diagnosed that in "The Strange Case of Paul Robeson," the patient was "over-sensitive" to discrimination, a "neurotic [...] bewildered man who is more to be pitied than to be damned" (in Duberman 1989:394). Similarly, the professional informer and black ex-Communist Manning Johnson informed HUAC that Robeson suffered from "delusions of grandeur" so serious that he was "desirous of becoming the Black Stalin" (359).⁵ As if in reaction to such diagnoses, the US State Department engaged in the practice conventional for both the treatment of mental illness and the threat of Communist contagion: confinement. As a result, Robeson's passport was revoked, and he was forbidden to travel even to places where no passport was needed for US citizens, like Canada or even Hawaii. In the cold war political doctrine developed by George F. Kennan, this practice was known as "containment" (1967).

Committee members, themselves, treated the hearing space as that of the asylum by adopting the guise of the newly popularized psychoanalyst. For it was only this kind of specialist who could determine the authenticity of witnesses' performances by seeking to break through the obfuscating masks of alleged Communists and reach the "psychological depth" concealed by the uncooperative witness.

Acting Like a Communist, Acting Like a Psychopath

As part of the state's desire to expose the "truth" of the Communist conspiracy, an anti-theatrical prejudice that militated against acting governed the Committee's continuous hearings and investigations. In the hearings, it was the theatricality of the witness's performance that came to be the measure of his/her citizenship. As Eisenhower describes them, Communists were dangerously talented actors: "Communists are such liars and cheats that even when they *apparently* recant and testify against someone else for his communist convictions, my first reaction is to believe that the accused person is a patriot" (in Schrecker 1998:140). For Ike, Communists were such good actors that they threatened to destabilize clear distinctions between acting and "real life."⁶ And while Ike's first reaction might have been to believe in the patriotism of the accused, he quickly changed his mind. The ritual of informing soon concocted the treason of the accused, and as such, secured a tenuous yet authentic citizenship for the accuser.

Cold war Americanness was constructed around an outright rejection of mimetic theatricality—where the enemy's performance was both inscrutable and transparent. As J. Edgar Hoover described them, the Communists were "Masters of Deceit," who were "ordinary-looking people, like your seatmate on the bus or a clerk in one of your neighborhood stores" (1958:105). The Red practice of masking enabled the Communist "hard-core fanatical members" (4) and their sympathizers to produce false "fronts." The Communists' propensity for mimesis, Hoover explained, concealed their intention to turn every American into a "'communist man,' a mechanical puppet, whom they could train to do as the party desires" (9). Beneath the front of citizenship, as cooperative witness Herbert Philbrick put it, "anyone could be a communist" (in Schrecker 1998:141).

5. See also Murray Kempton's 1955 portrait of Robeson, in which he characterizes Robeson as being "afflicted" by the "Communist infection" ([1955] 1998:321). For Kempton, Robeson, whom he contrasts to A. Philip Randolph, gained success with "delusive ease" (327), such that he had "almost ceased to be an American Negro at all" (326). For a similar representation of Robeson, see Cruse (1967).

6. This blurring has been central to modern acting techniques, beginning with what Jonas Barish has called Stanislavsky's move to "detheatricalize theater" (1981:344).

Although Communists were seen as innately duplicitous, their performances were deemed all too visible, always already failing. Just as citizens in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) detected “pod” neighbors because of their unconvincing performances of humanity (“That’s just it, there is no difference you can actually see. [...] There’s something missing!”), Americans explained in a 1954 poll that their justification for informing on their neighbors was equally elusive: “I just knew. But I wouldn’t know how to say I knew” (in Schrecker 1998:141–42). The Communist was always seen to be acting, while the anti-Communist American was transparently truthful. The American citizen, constituted in noble sincerity, refused mimesis and instead inhabited an authentic citizenship. So strong was the belief in the anti-Communist honesty, that the fictionalized film adaptation of professional informer Matt Cvetic’s memoir, *I Was a Communist for the FBI* (1951), was nominated for a Best Documentary Oscar (Schrecker 1998:122).

Moreover, anti-Communist discourse articulated treasonous duplicity with race. In his famous “Long Telegram” to the US State Department that sketched out the initial policy of “containment,” George F. Kennan argued that Communist theatricality was “Oriental” in nature. The Soviet government’s mask-wearing and the “disrespect of Russians for objective truth—indeed their disbelief in its existence” was due to their “attitude of Oriental secretiveness and conspiracy” leaving Russians “ignorant” and “mentally dependent” (1967:551; see also Borstelmann 2001:49–51 and Klein 2003). Like Ben Franklin, who bemoaned the “foreign cadence” of mimesis in early American political discourse (Fliegelman 1993:79), Kennan ascribes mimetic practice to a presumed ethnic inferiority. Thus, the inscription of Communist duplicity into US foreign policy was rooted in the desire to contain a racial Other.



Figure 3. The truth-effect of anti-Communism was so strong that the fictionalized account of FBI informant Matt Cvetic, *I Was a Communist for the FBI*, was nominated for the Best Documentary Oscar in 1951.

If such a predisposition to duplicity was considered to be the “essence of Communism, the inevitable product of Marxism-Leninism,” it was also considered to be the key symptom of the newly diagnosed psychiatric type: the psychopath (Schrecker 1998:139). The term “psychopath” emerged during the postwar era as popular shorthand that could explain any “deviant” behavior. The psychopath was distinct from previously diagnosed psychotics in that he “could keep up a far better and more consistent outward appearance of being normal”

(Cleckley [1941] 1976:191). The 1940s psychologist Hervey Cleckley describes this condition in distinctly theatrical terms—the psychopath conceals his madness by donning a “mask of sanity.” In fact, Cleckley argues, the psychosis of the psychopath is nearly undetectable since he “looks like the real thing” so much that “everything about him is likely to suggest desirable and superior human qualities, a robust mental health” ([1941] 1976:339).

The telltale sign of the psychopath, his seeming superiority, discursively links him to the Communist during this era, as the psychopath shared with the Communist a “remarkable disregard for truth” (341). In a description that echoes Eisenhower’s Communist “liars and cheaters” and Hoover’s “masters of deceit,” Cleckley explains that the psychopath “will lie about any matter, under any circumstances” (341). In fact, it appeared to Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. that *only* psychologically damaged people joined the Communist Party. In his 1949 book, *The Vital Center*, Schlesinger is baffled as to why anyone would ever possibly want to join the American Communist Party and concludes, “America has its quota of lonely and frustrated people, craving social, intellectual and even sexual fulfillment they cannot obtain in existing society” ([1949] 1962:104). Ideological commitment and political movement are dismissed out of hand, and the only valid reason to join the Communist Party that can be comprehended is simply that, “Communism fills empty lives” (105).

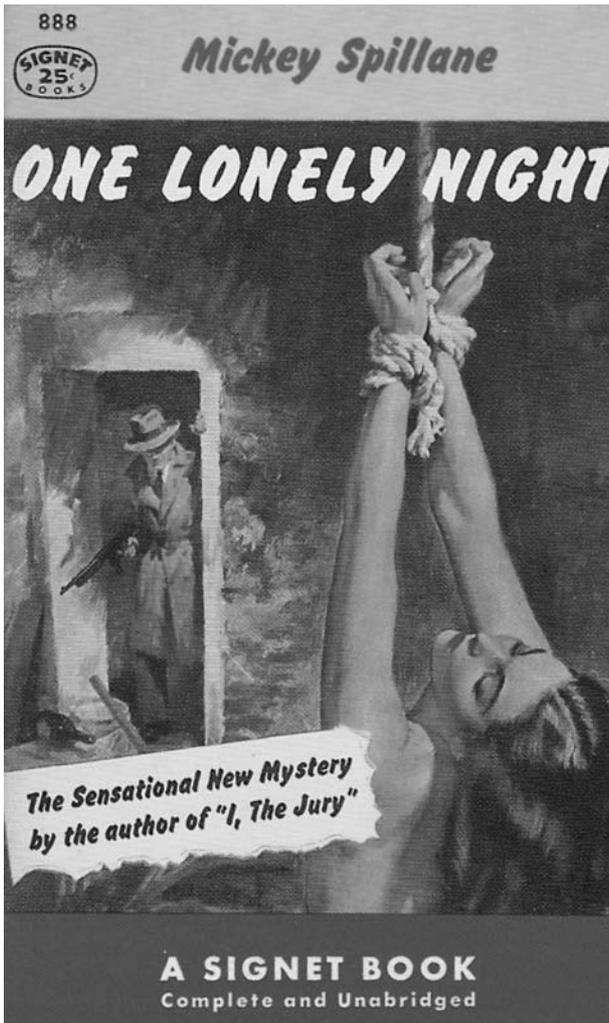


Figure 4. In *One Lonely Night* (1951), Mickey Spillane’s “Mike Hammer” battles Communism, the philosophy of “the crazy mind.”

Such a belief emerged in many popular texts of the era. Mickey Spillane’s “Mike Hammer” was a great believer in the Schlesinger model that only a mental defect could lead an American to adopt Communism. In *One Lonely Night* (1951), Hammer unmasks Oscar, the Communist, escaped mental patient, and villain of the novel with the following exclamation: “That’s why you were a Commie, Oscar, because you were batty. It was the only philosophy that would appeal to your crazy mind” (Spillane [1951] 2001:170). Similarly infamous Red-hunter Senator Joe McCarthy declared that “practically every active Communist is twisted mentally or physically in some way” (in Schrecker 1998:152). As McCarthy tellingly suggests, the mask of sanity

was the equivalent of the mask of citizenship. Thus, the mask of sanity not only mimicked the Red mask of patriotism, it was often the very same one.

The symptoms that HUAC members used to diagnose politicized (in)sanity included the volume, tone, and speed of witnesses' performances. HUAC members read the sound of testimony as a supplement that might undermine the Aesopian language ostensibly used by the Communists to mislead them. The Committee depended on the sound of loyalty, since visibility did not provide the requisite material for members to "see" the truth. As Michael Rogin explains, cold war countersubversion was characterized by "a national-security bureaucracy confront[ing] the invisible agents of a foreign power" and marked a move from "visibility to invisibility, from body to mind, and from the American individual to the national-security state" (1987:68). *Look Magazine's* guide, "How to Spot a Communist," is a critical example of this shift in that it provides no guidance on how Communist performances might be visually "spotted," but instead indicates which beliefs (that WWII was an "imperialistic" war) or speech acts ("declaring that capitalism and democracy are 'decadent' because some injustices exist under those systems") evidenced Communism (in Barson and Heller 2001:64; see also Engelhardt 1995:116–17). Sometimes, it was the possession of "offensive artifacts" (in Schrecker 1998:126) such as Marxist literature, or even (as was often asked of HUAC witnesses) the owning of a Paul Robeson record, that revealed disloyalty (283). Despite HUAC's privileging of aural and artifactual testimony, and the apparent inadequacy of visual identification, surveillance still remained a dominant practice of information gathering in an era that Frank J. Donner calls "the age of surveillance" (1980).

HUAC was particularly dependent upon surveillance operatives, relying on files that were compiled by J. Edgar Hoover's FBI and illegally funneled to the Committee. Nevertheless, despite its ubiquity, surveillance that focused on such performances under pressure was insufficient. As Alan Nadel has suggested, "Surveillance is necessary, but it is also inadequate, because global safety requires scrutiny not only of actions but also of motives [...] making observable actions the inadequate clues to secret orientations" (1995:23).⁷ In postwar culture, it was only the psychoanalyst who was able to resolve this paradox. For the psychoanalyst, the scopic field becomes a symptom to be interpreted where the body becomes "not so much a spectacle but [...] a manuscript to be read for the symptoms which betray [a] story" (Doane 1987:43). In her study of medical discourses in postwar films, Mary Anne Doane argues that the psychoanalyst is represented as "a kind of epistemological hero, as the guarantor of the final emergence of truth" (47). With this reliable "expert reader of interiority," the patient as a "subject of discourse is inevitably absent," and yet the symptoms of the objectified body "speak" (66). In addition to his visual interpretative skills, the psychoanalyst also relies on a symptomatic reading of sound, "which generally bears a heavy load in the signification of that which is invisible" (50). As he who can "penetrate the surface" of encoded language in Communist speech and the misleading performances of Communist acts, the Committee member occupied this position of a governmental "medical" professional. As if consulting a symptomatology of Communism, the HUAC "psychoanalyst" auscultated the witness's performance to determine if it sounded of disloyalty. Consequently, it was imperative "to ensure that their [the witnesses'] vocabulary, syntax, and tone should be what Congressmen regard as proper" (Bentley 2002:952). Improper sounds, such as Robeson's resounding speeches, were considered too loud; in their excessive volume, the speeches were apprehended as the symptoms that confirmed his treason. This symptomatic reading of tone and gesture sought to detheatricalize the witness in order to elucidate his/her treason.

7. Nadel argues that Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954) enacts this insufficiency, that the film is "about the inadequacy of observation to identify deviant behavior or distinguish it from normative" (1995:28). See also Robert Corber's discussion of the film in which he also links it to McCarthy-era surveillance, in that the film "tries to show that under the scopic regime of the national security state, voyeurism had become a surveillance practice" (1993:100).

Such practices were particularly evident in the case of former State Department official Alger Hiss, whose conviction of perjury in 1950 seemed to prove that Communists, as Eisenhower's Attorney General Herbert Brownell put it, "are everywhere," hiding behind a mask of American normalcy (in Schrecker 1998:141). Hiss's case was a watershed for the anti-Communist Right, as it became "the most important case of alleged espionage within the federal government" (Schrecker 1998:174).

In a series of spectacular hearings, Whittaker Chambers (an ex-Communist whose memoir, *Witness* [1952], became a runaway best seller) first named the esteemed New Dealer Hiss as a Communist, and then accused him of espionage. Richard Nixon described Chambers as "a man who showed greatness [...] by exposing the conspiracy he helped to create" (Nixon [1952] 2002:571). In his book, Chambers not only uses the anti-theatrical technique of symptomatic reading to reveal treason, but he also convicts theatricality itself as a symptom of Communism. Describing the hearings, Chambers explains:

Not the least horrifying aspect was that it was great theater, too; not only because of its inherent drama, but in part because, I am convinced, Alger Hiss was acting from start to finish [...] His performance was all but flawless, but what made it shocking, even in its moments of unintended comedy, was the fact that the terrible spur of Hiss's acting was fear. Congressman Nixon opened the sad play as soon as I was brought into the room. (1952:605)

The tragedy of this sad play was that those American patriots of great authentic sincerity like Chambers and Nixon would be forced into theatricality at all. Hiss, as a Communist, willfully performs duplicity in his "shocking performance," while Chambers, Nixon, and the rest of HUAC are by contrast, diffident actors, performing because the nets of theatrical spectacle "entrapped" them, and because it was after all, the only defense that the innocent Committee had:

[S]howmanship was almost the only weapon the Committee possessed. Without that flair for showmanship [...] the extremely important work which the Committee had done in exposing the Communist conspiracy would have been smothered in silence and reduced to nullity. (Chambers 1952:529)

Feigning reluctance to embrace their roles, Committee members justified their own performances in order to attack those of the witnesses. Despite their success in this masquerade, the price of removing the alleged Communist's right to silence was the ultimate sacrifice: Committee members had to become actors.

When Chambers dramatically entered the stage, as he describes it, he did so not only as a nervous, dedicated actor, concerned about his own audibility, but also as a distanced performance critic, pointing to the inadequacies of the other actors (1952:540). For Chambers, theatricalized passion was evidence of over-acting and thus of treason. In support of this notion, Chambers explained that he was "less impressed by [...] shrieks of outraged innocence," which according to his theory confirmed the actor's guilt (1952:536–37). In opposition to these overly dramatic representations, Chambers describes in his memoir what he calls "the tone of innocence," and scripts the "proper" performance for the unjustly accused: "My life is blameless. Look into it if you like, for you will find nothing.' That is the tone of innocence" (537). For Chambers then, an acquiescent tone is the mark of innocence, since one who willingly and calmly opens himself up to surveillance is hiding nothing and thus has nothing to hide. Chambers's symptomatology of tone extends beyond the sounds of innocence, as he argues for tone itself as marking the authenticity of a performance. If the sound of compliance with scopical intrusion is innocence-making, then to resist it is to commit treason, *tonally*. In contesting Chambers's accusations, Hiss's tone confirms his guilt as the theatricality of his "shrieks of outraged innocence" had already established it.

That Chambers would capitalize on his use of the term "shriek," as an invitation to invoke a feminine tone and subsequently reaffirm disloyalty, is not incidental, given the gender politics

and homophobia that articulated with anti-Communism. The sound of feminine protest emerging from Hiss's male body marks him as a threatening deviant. Like madness, and as a form of "mental illness," homosexuality during the cold war era was a marker of treason. It was even considered a threat to national security when, in 1950, the Senate Appropriations Committee alleged the presence of homosexuals in the federal government and required prompt expulsion of "sexual deviates" (in Corber 1993:62). Yet the discovery of "such persons" would be no simple task for the government, since it was assumed they were passing undetected, as they showed, according to "The Employment of Homosexuals and Other Sex Perverts in Government" released by the US Senate, "no outward characteristics or physical traits" which could confirm that they "should be considered as proper cases for medical treatment" (62).

For Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., the deviance of Communism was revealed through a semiotics of gayness. According to Schlesinger, the impulse to left-wing activism emerged from a "somewhat feminine fascination with the rude and masculine power of the proletariat" ([1949] 1962:46). Moreover, the "underground" Communist could be best understood through a comparison to gay subculture: the ephemeral affiliations and modes of contact of Communists were "reminiscent of nothing so much as the famous scene in Proust where the Baron de Charlus and the tailor Jupien suddenly recognize their common corruption" (127). As Robert Corber argues, the imbrications of Communist and homosexual symptoms and sympathies mutually reinforced the deviance of both Communism and homosexuality. Homosexuality's Communism rendered someone imminently treasonous, while Communism's gayness exposed someone as "unnatural" (1993:21). While liberal anti-Communists disputed McCarthy's claims of the ubiquity of Communist infiltration, they nonetheless shared in his pairing of political and sexual "perversions." As the Freudian analysts Ernst and Roth determined in their 1962 *Report on the American Communist*, "while it is true that there is not a communist under every bed, the Freudians would have a good deal of justification for the claim that there is a bed under the basic emotional motivations of every communist" (in Baldwin 1998:133). And Joe McCarthy and right-wing Senators took up the patriotic challenge to rid the government of the infiltration of "commies and queers," and pledged allegiance to their mission as a "purge of the perverts" (Dean 2001:71).⁸

The logic of theatricality that instanced the conspiratorial menace of Communists also typified the threat of gay passing. Thus, revealing the mask of artificial heterosexuality was akin to and, in some instances, equivalent to the revelation of treason. As Robert Dean contends, an "imperial brotherhood" that led the federal government during the postwar years anxiously performed an aggressive masculinity to refute charges of being "soft" on Communism. Insufficient masculinity revealed a feminized defect of Communist "sympathy."

The public performance of "respectable" masculinity became increasingly crucial as a test of political legitimacy in public life. Unmasking secret behavior, thus revealing a "true" but concealed identity that belied a man's public pose of conformity to social norms, became a weapon wielded against political enemies, linked in form and function to the unmasking of "secret communists" that formed the more visible dimension of the Red Scare purges. (Dean 2001:66)

"Outing" gays during this period was given the same political imperative as outing Commies by the anti-Communist Right. At the HUAC hearings on alleged treason by Alger Hiss, Chambers and Nixon focus on Hiss's performance of masculinity, in order to see if he "shrieks" with Communist perversion:

8. Consider also RAND Corporation analyst Nathan Leites's conclusions in a 1955 study that the "Bolshevik belief" of the imminence of attack by the West was a "classical paranoid defense against latent homosexuality." Actual threats were absent, Leites argued, as Soviet "aggression" was actually "an effort to ward off fear-laden and guilty wishes to embrace men and be embraced by them" (in Robin 2001:133).

NIXON: Could you describe Mr. Hiss's physical appearance for us?

CHAMBERS: Mr. Hiss, I should think, is about 5 feet 8 or 9, slender. His eyes are wide apart and blue or gray.

NIXON: Blue or gray?

CHAMBERS: I think they change.

NIXON: Sort of blueish-gray?

CHAMBERS: Blueish-gray you could say. In his walk, if you watch from behind, there is a slight mince sometimes.

NIXON: A slight mince?

CHAMBERS: Mince. Anybody could observe. (in Chambers 1952:566)

As Chambers and Nixon imagine watching Hiss from behind, measuring his citizenship by the arc of his mince, Hiss's son Timmie is also "outed" by Chambers as a "puny little boy, also rather nervous" and Hiss's mother as "affectionate," but "domineering" (Chambers 1952:566–67). In these moments, the Communist body, gendered and sexualized, is already guilty, because a body so constituted cannot possibly produce tones of innocence, but only the perverted shrieks of protestation that performatively produce the truth of treason. It is no wonder then that

when Kim Philby, British Intelligence officer and Soviet mole, was assigned to Washington D.C. after World War II, his superior at MI6 warned him not to get mixed up with Communists, homosexuals or Negroes. In response to this official request, Philby is quoted as replying, "In other words, I shouldn't make a pass at Paul Robeson." (in Corliss 1998)

Philby's comment demonstrates the yoking together of the discourses of perversion and psychopathology with those of racism and anti-Communism in which Paul Robeson personifies the conflation of these threats.

In John Frankenheimer's 1962 film *The Manchurian Candidate*, this collapse of theatricalized mental stability and Communist infiltration receives perhaps its most vivid representation. The film tells the story of an Army platoon that is captured during the Korean War by Soviet and Chinese Communists. These soldiers and patriots are then "brainwashed" by the Communists and compelled to participate in a murderous plot to infiltrate the US presidency. This Communist plot is represented on screen through both a complicit narrative in which the audience knows that the Soviets have brainwashed these soldiers and a visual spectacle of unmasking, in which society ladies are suddenly revealed to be Communists.

Upon returning home from the war, Sergeant Raymond Shaw (Laurence Harvey) appears to be normal and is seen as the ultimate patriot, having been awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. However, the audience knows that this is all a performance—one so deviously conceived that the actor ("Raymond") does not, himself, realize that he is acting a part. The Communists have actually transformed him into an assassin through "brainwashing" and posthypnotic suggestion. The narrative explanation as to why Raymond is susceptible to the Communist infiltration is presented psychoanalytically through a "momist" discourse, since his mother, played by Angela Lansbury, is both domineering and a Soviet agent—though in "momist" discourse these amount to much the same thing.⁹

The film positions the audience to identify with Major Bennett Marco (Frank Sinatra), who is the first to realize that his mind has been infiltrated by the Soviets. We know, before Marco

9. "Momism" was introduced in Philip Wylie's *Generation of Vipers* ([1942] 1955), which indicted "the destroying mother" as the feminizer of American manhood, declaring that "the women of America raped men, not sexually, unfortunately, but morally, since neuters come hard by morals" (200).

does, that there is a “truth” that lives behind Raymond’s mask. In an early scene Frankenheimer shows us Marco’s recurring nightmare, where the platoon listens to a group of matronly women engaged in a club meeting on hydrangeas. The camera pans fully around the room, and as it returns to the bored soldiers, we see that the women are actually Soviet and Chinese soldiers in a lecture hall complete with photos of Stalin and Mao, who are discussing the very process of brainwashing that has led the soldiers to see the Soviets and Chinese as ladies garden club members. Here, the camera performs the unmasking process, positioning the audience as omniscient, as either Committee members or psychoanalysts, or both, who are capable of seeing through the façade. Through this visual unmasking, the audience becomes narratively invested in the revealing of such treasonous acts not only of counterfeit sanity, but also of counterfeit citizenship. Invested with identifying both the psychopaths who are Commies and the Commies who are psychopaths, the audience anxiously anticipates the moment of revelation. And it is only through our direct access to the unconscious onscreen, in the form of Marco’s dream, that we are able to revel in that “ah-ha” moment when the Communist conspiracy is finally revealed.

Moreover, Marco’s American-style “psychotherapy” enables him to ultimately counter Raymond’s posthypnotic suggestion by confronting him with the mechanism of his brainwashing during hypnosis. By simply revealing the “truth” of brainwashing to him, Marco ends its hold and thus foils the Commie plot:

MARCO: It’s over. The links. The beautifully conditioned links are smashed. They’re smashed as of now because we say so. Because we say they are to be smashed. We’re busting up the joint. We’re tearing out all the wires. We’re busting it up so good all the queen’s horses and all the queen’s men will never put old Raymond back together again. You don’t work anymore. (Frankenheimer 1962)

Marco’s psychotherapeutic technique of “busting up the joint” is representative of his anti-Communist methodology, as he mimics the anti-Communist techniques of HUAC and the FBI of tearing down the Red mask of sanity. Because the main quality of this mask was its apparent normalcy, any and all Americans could be hidden Communists and thus were expected to be able to prove the authenticity of their loyalty. The only way to avoid being a traitor in the eyes of the state was to adopt a “tone of innocence,” a tone of disclosure, acquiescence, and submission. Adopting this tone marked the acceptance of McCarthy, Hoover, Major Marco, or Mike Hammer as your very own psychotherapist and the offering up your psychopathology to their specialized interpretation and treatment.

Yet, psychopathology may be considered as less an experience of clinical illness and more a radical position of critique—less a failure “to internalize the norms of social behavior” and more a refusal to do so (Douglas 1998:80). As Ann Douglas refigures this position, the cold war “psychopath” was not someone who was *unable* to tell the truth, but rather someone who “met no inner resistance to the act of uttering and maintaining what the world held to be untruth” (81). With this redefinition, Douglas problematizes the function of truth that indicates a psychopath as a clinical type. Untruth, like unreason, is produced as the Other of the Truth fashioned in rituals like the HUAC hearings. The introduction of the psychopath as a clinical type operates as a mode of containing the political as an aspect of social adjustment. For it is the performance of resistance that is being diagnosed here—a resistance paradoxically characterized by the *absence* of an internal “resistance to the act of uttering” opposition to officially held truths. It is not incidental, then, that the diagnosis of a psychopath was applied to “everyone who threatened national security, ranging from Stalin, Castro, and Lumumba to Billie Holiday, Lester Young, Charlie Parker, Jackson Pollock and Jack Kerouac” (81). Robeson is discursively “committed” along with this group of mental patients, diagnosed as the neurotic Black Stalin, because of the “lack” of “inner resistance” to official untruths that his utterances symptomatically revealed.

The Stagecraft of Statecraft and the Manufactured Crisis

The predominant way of describing the HUAC hearings in recent scholarship is to consider them as “ritual” performances. Victor Navasky, for example, calls the hearings a “ritual of naming names” performed in the “degradation ceremonies” of a “surrealistic morality play” (1980:314). Tom Englehardt considers the “HUAC Performance” to be a “traveling road show” that was “highly stylized and largely ceremonial in nature. Roles were carefully predetermined, with testimony normally rehearsed” (1995:126). According to Schrecker, the hearings developed from “frenzied improvisations” into “increasingly stylized rituals” where loyalty could be performed (1994:55). Furthermore, Eric Bentley argues:

HUAC carefully dramatized the act of informing for purposes of waging political warfare: to intimidate some, to encourage others, and so on. It was theater or, if you like, ritual: a rite of purification that would also put the fear of God (HUAC’s man in heaven) in the as yet unpurified. (2002:947)

While anti-theatricality governed anti-Communist discourse, performance was also an important weapon in the federal government’s cold war arsenal. US “statecraft” manufactured a dramaturgy of crisis, which sought to discipline and order bodies as well as voices of dissent. These practices have a lengthy history, extending from the pathologizing of “emancipation utterances” by black Americans through revealing the perpetuation of the legacy of slavery at home and the contesting of America’s imperial practices abroad.¹⁰

The HUAC hearings exemplified the US government’s practice of stagecraft as a mode of consolidating power. For Eisenhower, policy decisions were to be made for their theatrical efficacy. Statecraft for him was indeed a form of stagecraft. In anticipation of the execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, he explained to his cabinet that preventing the execution (and as he would later similarly proclaim about the integration of schools in Little Rock, Arkansas) would only be justified when “statecraft dictated in the interests of the American public opinion or of the reputation of the United States Government in the eyes of the world” (in Suchoff 1995:162). As enactments of the stagecraft of statecraft, domestic political acts were theatrical expressions for the consumption of both Americans and the rest of the world. As James Scott describes, such performances of power are meant to mask dissent:

By controlling the public stage, the dominant can create an appearance that approximates what, ideally, they would want subordinates to see. The deception—or propaganda—they devise may add padding to their stature but it will also hide whatever might detract from their grandeur and authority. (1990:50)

The hearings staged both the authority of the Committee, as well as the acquiescence of witnesses, producing a “*dramatization* of power relations” (66). Thus, the propagandistic value of the stagecraft of statecraft was a theatricalization of power more than a hunt for “truth” or an enactment of justice.

The HUAC hearings were a form of “Congressional Theatre.”¹¹ According to Brenda Murphy,

the Committee hearings became a scapegoating ritual by which “Communists” [...] could be assigned blame for the country’s anxiety and division, then effectively purged and

10. References to “emancipation utterances” here and throughout are meant to invoke the regulation of slave speech in anticipation and/or aftermath of slave revolts. On its use in the aftermath of the Nat Turner insurrection, see Herbert Aptheker (1966).

11. In response to what the Committee deemed to be the public relations debacle of the Hollywood Ten hearings, HUAC banned radio, newsreel, and film coverage of the hearings due to the “circus atmosphere” media elements allegedly produced (Doherty 2003:116–17).

punished, and welcomed back only when they had undergone a ritual confession and affirmed their new loyalty to the values of the community. (1999:61)

For Murphy, the Red Scare is best understood as exemplifying Victor Turner's model of "social drama," with the hearings functioning as a form of "redress." As Richard Schechner explains: "Redressive action is what's done to overcome the crisis—the crisis itself having arisen out of a breach" (1988:187). The ritual process is finished when redress is completed and the figure of crisis is integrated back into society, or when a schism occurs.

Turner suggests that the role of redress is "to *contain* [and] then [to] dispel crisis" (Turner 1982:108; emphasis added). But, did the ritual of the HUAC hearings really act to dispel the cold war crisis, or did it simply serve to contain that crisis? It is better said that the federal government wished to *extend* crisis, but only in order to manage it, or as Clifford Geertz describes ritual's purpose: to "render it orderly" (1983:28). The crisis produced in the social drama of the cold war is that of the mythic "Communist infiltration," and the redressive measures can be seen as the revelation of that conspiracy through rituals of truth, which extend and order crisis rather than overcome it.

However, the HUAC ritual produced not only the authentic citizenship of the informer, but also the threat of the "false witness," who is the ultimate traitor, for he has sullied this purification ritual, jeopardizing the credibility of the informers and the ritual efficacy of HUAC hearings (Matusow 1955). Moreover, through the revelation of the existence of a Communist conspiracy and of the supposed Communist infiltration of Hollywood, the State Department exacerbated rather than remedied crisis; it seemed to confirm the presence of the pervasive, yet invisible enemy. The ritual of naming names thus *perpetuated* rather than redressed crisis. By confirming the existence of Communist infiltration, HUAC produced and reproduced a pervasive sense of panic. Moreover, the ritual perpetuated crisis while *seeming* to redress it.

Such a perpetuation of crisis is what Walter Benjamin names as "the state of emergency," which, he contends, "is not the exception but the rule" (1968:257). Michael Taussig extends Benjamin's claim to describe how the state manufactures this experience of "terror as usual," which encourages citizens to accept "the apparent normality of the abnormal created by the state of emergency" (1992:13). This doctrine of "terror as usual" was central to the manipulation of the American public during the cold war.¹² It was the policy of the federal government, in the words of Senator Arthur Vandenberg, "to scare the hell out of the American people," to build support for massive military build-up (in Lipsitz 1994:183). Even the immanence of a showdown with the Soviet Union in 1948 was a "war scare" manufactured to support an ailing aircraft industry and a faltering Marshall Plan (Kofsky 1993). The federal government "deliberately misrepresented the nature of that threat" in order to "create a crisis atmosphere" (Lipsitz 1994:187). Similarly, the development of civil defense programs served as a "normalization of emergency," as it turned all citizens into cold warriors (Grossman 2001:105; see also Davis 2007).

While some have argued that civil defense programs were intended to calm American fears of nuclear war (Davis 2007), Andrew Grossman argues that such programs were "intended to *produce* a manageable level of fear" (2001:42; emphasis added).¹³ Fear had to be manufactured to sustain WWII military spending levels and to create support for the corporate-friendly Marshall Plan. Meanwhile, the psychological ailment of "nuclear terror" had to be prevented so that

12. The production of crisis was central to the maintenance of "slaveocracy" in the South as well. Fears of slave revolts were often manipulated to quash liberal dissent: "An occasional revolt went a long way toward justifying measures to suppress political opposition to the regime" (Genovese 1974:596). According to Eugene Genovese, supporters of slavery often manufactured "'sham' insurrections and vigilante hysteria" (1974:596).

13. Even Guy Oakes (1994), who accepts that such programs were intended to calm the public, acknowledges that they ultimately had the opposite effect.

Americans would accept nuclear war as a reasonable military option. To this end, the government intentionally misrepresented the possibility of surviving a nuclear attack in order to create support for “nuclear diplomacy” (Grossman 2001; Oakes 1994; Boyer 1985). These programs were intended to teach ordinary Americans how to *keep worrying* and love the bomb (as opposed to Stanley Kubrick’s film, *Dr. Strangelove* [1964], whose subtitle satirically taught audiences *How to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*).

Ritual theory contends that redress initiates a process of integration, which enables the restoration of the status quo. If there was a mode of “integration” in the HUAC ritual, it was “the reintegration of McCarthyism into state doctrine and its extroversion onto the world stage” (Kovel [1994] 1997:68). Thus the extension or staging of McCarthyism was foundational to the creation of an “age of anxiety” as a production of US foreign and domestic policy. Integrated into US policy was the practice of what the Director of Civil Defense Planning considered to be the necessary process of “conditioning” (in Grossman 2001:37). Clarence Cannon, Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, argued that this “conditioning” was required for Americans to “willingly and voluntarily” accept crisis conditions such as “higher taxes, shortages, many sacrifices and even hardships” (38).¹⁴ The production of fear was a staged operation whose goal was to coerce the citizenry into accepting scarcity in the name of national security.

National Security Council Directive-68 (NSC-68), the government document that formalized “containment” as US foreign policy, was part of that integration of crisis into the status quo. Advocating for the rapid build-up of military strength, NSC-68 warns of the “Kremlin’s design for world domination,” in which “the concentration camp is the prototype of the society,” (National Security Council [1950] 1993:33) and points to “the stark fact that our very independence as a nation may be at stake” (73). To further eliminate any doubt as to the level of emergency, the document reminds readers “that the cold war is a real war in which the survival of the free world is at stake” (33, 73). NSC-68 can be seen as an example of what Randy Martin calls “crisis talk,” which is often used to create an *illusion* of scarcity of resources as well as of permanent political stasis (1998:190). This type of scarcity is endemic to capitalism according to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, as capitalism’s “supreme goal [...] is to introduce lack where there is always too much, by effecting the absorption of overabundant resources” (1983:235). As a result, political dissent must be restricted, “extravagant” social services must be cut or canceled, and labor must cooperate with the liberal-corporate establishment to maintain labor “stability.”

Paul Robeson and the Culture of Crisis

In many of his speeches of the period, Paul Robeson critiqued the extension of this “crisis” of WWII to the postwar era. In a 1949 “welcome home” rally following his Paris Peace Conference remarks, Robeson argued that the “war economy” produced by perpetual crisis was a concomitant violence with war itself, as the war economy produced “an economy of scarcity and unemployment, [...] the loss of civil liberties, [...] slavery for colonial people, [and] domestic fascism” (1978:204). He emphasized in a 1951 speech that the government intentionally misrepresented the economic function of war, claiming that, “not only is there no bonanza in war but [...] the guns-instead-of-butter program results in lowering, not raising, standards of living” (279). According to Robeson, the burden of the war economy is borne “on the backs of the working masses of the land, [which has] accentuated the obvious and cancerous disparity between the ill-gained profits of the wealthy few and the meager subsistence of the multitude of producers—farmers and workers” (279). Rather than accept the arguments proposed by the government for the necessity of crisis, Robeson pointed to the demands of political stasis,

14. These practices of using crisis to allow for the pushing through of ideological reforms can be seen as a precursor to what Naomi Klein (2007) has described as “disaster capitalism,” where the production of crisis is used to enforce free market restructuring.

material sacrifice, and state violence that the “staging of crisis” produced. For Robeson, crisis both creates and reveals the inequalities brought about by capitalism.

The legal basis for the State Department’s revoking of Robeson’s passport was the ongoing “state of national emergency,” which had never been officially canceled at the end of World War II and thus justified conventionally extralegal measures (Duberman 1989:393). The mainstream media condoned Robeson’s confinement by marshalling the collapse of race and dissent in this period of crisis. In his syndicated column, Robert C. Rurk argued that, “In the modern emergency, Mr. Robeson is worthy of internment as any Jap who got penned away in the last” (in Duberman 1989:393–94). Both the revoking of Robeson’s passport and his appearance at the HUAC hearings were due to speeches wherein he spoke directly about the manufactured nature of this crisis, and yet his blackness equally enforced his status as an “enemy within.”

In addition to his speeches concerning the fabrication of crisis, Robeson was also extremely vocal in his advocacy of African and Asian anticolonial movements. On numerous occasions, including in a 1951 speech entitled “Toward a Democratic Earth We Helped to Build,” he spoke out against the capitalist expansion into those areas where the “crisis” was organized to produce “a new colonialism on the masses of people” (1978:64). A State Department response to Robeson’s appeals for the restoration of his passport asserted:

Furthermore, even if the complaint had alleged, which it does not, that the passport was cancelled solely because of the applicant’s recognized status as spokesman for large sections of Negro Americans, we submit that this would not amount to an abuse of discretion in view of the appellant’s frank admission that he has been for years extremely active politically in behalf of independence of the colonial people of Africa. (in Robeson [1958] 1988:64)

As justification for their containment of Robeson, the federal government cites not only Robeson’s promotion of African American rights, but also his linking of the cold war crisis with capitalist investments in colonialism. Robeson accused the US government of allocating funds for colonialist power structures in order to maintain stable markets for American corporations in Africa. In his 1950 comments against the imperialist imperatives of the cold war crisis manufacturers, Robeson accused “American banker-imperialists” of “prop[ping] up the shaky empire builders of Europe who own and control most of Africa [...] which opens the door for investment of capital by American big business in African raw material and cheap labor” (1978:247). For Robeson, the possibility of African Americans going to war against the Soviet Union was “unthinkable” because the adverse material effects of war on blacks throughout the black diaspora rendered the very notion of fighting in such a war in direct conflict with the movement toward substantive redress and the realization of freedom. Blacks’ participation in such a war amounted to fighting for their own disenfranchisement and to their own disadvantage.

On 23 July 1956, Paul Robeson, whom Leo Rover, the federal district attorney representing the State Department, called “one of the most dangerous men in the world,” gave his subpoenaed testimony before the House Committee on Un-American Activities (in Duberman 1989:433). Robeson’s testimony there can be read as “one of [his] finest performances,” as long-time ally William Patterson described it (in Duberman 1989:442). This performance has been retrospectively constructed as a “crisis of sanity” by biographer Martin Duberman, who contends that Robeson suffered from a “major depression” brought on by years of confinement and “reached rock bottom” when he received his subpoena to testify before HUAC on “passport irregularities by Communist sympathizers” (438, 439).¹⁵ The point, however, is that anti-Communist discourse and the culture of cold war America constructed Robeson (and many other left-wing advocates) as always already “mad.” Both HUAC and the McCarthy-led Senate

15. For an extended refutation of Duberman’s representation of Robeson, see Paul Robeson Jr. (2000).

Intelligence Committee hearings hinged on positioning the state as the psychoanalyst of treason who could reveal the psychopathic unconscious of the Red. Extending US economic hegemony and invoking the specter of the mad racial Other, the federal government cast Robeson as mentally unstable for his expression of the “unthinkability” of black participation in the cold war and for his advocacy for black liberation (at home and abroad).

During his 1956 HUAC hearing, Robeson argued for the specificity of this concept of the “unthinkable.”¹⁶ At one instance, congressional council Richard Arens demanded to know if Robeson had said in Paris “that the American Negro would never go to war against the Soviet Government” (Robeson 1978:424). Robeson clarified his comments, stating that he was not commanding “15 million American Negroes” to do anything. Rather, he argued that the prospect of blacks going to war against the Soviet Union was undermined by the federal government’s resistance to protecting civil rights in the South:

I said it was unthinkable to me that any people would take up arms in the name of [segregationist Mississippi Senator and chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee] Eastland to go against anybody, and gentlemen, I still say that. What should happen would be that this United States Government should go down to Mississippi and protect my people. That is what should happen. (424)

Robeson reframes the question of a war with the Soviet Union as a question of civil rights. By claiming that the interests of the Soviet Union and blacks should be united against the US, he counters the government’s configuration of solidarity within the US’s diverse and dissenting populations. Robeson’s performance of these politics is not an isolated instance in the history of American political dissent; rather it existed amidst an array of anticolonial African American intellectual and artistic opposition. Speeches, performances, and treatises given by people such as Robeson’s wife, Eslanda Robeson, W.E.B. Du Bois, William Patterson, Alphaeus Hunton, Harry Belafonte, and Lena Horne all called for the end to what Robeson and William Patterson called the “oppression that guarantees profit” in the petition “We Charge Genocide” that they presented to the United Nations in 1952 (in Robeson 1978:311; see also Von Eschen 1997; Horne 1986; Plummer 1996). Their critique of American foreign policy revealed not only the contradiction of preaching “freedom” abroad while maintaining Jim Crow violence at home, but also the attempt by “American Big Business,” as the *Chicago Defender* protested, “to carry abroad the system that prevails in South Carolina” (in Von Eschen 1997:103). In other words, by subsidizing transnational capitalism, the American government was supporting the exportation of its own brutal labor practices in countries throughout Africa.

Such critics, whom Penny Von Eschen has called the “avant-garde international left,” threatened to give lie to the premise of “national security” as the governing motivation of US foreign policy (1997:4). Even historians sympathetic to American hegemony, as Noam Chomsky points out, accept that cold war military policy was designed to enforce American economic dominance internationally. Quoting John Gaddis, Chomsky reveals the commonplace acceptance of a militarized American economic hegemony: “America must maintain what is in essence a military protectorate in economically critical regions to ensure that America’s vital trade and financial relations will not be disrupted by political upheaval” (in Chomsky 1994:34). During the cold war, American involvement in Asia and Africa was part of a global economic strategy marked by a “commitment to integrating the extractive economies of the Third World into the industrial core and to using military force if necessary to defend it” (McCormick 1989:99). Military force abroad and anti-Communism at home functioned as part of an American

16. From: House of Representatives, Eighty-Fourth Congress, “Investigation of the Unauthorized Use of United State Passports—Part 3,” *Hearings before the Committee on Un-American Activities, House of Representatives, Eighty-Fourth Congress, Second Session, June 12, 1956*. Washington, D.C., 1956, 4492–4510. The transcript of the Robeson testimony is reprinted in Robeson (1978).

international campaign to repress dissent against American global expansion. Making “economic expansion a matter of patriotic obligation,” domestic anti-Communism impeded any critique made by American citizens against US foreign policy (Lipsitz 1994:189). As such, the government was able to “equate opposition to its foreign policy with disloyalty to the country” (189). And it is this equation that not only characterized the US government’s response to Robeson’s speeches, but also informed Robeson’s opposition and resistance to the government and its sanctioned performances of crisis. Robeson’s performances, as well as the international attention given to American racial violence, disrupted the theatrical performance of statecraft.

“Being Paul Robeson” and the Madness of the Burning Voice

Such performances, it was believed, could be contained through violence. In Robeson’s case, the popular press joined in this hope, attempting to induce him to contain, rather than to silence his voice, arguing for an ontology constituted by vocal containment. The *New York Times* wanted him “to sing, and to go on being Paul Robeson” (in Duberman 1989:349). However, since Robeson had “retired” from his concert career in 1947 in order to focus on political organizing, “being Paul Robeson” was largely constituted by performing activism for civil rights, and in particular, pressuring President Truman to sponsor an anti-lynching law.

Being Paul Robeson sounded so much like black revolt that when one black man refused a Knoxville, Tennessee, police officer’s order to move to the back of the bus, the officer shouted at him, “You’re just like Paul Robeson!” (in Duberman 1989:362). To voice “emancipation utterances” made one not only a black radical, but also a Communist, since the iconology of Robeson united the two in a burning and booming voice. Since “emancipation utterances” belied the staged narrative of American racial progress (thus giving “ammunition” to the Soviet Union) and since the Communist Party of the USA vocally supported civil rights legislation, these utterances nearly guaranteed the speaker to be a Communist. Discerning one’s opposition to “blood segregation” was a central part of the mission of the Loyalty Review Board set up by Truman to identify Communists in government (in Schrecker 1998:282). A department loyalty



Figure 5. Lynching an effigy of Robeson in Peekskill, NY, in 1949. (© Bettman/CORBIS)

utterances” made one not only a black radical, but also a Communist, since the iconology of Robeson united the two in a burning and booming voice. Since “emancipation utterances” belied the staged narrative of American racial progress (thus giving “ammunition” to the Soviet Union) and since the Communist Party of the USA vocally supported civil rights legislation, these utterances nearly guaranteed the speaker to be a Communist. Discerning one’s opposition to “blood segregation” was a central part of the mission of the Loyalty Review Board set up by Truman to identify Communists in government (in Schrecker 1998:282). A department loyalty

board chairman explained: “Of course the fact that a person believes in racial equality doesn’t *prove* that he’s a Communist, but it certainly makes you look twice, doesn’t it? You can’t get away from the fact that racial equality is part of the Communist line” (in Schrecker 1998:282).¹⁷ In fact, if the person looking twice was J. Edgar Hoover, then the belief in racial equality did, in fact, prove that one was a Communist. As Kenneth O’Reilly contends, Hoover believed that “the advocacy of racial justice was itself a subversive act, and his reports on communism [in civil rights organizations] were simply to support this thesis [...] equating civil rights activism with un-American activities” (1989:40). For Hoover, any agitation for racial justice was self-condemning since it operated in opposition to the status quo. It was, by its very nature, “subversive.” Moreover, since the Party had adopted such phrases as “equal rights” and “self-determination,” Hoover surmised that anyone using such terms was simply voicing “the Party’s chief slogans for Negroes [...] obedience to Soviet foreign policy” (Hoover 1958:244–45).

The mere acknowledgment of racism was proof positive of one’s Communism, according to Congressman Albert Canwell of Washington, who asserted, “If someone insists there is discrimination against Negroes in this country [...] there is every reason to believe that person is a Communist” (in Caute 1978:168). The association of civil rights advocacy and Communism was so pervasive that it became standard practice for loyalty boards to inquire about one’s “feelings [...] concerning racial equality” (Caute 1978:168). During the cold war, “emancipation utterances” were equivalent to treasonous ones as advocacy for racial justice was a Communist act.¹⁸

Whether singing or speaking, “being Paul Robeson” in public had the contagious, corrupting effect of incendiary “emancipation utterances.” Furthermore, Robeson’s singing at an event *made* it Communist. When Congressman Richard Nixon asked actor (and cooperative witness) Adolph Menjou what “tests” he would apply to determine if someone “acted like a Communist,” Menjou replied: “Well, I think attending meetings at which Mr. Paul Robeson appeared, and applauding or listening to his Communist songs in America. I would be ashamed to be seen in an audience doing a thing of that kind” (in Bentley 2002:131). According to Menjou, the mere hearing of Robeson’s singing turned one into a Communist. Indeed, the incendiary infectiousness of “emancipation utterances” had to be contained, as the act of collective hearing threatened the status quo and the believability of American stagecraft.

In his concerts of Negro spirituals, Robeson’s voice was famous for its ability to evoke the violent suffering of bondage. The effect was much like what Frederick Douglass detailed in the act of listening to the “sorrow songs” where “[e]very tone was a testimony against slavery” that could transform the listener: “the mere hearing of those songs would do more to impress some minds with the horrible character of slavery than the reading of whole volumes on the subject could do” ([1845] 1987:263). Some who heard Robeson claimed that he had a similar effect on them, since hearing him sing made them “feel a solution to the ‘negro problem’” (Boyle and Bunie 2001:170).

During the cold war, such an affective hearing extended this treasonous effect. Since *being* a Communist was so difficult to determine, the Committee relied on what Paul de Man calls “the medium of mimicry, of gestures” (1979:281), or what the Committee called the “duck test” (if it walks like a duck...). In *The Communist Weapon of Allure*, a Department of Defense–produced film, a “Dr. Warren Walsh, of Syracuse University” offers to identify Communists through analogy: “Frenchmen who act not like Frenchmen but like Soviet citizens, Italians who act not

17. In the film *I Was a Communist for the FBI* (1951), all labor and civil rights activism is a Communist plot to consolidate power.

18. The process of conflating black political activism and Communism was, in fact, a founding practice of Hoover’s FBI from its inception. The collapse of black radicalism and Communism as well as the targeting of black Communists were central components of the interwar Red Scare (Kornweibel 1998; O’Reilly 1994:1–48).

like Romans, but like Muscovites, Americans who act like a Hiss or the Rosenbergs,” were people who were “controlled by the bosses of the Kremlin” (Dept. of Defense [1956] 1983). For the anti-Communist, “acting *like* a Communist” was proof that one was a Communist. And “being Paul Robeson,” hearing Paul Robeson sing, and the black performance that conjoined the two, were all occasions of “acting like a Communist.” With his persistent voicing of “emancipation utterances,” “being Paul Robeson” was a condition of being in “obedience to Soviet foreign policy” as Hoover put it, and thus always “acting like a Communist.”

Since Robeson was always already “acting like a Communist,” he became a vital resource to the ritual process of cold war loyalty and its performance during HUAC. While most white witnesses were expected to name names before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, witnesses who were black were compelled to perform a more specific ritual: they needed simply to name Paul Robeson and their redemption was secured (Navasky 1980:187).¹⁹ It is evident, then, that the state needed Robeson to be a Communist since it relied so heavily on the signifying force of his name for “repentant” blacks to name. But, for the Committee and in American culture more broadly, Robeson’s Communism was tautological, since it was *because* he was always already a Communist that his Communism needed to be constantly re-presented in order for it to maintain its signifying power. As a result, the Committee needed his name to have the citational force of referencing not simply a “Communist,” but “The *African American* Communist,” so that black witnesses would be able to name him, and only him, as a part of their compulsory loyalty ritual. Black witnesses, therefore, such as Jackie Robinson, Josh White, and others, could then performatively secure their citizenship by disavowing “Paul Robeson,” in order to affirm their loyalty to the United States.

Despite the citational power that his name assured, when Robeson himself was called before HUAC, he reclaimed the performance space of the hearing as a resistive, and even a potentially redressive, space. By reclaiming the interests of African Americans against US foreign policy vis-à-vis the Soviet Union and by performing the divestiture of blackness in the cold war effort, Robeson re-valued a space that heretofore had conscripted blackness as inferior and treasonous. The redressive potential of black performance as evidenced in Robeson’s enactment within the “social drama” has a notable distinction from Turner’s model, where redressive action seeks to “contain, then dispel the crisis” (Turner 1982:108). In Saidiya Hartman’s configuration, redress is necessarily incomplete “without the occurrence of an event of epic proportions—the abolition of slavery, the destruction of a racist social order, and the actualization of equality” (1997:77). Robeson’s performance marks the absence of such events as constituting the very conditions of his appearance before HUAC:

I invoke the Fifth Amendment. Could I say that for the reason that I am here today, you know, from the mouth of the State Department itself, is because I should not be allowed to travel because I have struggled for years for the independence of the colonial peoples of Africa and [...] that when I am abroad I speak out against the injustices against the Negro people of this land. That is why I am here. This is the basis and I am not being tried for whether I am a Communist, I am being tried for fighting for the rights of my people who are still second-class citizens in this United States of America. (1978:421–22)

Robeson makes clear that it is as much for his blackness as it is his “Red-ness,” for which he is being persecuted. Furthermore, Robeson theorizes that it is the way in which his performances have borne witness to the inadequacy of redress for slavery and racism that have compelled his HUAC performance. And it is through this performance that he must repeat his redressive performance in what is at once “an articulation of loss and a longing for remedy

19. It should be noted that the position of “witness” has been a particularly fraught one for African Americans. As blacks were historically restricted from testifying against white persons, the allowance of simply naming Robeson before HUAC perhaps reveals the ways in which race governed the informing process (McBride 2001).

and reparation” (Hartman 1997:77). In fact, it is the perpetuation of crisis through anti-Communism that produces the need for the repetition of redress—in part because previous redressive performances are punished, revealing that a racist social order has not been (yet must be) overcome (81).

Perpetual crisis limits what kinds of performances are permissible, formally contributing to the ideology of scarcity. However, crisis is also a productive force, as Martin points out, in that “performance can be said to occur *through* crisis” as well as from crisis (1998:188). Just as HUAC needed Robeson to “act like a Communist” so that he could serve as an object of repudiation for other blacks, his occupation of that position gave rise to a critique of US postwar foreign policy, civil rights, economic practices, and thus threatened to reveal that HUAC and other anti-Communist forces were operating as a means to undo New Deal programs. These anti-Communist moves were enacted not out of a “free market” ideology, but rather were meant to facilitate government-corporate partnerships to expand global capitalism (Lipsitz 1994). Robeson’s performance, rather than ritually interpellating him as obedient citizen, reclaimed the space of performance as a site to demand the redress of the violence of slavery, racism, and capitalism, or at least to inhibit their perpetuation.

Black Paranoid Poetics and the Cold War Crisis (of Sanity)

“Black paranoia” has long been used to discount assertions of racist practices in the US government. As Patricia Turner has argued in her study of rumor and folklore in African American culture, the vast accounting of state-sponsored and state-sanctioned violence against blacks means that such thinking is not paranoid, but rather is “entirely reasonable and in perfect keeping with traditional anti-black hostility one finds in many branches of government” (1993:120; see also O’Reilly 1994). However, if we consider paranoia less as a clinical disorder and more as a social practice where “one’s interpretations seem to be unfounded or abnormal *to an interpretive community*” (Melley 2002:66), then the paranoiac seems to occupy a position of radical critique. It is this position that Joseph Heller’s “paranoid bomber” occupies in *Catch-22* (1961); he believes that everyone is trying to kill him because they actually are. As a position of radical critique, “creative paranoia” and critical paranoia “can serve as effective forms of resistance to social control” (Melley 2002:68). The postwar narrative of paranoia and conspiracy, according to Timothy Melley, is “driven by a sense that knowledge and power are inextricably linked and that to be ‘paranoid’ may only be to reject the normalizing ideology of the powerful” (68). If we see critical paranoia as a social practice that operates as a form of political resistance (rather than as a clinical diagnosis), then we need not, as Patricia Turner does, dispense with the term. Instead we can adopt critical paranoia as a political strategy of making visible the connectedness of state-sponsored and state-sanctioned oppression manifested by the violence of physical force or the violence of economic domination and exploitation.²⁰

In his HUAC performance and other postwar appearances, Paul Robeson engaged what Eithne Quinn calls a “black paranoid poetics,” which registers in tonal quality, where the “grain of [...the] voice is thick and rough” (2001:179, 186). The policing of Robeson’s tone might be seen as the policing of a black paranoid poetics, which is a policing of the grain. “The grain of the voice,” as laid out by Roland Barthes, is the “body in the voice as it sings” (1977:188). Tone operates for the anti-Communist as a surrogate signifier to replace the opacity of Communism/blackness that renders the red/black body illegible. The tone of innocence and the burning voice operate as an audible and legible binary. By voicing protest through the form and content of his speeches, Robeson performs a sonic resistance, one that HUAC seeks to manage. Tonal

20. This line of argument goes against Eve Sedgwick’s distinction between “paranoid” and “reparative” practices. Here, a black paranoid poetics functions as part of a reparative and redressive process of (re)asserting the *actual* conspiracies that are perpetually disavowed (see Sedgwick 2003).

management by the state is, in part, the desire to make visible the corporeality of voices so that they too might be disciplined.

The Truth sought in the psychoanalytic function of HUAC is the spectacularization of this tone as “the voice displays what is inaccessible to the image, what exceeds the visible: the ‘inner life of the character’” (Doane 1986:341). This excess, which is a sonic excess, is “manifest and stubborn” and “beyond (or before) the meaning of the words” (Barthes 1977:179). The spectacularization of the inner life heard in the grain operates as a means of disciplining bodies. The state attempts to discipline the “burning voice of revolt (and through it the burning fact of revolt)” into and through the means of the “cold voice of order, normality, and power” (Bonitzer 1986:325). Robeson’s “burning voice of revolt” emits sounds produced by, through, and against labor, which speaks “emancipation utterances” in the demand for black liberation.

For Robeson, the burning voice of revolt is characterized by a radical linking that also characterizes “critical paranoia,” which is, in fact, a theory for a “total system” that underlies all folk expression. During his confinement, Robeson began research to develop a musicological paradigm that would—according to Tim

Shopen’s recounting of a speech Robeson gave at Swarthmore College—illumine how “peace [...] has a cultural basis” (Shopen [1955] 1978:401). In his writings and speeches on music, Robeson argued that “there is a world body—a universal body—of folk music based upon a universal pentatonic (five tone) scale” ([1958] 1988:115). Robeson had initially looked to pentatonism as a way to refute suggestions that African American musical traditions were imitations of European musical forms. Afro-American music, with its emphasis on the polyphonic and contrapuntal, was based on the pentatonic scale, which he argued in 1956 had an “African heritage” (Robeson 1978:439; see also Baldwin 2002:214–27).

But Robeson extended his debate to argue for a universal tonality that linked folk cultures. A “pentatonic harmony” united “China, Africa, Indonesia,” and (up until 1500) Europe (Robeson [1958] 1988:116). Robeson biographer Martin Duberman dismisses Robeson’s findings by saying that pentatonic universalism as “a ‘discovery’ [is] as indisputable as it is unoriginal” (1989:438). Moreover, Duberman reads Robeson’s “obsessive” investment with pentatonism as evidence of his imminent mental breakdown. Duberman insists that Robeson’s “rattl[ing] on” about “similarities between seemingly disparate cultures” proved him to be “manic” and “compulsive” (438–39).

However, Duberman fails to recognize the cultural politics of Robeson’s theory in its cold war context. It is not incidental that Robeson highlights “China, Africa, Indonesia” in his theory



Figure 6. Paul Robeson speaking at a rally against the Mundt-Nixon bill, 1 July 1948. (Photo by Leonard McCombe, courtesy of Time Life Pictures/Getty Images)

of musical universalism. These were sites of intense contestation during the cold war conflict. His theoretical formulation operated as a cultural correlative to the 1955 Asian-African Conference held in Bandung, which he had been prevented from attending. The Bandung Conference was organized as a site to develop a strategy for resisting US *and* Soviet hegemony in global politics. The majority of Asian and African countries were “non-aligned” to capitalism or Communism and argued that they should be allowed to maintain neutrality in the cold war, constituting as they did a “third world” (Von Eschen 1997:168–73; see also Plummer 1996:247–56; Borstleman 2001:95–97; Wright 1956).

While the African American press praised the conference as a “clear challenge to white supremacy [in] this gathering of the world’s yellow, brown, and black races,” the US government cast the conference as a further expression of Afro-Asian psychotic deception. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles condemned the conference, and the idea of neutrality in general as “immoral and shortsighted,” dismissing the event as a “*so-called* Afro-Asian conference” (in Von Eschen 1997:170). The US dispatched Adam Clayton Powell to Bandung, who contended that his presence at the conference presented “living proof to the fact that there is no truth in the Communist charge that the Negro is oppressed in America” (in Borstleman 2003:96). But the opposite was true. Sending Powell as a representative of the Eisenhower administration, while forbidding the travel of Robeson and W.E.B. Du Bois (as well as numerous other African Americans whose passport applications were “lost”), gave evidence for “the Communist charge that the Negro is oppressed in America” being proved not refuted.

In the “Greetings to Bandung” Robeson sent to the conference, he linked cultural politics to political practice. He noted that the “living evidence of the ancient kinship of Africa and Asia” could be seen in “language structures” as well as in “arts and philosophy” (1978:399). The connection between “similar yet different cultures” provided a means to resist “the policy of force” that could put an “end to threat of an H-Bomb war,” and to disrupt the “imperialist enslavement of nations” (399–400).

Robeson’s theory of musical universalism operates as an expression of third world self-determination. Perhaps not “original” as an aesthetic formulation, Robeson’s voicing of cultural politics is an exceptional performance of the popular desire for nonalignment and resistance to American hegemony. The sound of folk expression, Robeson argues, voices the labor of resistance to “imperialist enslavement.” Incendiary voices giving sonic resonance to “emancipation utterances” privileges the sounds produced by bodies laboring under and against exploitation.

Such a corporealizing of the voice, Pascal Bonitzer explains, reveals “a subject fallen to the rank of an object and unmasked.” The body of the voice is “its death to meaning.” And as a body, the voice “labors.’ It is perceived as an accent [...] and this accent neutralizes meaning” (1986:328). The incendiary accent of foreign cadence that marks particularity also fixes the body and voice as object. And the becoming of an object emerges as both an “unmasking” (HUAC’s project) and a death to meaning produced in the performance of labor and the labor of performance.²¹ As the particularity of the voice’s body removes it from being the universal, objective voice of whiteness, Bonitzer proclaims, “This is why it is necessary to speak as little as possible” (1986:328).

But becoming an object clearly is a threat to modes of governmentality. What Michael Fried calls the “theatricality of objecthood” threatens to disrupt the objective gaze of the spectator, as such objecthood “refuses, obstinately, to let him alone—which is to say, it refuses to stop confronting him, distancing him, isolating him” (1968:140). Is this, too, the threat of the voice’s body, that by unmasking Robeson’s objecthood, it “refuses to stop confronting” the state through the “burning voice of revolt” and shrieks of protest, rather than the cold voice of the

21. On black performance as the “resistance of the object,” see Fred Moten (2003:233–54).

“tone of innocence”? It is this objecthood that Robeson performs when he counterposes that in Russia he “felt for the first time like a human being,” while in America he experienced the “pressure of colored as I feel in this committee today” (1978:427). What Robeson sounds is the burning voice and/as object, which is produced by and against the “pressure of colored” initiated by the committee hearing.

The performance of Robeson’s voice’s body, which is to say the objecthood of Robeson’s sound and the sound of Robeson’s objecthood, does threaten the Committee. It is when Robeson performs his objecthood that he most occupies the position of “acting like a Communist,” because in that position, he embodies, that is to say, presences/presents the materiality of the burning voice of revolt in all the accent of its foreign cadence. It is this embodying of voice that Antonin Artaud hopes for; what Jacques Derrida describes as “a speech that is a body, a body that is a theater” so that he may “forbid that his speech be spirited away [*soufflé*] from his body” (1978:174, 175). It is, thus, in the corporealizing of the voice that Robeson’s tone may be able to resist the theft of speech from him—the desire to extract a non-Communist affidavit or to name names. Through embodying the voice, Robeson is able to resist the disciplining of his voice by the Committee, so that it may not be “*stolen* by a possible commentator who would acknowledge speech in order to place it in an order, an order of essential truth or of a real truth, psychological or other” (175). By repeatedly “making a speech” in a tone that marks its foreign cadence, he labors to engrain his voice so that it might not be forced to work in the service of the state. In so doing he reveals the role the forced labor of slavery has played in constructing the nation. HUAC, Robeson pronounced in the hearing, is a “representative of the people who, in building America wasted 60 to 100 million lives of my people, black people drawn from the plantations [...] nothing could be more built on slavery, I assure you” (1978:429–30). In tone and words, Robeson’s burning voice dismantles the stagecraft of US statecraft, which sought to continually cast the Soviet Union and not the US as the slave nation in question.

Robeson’s tone is, following Nathaniel Mackey, a tone of “fugitivity” that labors to release the black body from servitude (1997:200).²² In linking his own voicing of freedom to a tradition of black performance and/as resistance, he attempts to escape the American asylum. Following the inquisition on the Paris remarks, Congressman Arens performed what he quoted as a Robeson speech from Stockholm: “I belong to the American resistance movement which fights against American imperialism, just as the resistance movement fought against Hitler” (in Robeson 1978:425). Robeson then interrupted the theft of his speech by Arens, who had appropriated it along the lines that Derrida theorizes: “in order to place it in an order, an order of essential truth” (Derrida 1978:175). The essential truth of treason that Arens ordered in Robeson’s speech attempted to force it to labor in the aid of Robeson’s continued confinement. But Robeson resisted the enslavement of his speech by connecting it to black performance as a mode of resistance to slavery and positioning his speech within the black radical tradition: “Just like Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman were underground railroaders, and fighting for our freedom; you bet your life” (Robeson 1978:425).

The result of this interchange—the subverting of the Committee’s attempts to steal his speech—is met with the persistent Committee complaint: “The witness has answered the question, he does not need to make a speech” (426). This ordering of black voices, which can be traced back to antebellum-era “carefully-regulated quietude” of slavery, was central to the Jim Crow practices that Robeson was protesting (Smith 2001:68). On Birmingham buses, Robin D.G. Kelley explains, “any verbal protest of complaint registered by black passengers was frequently described as ‘loud,’” usually causing the passengers’ violent expulsion from the bus.

22. For Mackey, “fugitivity” carries with it an aesthetic dimension, which is “the cultivation of another voice, a voice that is other than that proposed by one’s intentions, angular, oblique—the obliquity of an unbound reference” (1997:200).

These voices were particularly subversive because they were able to occupy space that segregation forbade, as they “literally penetrated and occupied white spaces” (1994:71). Robeson’s incendiary voicing threatens the Committee because it resists ordering, theft, and enslavement in his protest of the very institutional structures that enforced these practices.

Moreover, Robeson continued to *make* speeches, and the Committee repeatedly voiced their fear of the productive force of performance. Robeson’s engrained speech resisted the state psychoanalysis that sought to order it. Yet, psychoanalysis is characterized by the *resistance to psychoanalysis*, which, Derrida points out, is “when one has not succeeded in transforming the patient, the resister, into a ‘collaborator’ (that is Freud’s word)” (1998:17). Robeson’s resistance to psychoanalysis is a resistance to *collaboration* with the disciplinary forces of the cold war American state.

The Committee attempts to order and contain speech, which Deleuze and Guattari describe as the graphic function of “the despotic machine and imperial representation” (1983:205). The sonorousness of Robeson’s voice of revolt is to be stolen so that it might be replaced by Arens’s in the cold (war) tone of order, where writing “subordinates itself to the voice in order to supplant it [...] the voice no longer sings but dictates, decrees” (205). The taming of tone from singing to dictation, from revolt to order, from foreign cadence to innocence, inhibits the revolutionary productivity of desire.

This taming of production into representation is not only, as Derrida describes it, “psychological or other” (1978:175) but is also particular to the process of psychoanalysis itself. Deleuze and Guattari argue that psychoanalysis privatizes desire, making the analysand more amenable to capitalist interpellation. The anti-Communist/psychoanalyst operates akin to how Deleuze and Guattari describe Freud: “He mobilizes all the resources of myth, of tragedy, of dreams, in order to re-enslave desire, this time from within: an intimate theater” (1983:271). So, the anti-theatrical imperative of anti-Communism seems itself to be a state performance that seeks to encode the productive sound of performance as a spectacle of treason. This transformation explains the spectacular enslavement of Robeson’s voice as a function of anti-Communist disciplinarity.

However, is Robeson’s performed response to such enslavement that which Deleuze and Guattari recommend? They suggest that the radical decoding of signification of the schizoid operates as the revolutionary potential of capitalism’s progressive thrust. Robeson’s theatrical response is to decode (in the more conventional sense) the political operations of the postwar state. We have already seen how Robeson links anti-Communism to the construction of scarcity and the racial violence of segregation and US imperialism. Robeson also links his presence before the Committee to the history of what Michael Rogin calls America’s “countersubversive” history: “I am here because I am opposing the neo-Fascist cause which I see arising in these Committees. You are like the Alien [and] Sedition Act, and Jefferson could be sitting here, and Frederick Douglass could be sitting here and Eugene Debs could be here” (1978:427). What Robeson constructs looks a bit more like the production of a narrative of conspiracy—which is the product of the paranoid impulse (which Deleuze and Guattari see as counterrevolutionary) rather than that of the “schizoid.”

The paranoid response, which imagines and makes visible the actual conspiracies of the state to enslave and murder (both voices and bodies), can actually be seen as a radical component of performance rather than a conservative one. As Ray Pratt suggests, paranoia emerges out of the productive force of desire—“a desire to make sense of what does not make sense”—a productive performance in the face of the unthinkable. Paranoia might be thought of as a “method,” where we begin “noting the connections between things to be declared by official authorities as unconnected” (2001:9). It is such a methodology that underlies a black paranoid poetics, as Richard Wright’s 1957 statement makes clear: “I know I am paranoid. But you know, any black man who is not paranoid is in serious shape. He should be in an asylum and kept under cover” (in Rowley 2001:490–91). And we understand here that Wright suggests that paranoia is a

necessary tactic of resistance rooted in the specific historical conditions constituted by the racial state. Wright's formulation constructs an awareness of conspiratorial actualities that is an indication of *sanity* rather than pathology. Robeson's paranoia was adopted as a necessary tactic of survival. The FBI was, in fact, watching him so regularly that he could recognize the specific undercover agents who followed him (Duberman 1989:383).

Robeson's paranoid poetics of sense-making facilitates a monitoring of the "inner eyes" of the federal government, as he takes the position of psychoanalyst of the state. In the statement that he was forbidden to read unless he named names, Robeson explains that, "It would be more fitting for me to question Walter, Eastland, and Dulles than for them to question me, for it is they who should be called to account for their conduct, not I" (1978:432). This reversal was characteristic of popular African American responses to the Committee's attacks on Robeson. Langston Hughes's character, John Semple ("Simple"), serialized in the *Chicago Defender*, questions HUAC in his "imaginary session of the Un-American Committee" in "When a Man Sees Red" (Hughes 1994:86). In his hearing, Simple begins questioning the Chairman, particularly pressing him on the conflation of black resistance and Communism: "I thought you just said I was a Red Russian. Now here you go calling me a Negro. Which is I?" (85). The Chairman replies, "You are both." When Simple continues to refute the Chairman, he is finally met with the same response that Robeson received after his hearing, "You're in contempt." Simple, like Robeson, diagnoses the mental illness of the psychotic state, revealing the stagecraft of American statecraft.

During his hearing, Robeson took on the role of psychoanalyst of the state with critical paranoia as his chief methodology. After repeatedly being ordered to name names, Robeson followed the model of Simple and began questioning Chairman Walter:

MR. ROBESON: [...] To whom am I talking to?

THE CHAIRMAN: You are speaking to the chairman of this Committee.

MR. ROBESON: Mr. Walter?

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MR. ROBESON: The Pennsylvania Walter?

THE CHAIRMAN: That is right.

MR. ROBESON: Representative of the steelworkers?

THE CHAIRMAN: That is right.

MR. ROBESON: Of the coal mining workers and not United States Steel, by any chance? A great patriot.

THE CHAIRMAN: That is right.

MR. ROBESON: You are the author of all the bills that are going to keep all kinds of descent people out of the country.

THE CHAIRMAN: No, only your kind.

MR. ROBESON: Colored people like myself, from the West Indies and all kinds, and just the Teutonic Anglo-Saxon stock that you would let come in.

THE CHAIRMAN: We are trying to make it easier to get rid of your kind, too.

MR. ROBESON: You do not want any colored people to come in? (Robeson 1978:420–21)

Robeson not only reverses the position of questioner and witness, but he also works to reveal the political unconscious of state action. First, he connects Walter's position as anti-Communist chair of HUAC to his position on labor—which Robeson implies is a political support of US Steel rather than of workers. Then, Robeson questions him on his authorship of the McCarran-

Walter Immigration Act (1952), which restricted immigration of alleged “dangerous aliens,” initiating quotas on immigration from non-European countries and which allowed deportation based on political belief. Robeson reveals that the unconscious desire of HUAC is not the exposure of a “Communist conspiracy” at all, but a racially constructed capitalism that supports US Steel both financially and through race-based immigration policies.

It is not that Robeson simply reverses the psychoanalytic position that HUAC adopts, but that he refashions it into a mode of resistance. While the Committee attempts to privatize political commitment as an expression of psychopathology (“to transform deeply rooted conflicts into problems of personal adjustment” [Rogin 1987:286]), Robeson labors to publicize the hidden political interests of the state. The state, itself, emerges as the patient suffering from mental illness. It is, as Taussig (1992) describes it, a “nervous system” that must respond to any hint of resistance that might reveal the instability of its governing authority. The psychopathology of the *state* is what Rogin sees when he reverses Richard Hofstadter’s famous formulation of “the paranoid style of American politics” (Rogin 1987:286). Rogin argues that the paranoid style is not primarily the expression of minoritized groups, as Hofstadter claims, but is the dominant expression of political organization in US history, which depends upon “the avoidance or demonization of fundamental differences within America” (278). State paranoia (as opposed to the tactic of black paranoid poetics) does not so much express the psychopathology of the individuals who run state apparatuses, as much as it presents an exaggerated response to political interests: “The fantasies whites generated about people of color exposed and intensified actual conflicts of interest; interests and fantasies could neither be reduced to nor separated from one another” (277). That is to say, Robeson really is a threat to the state’s ability to maintain the cold war crisis. He discursively and tonally threatens to reveal the political unconscious of anti-Communism as an imposition of a racially ordered global capitalism. So, when Robeson in 1949 says that “the people of the Congo refuse to mine the uranium for the atom bombs made in Jim Crow factories in the United States,” he narrates the state unconscious as one that links colonial, domestic, and racial exploitation with the unthinkable prospect of what Robeson called the “atom madness” of massive retaliation (1978:237).²³

Robeson’s psychoanalytic practice operates at the state rather than the psychic level. He means to make visible, and thus disrupt the smooth functioning of the US government’s impulse toward power and order. That Robeson’s burning voice of revolt sounds like treason to the Committee reveals as much about the political unconscious of the Committee as it does about Robeson. The disruptive force of Robeson’s performance resists the disciplinarity of the state, for he threatens to reveal the stagecraft of statecraft, and thus undo the constitutive conventions upon which state power rests, and must therefore perpetually dissimulate. Robeson’s performance does indeed reveal a “crisis of sanity,” but such a crisis produces performance—a performance in which the unthinkable of state action can be made visible, in which a tactical paranoia operates as a position for a radical psychoanalysis of the state, and the performance of tones that sound like revolt.

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23. “Massive retaliation” was military doctrine introduced in 1954 by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, who asserted that the US would immediately respond to even the smallest military provocation with nuclear retaliation.

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