

# Race as Technology

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Senator Barack Obama, “A More Perfect Union” speech, Philadelphia, 18 March 2008, <http://www.barackobama.com/tv/>

## Summary of Argument

For the sake of decency, I call for a perversion of common standards or at least a productive distortion of such. I ask the reader to consider race as technology. This proposition moves race away from the biological and genetic systems that have historically dominated its definition toward questions of technological agency. *Technological agency* speaks to the ways by which external devices help us navigate the terrain in which we live. For example, the hunter throwing a rock kills a tiger from a safer distance than if he had engaged in direct combat. The rock is the external device in this case. When the hunter leaves a sign behind, scratched into the stone or dirt, it indicates a good place for hunting; the hunter uses an external marker to communicate with distant parts of the tribe. In the fields of anthropology and philosophy, technology is often defined as an intrinsically human extension of the self.<sup>1</sup> We are by nature tool-making and sign-making creatures who cannot be separated from our urge for technology.

I argue in this essay that technology’s embedded function of self-extension may be exploited to liberate race from an inherited position of abjection toward a greater expression of agency. In this case, agency indicates presence, will, and movement—the abil-

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ity to move freely as a being—and it is not restricted to individuals but also includes systems: it concerns how beings are subjected in systems of power, ideology, and other networks. To make this argument, I engage theories of technology and race from an interdisciplinary cohort that includes the historian Michael Adas and the philosopher Bernard Stiegler, as well as the concept of aesthetic judgment from the philosopher Immanuel Kant. To begin, though, I offer a plain definition of race as technology.

With its roots in ancient Greek, the word *technology* first appears in the English language in 1615, meaning a “discourse or treatise on an art or arts; the scientific study of the practical or industrial arts.”<sup>2</sup> In this definition, technology means the study of technique. It does not hold the modern meaning of “machines,” but rather of the *science* of the mechanical arts. *Techné* (from the Greek), or more commonly “technique,” as we know from everyday usage, is a reproducible skill. A talented skateboarder or woodworker can both be said to possess “good technique.” The maker or the skater extends his or her powers of execution by mastering the tools at hand toward peerless technique. Such demonstrations of skill suggest that the ability to render results rests with the maker, not the tools. That is important to recognize, as the tools inevitably change over time.

In extending the function of *techné* to race, I create a collision of value systems. In this formulation, race exists as if it were on par with a hammer or a mechanical instrument; denaturing it from its historical roots, race can then be freely engaged as a productive tool. For the moment, let us call “race as technology” a disruptive technology that changes the terms of engagement with an all-too-familiar system of representation and power.

For race to be considered a technology, it must first be denatured—that is, estranged from its history as a biological “fact” (a fact that has no scientific value perhaps, but constitutes, nonetheless, a received fact).<sup>3</sup> To do so, I rely on the figure of the “levered mechanism,” a thing that is not the main engine of a system but rather an internal part that keeps all running smoothly. It is a figure that hails from the American age of industrial invention, the late 1800s, when racial positions were being constructed for

the modern age alongside such new tools as the light bulb and recorded sound. Also, in discussing the work of the thinkers and makers included in the essay, I underscore the qualities of race that they propose, the most pronounced being its immateriality. Neither its visual markings nor its political effects distinguish race; rather, its distinction lies in its speed of change, its sliding value, its apparent and invisible differences. In this sense, race may be the “hammer,” but the question remains: in whose hand does it rest?

The examples I give of race as technology span the rhetorical, the spectacular, and the temporal. For instance, I argue that then senator Barack Obama, in his March 2008 speech on race, powerfully reframed a rhetorical understanding of race in America. Working essentially against the ocular “proof” of race, Obama, in his Philadelphia address, presented a particularly American oratory that brands race as the familial (as a characteristic of the “American family”) and as a tool he would enlist toward societal change. Obama claimed that racial difference enriches, rather than divides, the US. Like other famous public addresses, Obama’s holds historic significance, sustaining value beyond transitory electoral political news. I include the speech because Obama’s race for the presidency and that speech in particular changed the body politic.

The “Man a Machine” section of the essay summarizes some of the recent debates on the return of race in a postgenomic world within the applied and social sciences. Here, racial constructionists Jenny Reardon, Evelyn Hammonds, and Richard Lewontin face off against racial determinists Armand Marie Leroi, Vincent Sarich, and Frank Miele. I raise these debates largely to caution against a humanistic reliance on scientific proof, arguing that scientific information does not give us the totality of knowledge that we need to make decisions about human difference. The key point I underscore is the ethical aspect of race and human difference that must be attended to.

In a spectacular example of race as technology, I look at the visual power of race in a colonial system in the 1966 film *The Battle of Algiers* (*La battaglia di Algeri*, dir. Gillo Pontecorvo, Italy/Algeria), shot on location in Algeria directly after the liberation of the country from French rule. I profile the role of the women characters of

the film. I highlight the women's abilities to produce strong visual filmic effects, effects paradoxically based on their agency in Algerian culture as cloaked figures: in a culture of the veil, such as that of the Algerian Muslim insurgency, the women express their power by trading one form of public invisibility (traditional dress) for another (Western dress). Through its framing of the female terrorist, the film exposes the power relations of the local and the historically specific, even as it offers a larger lens through which to interpret the visual signs of race and the invisible aspects of agency employed by the racialized.

A critical theorist of literature and film, James Snead provides the postscript for the essay with his theory of blackness as a "sign of repetition." His philosophical and aesthetic argument—he writes of modernity and Modernism—describes a system of valuation in Western culture that has entered into a kind of "futurist shock," wherein speed (an articulation of technology) has overtaken the conditions of subjectivity created in the Enlightenment.

### Race as Technology

Is it possible to think of race as a disinterested object of our delight, as opposed to one that is overinscribed? Can race survive as something other than the remnant of a traumatic history? Race as technology tells the tale of the levered mechanism. Imagine a contraption with a spring or a handle that creates movement and diversifies articulation. Not a trap, but rather a trapdoor through which one can scoot off to greener pastures. As an object of history, race has been used as a contraption by one people to subject another. An ideological concept of race such as this carries a very practical purpose. It vividly and violently produces race-based terrorism, systems of apartheid, and demoralizing pain.

A notion of race as technology, however, moves toward an aesthetic category of human being, where mutability of identity, reach of individual agency, and conditions of culture all influence each other. As a tool, race can be used for ill as well as for good; it may become a trap or a trapdoor. I base this turn from tool of terror to mechanism of agency not on magical thinking, but rather on

the ethical choices that one may make every day. If race possesses no value without context, then we must choose to act courageously when faced with oppression—our own or somebody else's.

The goal of thinking of race as technology is greater mobility for the subject and for society, more freeness. Now, before we can proceed toward said freeness, I must account for the terms I have engaged toward this end. In regard to race as a "disinterested object," the eighteenth-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant connects the concepts of "disinterest" and "delight" in *Critique of Judgment*. This critique presents a system of aesthetic judgment, of how one may (or may not) judge the beautiful or gauge the sublime. In moving through the mechanisms of judgment, Kant points to a *necessary* disinterestedness on the part of the judge. To make a proper judgment, one must be free of "agreeable sensations," such as the feeling that a thing is "graceful, lovely, delightful, gladdening, etc."<sup>4</sup> In the section entitled "The Liking That Determines a Judgment of Taste Is Devoid of All Interest," Kant writes, "everyone has to admit that if a judgment about beauty is mingled with the least interest then it is a very partial and not a pure judgment of taste" (45). Kant draws our attention to the commingling of "beauty" and "right" in his argument. Aesthetics and moral judgment share the same mechanism in this system.

One must put aside aspects of delight, our very delight in the affective, to perceive an object properly. The act of judgment is, according to Kant, a moral activity above all else. The possibility of interest (or, in my terms, of delight) may return, but only after the disinterested value of the object has been established: "A judgment we make about an object of our liking may be wholly *disinterested* but still very *interesting*, i.e., it is not based on any interest but it gives rise to an interest; all pure moral judgments are of this sort" (48n10).

As quoted above, the purity of a judgment is the greatest achievement of a moral being. There is a mechanism or a logic to how such an act is achieved. Kant takes the reader on a tour of personal preference that moves from his own taste (one not for splendor) to that of an Iroquois sachem (chief) who appears in the "Liking" passage—the chief also does not prefer splendor—and finally to the view of the Enlightenment *philosophe* Jean-Jacques

Rousseau, who, too, denounces human vanity.<sup>5</sup> This trio illustrates Kant's allegory of bad judgment: from the wisest man to the rudest, personal opinion fails to meet the mark of true judgment, for opinion lacks disinterest.

Yet between the philosopher, the Indian chief, and the *philosophe*, we find that the preconditions for pure judgment may not be of equal access. The scene possesses a comic character found in the classic figuration of the Rousseauan noble savage: the sachem stands in for native good wit. Based on common understandings of racial difference of the period, the sachem inherently lacks the faculty of judgment and, implicitly, only harkens to the here and now of native man—the realm of interest. His presence in the passage reminds us of the larger point Kant makes: to find a way toward “pure” judgment, the *Critique* produces a contortionist subject, one taken outside of itself and away from the “native” instinct of the atemporal and the subjective. Kant uses a native to point us toward the denatured creatures we must become.

Why then, you may wonder, gentle reader, would I ask you to participate in such a circus act of a contortionist subject? I would suggest that Kant's system points to tools that can be brought to bear on an object that strongly needs to be unmoored from inherited boundaries: race would benefit from some denaturing. Like the example of the sachem, as a culture in general we continue to naturalize racial difference as lack. In aspiring to *disinterest* in an object that has been so terribly interesting for us, we can dislocate race from its historically embedded status as a de facto biological object. Creating a distance from the inherited logic of race, conceptualizing race as technology enables an aesthetics and an ethics of race: an agent can judge the strategic value of one mode of representation over another.

Race as levered mechanism moves discourses of race from the field of science into that of ethics. What does the ethical in lieu of the scientific mean? Perhaps a thought experiment will help here: let us say that there exists a research project that proves that human intelligence can be identified and gauged in genetic data and that this gene for intelligence has been located, to our surprise, in the highest proportion with Nordic peoples. What would such a

study change in the world? Ideally, ethically speaking, nothing. The global mixing of populations and questions of genetic purity aside, the artists, theorists, and scientists whose work I analyze here ask us to take race as a place of variation, not as a sign of predicative meaning. If agency means degrees of freedom of choice, action, and self-direction, then *agency* is the operative word in extending race as technology.

### Prosthetic Logic

The claim of race as a technology recognizes racialized identities as constructed—understanding that, within the construct, if you die, you really are dead. If one is caught on the wrong side of the law with the wrong color or accent, then it may be curtains, lights out. That is the “reality effect” of race. But race as technology also grasps a prosthetic logic in which local agency—yours and mine—depends on what we make of the tools at hand. If, as Bernard Stiegler has outlined, we, as human animals, are continuously supplemented by our *techné* (technology and technique), then we already function under the schema of the supplemental.<sup>6</sup> Emphasizing this centrality of technology to the human animal, Stiegler calls on the 1940s work on technology of the French anthropologist André Leroi-Gourham to counter late twentieth-century determinist understandings of race in science and physical anthropology.

In his study *L'homme et la matière* (*Man and Materials*), Leroi-Gourham attributes to man a fundamental ability to work *between* cultural, geographic, and, crucially, racial mappings.<sup>7</sup> Wolves and lions will never bear offspring that are cross-pollinations of their genetic types, for, in Leroi-Gourham's articulation, they are species that run alongside each other. On the other hand, mankind as a species walks among, sharing traits between divergent groups of people. Stiegler writes, “[Leroi-Gourham's] remark . . . sheds unusual light on the question of the relations *between cultures*, and provides an altogether different perspective on combinatory evolution and, in the case of human life, on combinatory genetics, which reveals according to statistical laws the necessity of natural selection.”<sup>8</sup>

What Stiegler suggests in his reading of Leroi-Gourham is that human history, unlike that of other species, is combinatory rather than comparative. He continues, “the history of life can thereby continue according to *new laws*: in interethnic relations, insofar as human groups *do not behave as species* in these relations, a diversity of technical facts opens out within which the universality of technical tendencies is concretized” (63). Stiegler directly connects the “interethnic” of man—the mixed status of humans as a species—and “technical tendencies,” which he posits as another specific trait of mankind. Thus anthropologists and philosophers alike deem technology a characteristic of mankind, a prosthesis that cannot be removed from the species.

In the field of media studies, Marshall McLuhan has also championed the notion of technology as prosthesis. In his 1964 work *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man*, McLuhan framed the idea of “media as the extensions of man” through a formal analysis of different technologies that extend the human ability to convey a message.<sup>9</sup> The wearing of eyeglasses, the augmentation of a cane, the supplement of mediated communications: these are all declensions of originary human augmentation. Further, if, as I argue, the prosthetic logic of human identity bears on questions of race—rendering race a technology—then the historical weight of racism may be transmuted into a lightness (or speed) of being. If race as we know it is an “algorithm” inherited from the age of Enlightenment, reprogramming its function from inheritance (a form of destiny) to insurrection provides the possibility of new formulations. The subject, in such a case, is mobile, rather than moored to the historical valuation of race as it has been sutured to the biological. Perhaps this “light subject” portends a metaphysics of race, in which race and technology are linked not to settle human limits but instead to explore human thresholds. Occupying such a position of mobility is not without its risks, as James Snead’s work on black temporality as a sign of modernity (discussed at the end of this essay) reveals. Being in flux can be much riskier than knowing one’s place, even if that place represents the lowest level of society. Race as technology recognizes the proper place of race not as a trait but as a tool—for good or for ill—to reconceptualize how

race fits into a larger pattern of meaning and power. The question comes down to this: who organizes that pattern?

### **Pattern Master: Barack Obama’s “More Perfect Union”**

With sublime timeliness of address and of message, Barack Obama, in his 18 March 2008 speech from Philadelphia, transformed for many of his listeners a dangerous media story on race into a parable of American perfectibility. In this speech, which was broadcast to the nation, Obama, then the frontrunner for the Democratic Party’s nominee for president and an international star, spoke to the country about race. He rhetorically transformed its weighty presence in the American psyche into a pattern for the future of the US (with him projected at the helm). Obama’s speech was precipitated by his former pastor, the Reverend Jeremiah Wright, speaking of white America’s “comeuppance” through the war in the Middle East. Obama used the Wright controversy as a springboard for a referendum on race in America.

The subject of the speech may have been race and the country’s history of racial division, injustice, and strife, but his talk forged commonalities between black and white, between “you” and “me.” The driving figure of the speech, however, was perfectibility, the master Enlightenment trope of man’s power of self-perfection, a figuration that comes directly from the preamble to the Constitution of the United States of America. Sustaining an allegro tempo, fast and bright, Obama began his address with the brave founding of the nation, “We the people, in order to form a more perfect union,” and placed that proud moment in direct relation to the grave inscription of the nation’s “original sin of slavery.”<sup>10</sup> It is this discrepancy at the inception of the United States—the brave nation and the grave sin—that the senator took on himself to heal. In Obama’s speech, perfection emerges crucially as a transient verb, which means that one is always in the process of perfecting the union: “This union may never be perfect, but generation after generation has shown that it can always be perfected.”

*Perfection*, as Obama used the term, invoked a continual self-making of the American narrative and the American subject. He

configured an elastic subject that gains from cultural differences and learns from hardship. He invoked the perfection of the US as a mode of national self-invention. The spirit of American know-how is applied to the legacy of industry and ideas, as well as to the nature of its people. It was not only race that appeared as protean in Obama's speech but also the prospect of Americanness itself. Obama invoked Americanness, in its ongoing perfectibility, as a kind of national technology.

In this speech, Obama placed his hopes in the "story" of America, in its diversity of people, and in its unified goal of prosperity and peace (at the time of the speech, the US was at war in Iraq, and the American economy teetered on the brink of recession). His message of change was, in many self-acknowledged ways, old-fashioned and conservative; it turned on a proposition on which the nation was founded—"We the people." In Obama's estimation, "the profound mistake of Reverend Wright's sermons is not that he spoke about racism in our society. It's that he spoke as if our society was static; as if no progress has been made." At that juncture in the speech, instead of addressing the reversal of fortunes of many working-class black, white, and other Americans in the past twenty years, the then candidate chose a more uplifting image: himself. "This country," Obama continued, "a country that has made it possible for one of [Wright's] own members to run for the highest office in the land and build a coalition of white and black, Latino and Asian, rich and poor, young and old. . . . What we know—what we have seen—is that America can change. That is true genius of this nation."

I would not describe this autobiographical America as exclusively solipsistic or as mere political stratagem. One of the qualities that moved this unlikely candidate at that time to the center of the US political stage was wonder—his and ours. Not even Ronald Reagan, a president whose legacy has flourished, could have spoken of embodying the US in the way that Obama did in that speech. As with former president Bill Clinton's "covenant" with America, or with George W. Bush's feeling "in his heart" on the righteousness of his actions, Obama's mastery of the art of making his message sound personal *and* presidential was a tour de force. By investing in the

American story, he invoked his own, rhetorically making himself—his origin, his family, and his body—a symbol for the body of the state itself. The story of the US literally became his story, as the biracial son of Africa and Euro-America, and he has consistently named it so. "This belief [in perfectability] comes from my unyielding faith in the decency and generosity of the American people," he stated. "But it also comes from my own American story. . . . It is a story that has seared into my genetic makeup the idea that this nation is more than the sum of its parts—that out of many, we are truly one."

Obama spoke in an American autobiographical auditory. In that Philadelphia address, his presence, his heritage, and his body provided the proof of the potential for self-mastery and public agency of which he spoke. In its self-referentiality, this particular speech pointed less to the young President John F. Kennedy ("Ask not what your country can do for you . . ."), or to another lean Illinois lawyer, Abraham Lincoln, but rather to a self-freed man who, like Obama today, was one of the most famous public figures of the late nineteenth century: the orator and writer Frederick Douglass. Douglass spoke often on the subject of perfectibility in terms of himself, as an ex-slave, and of America as a nation on the cusp of civil war.<sup>11</sup> Obama's use of the autobiographical may be one of the few rhetorical markers that link him to a tradition of African American oratory, in which, historically, one was the subject and the actor of one's story. Like the freed men and women in their narratives, Obama invoked the trope of self-invention as the American Dream. He also combined it with other strands of American perfectibility that included the traits of self-sufficiency and propriety (decency, virtue, as well as being a property holder). Obama's masterful combination of several performative tropes—and I call them "performative" to include not only Obama's language but his gestures and appearance as well—leveraged a space in US public discourse that had no clear precedent. He invented a subject position with the help of context, at the right time and in the right place in which to exercise his agency.

He concluded his speech with the message, "[the American people] must always believe that they can write their own destiny."

This acknowledgment of a diversity of stories that must be heard to move the US closer to perfection—to justice, to equality, to mutual respect—repurposed the two-hundred-year-old rhetoric. By essentially coupling a celebration of core principles with a demonstration of how those principles could address disenfranchised citizens, Obama attempted to straddle the divides between a legacy of black American anger, white working-class anxiety, and the aspirational vision of the American subject. Everyone was united under the idea of “We the people.” This move sought to transform historical impasse into progress toward possibility.

Obama’s great skill displayed in that speech was not his forthright and rather humble style of oratory, nor any particular trait of blackness, but rather the ability to make a unique connection across mass-media channels. He spoke to “you,” and that moved him from stranger to friend. This skill grounded the legendary love affair with voters that we saw in the primary season of 2008. I believe they call it charisma. The rock-star awe and reverence for Obama and the hailing of the candidate as a twenty-first-century Jack Kennedy by Senator Edward Kennedy represented an enthusiasm for Obama—for what he represented in his person and in his policies—proper to the endorsement of a candidate, as opposed to the phenomenon of gawking at an exotic display.<sup>12</sup> Obama did not base his engagement of race as a tool toward his ascendancy on visual trickery. The then candidate is not only of African descent, but he also *appears* to be of African descent: when the public sees him, they see a black man. Rather, Obama’s engagement of race represented part of a full arsenal of political ability. One may or may not have agreed with Obama’s vision and policies, but at least that *territory* of agreeing or disagreeing was squarely within the realm of electoral politics as practiced in the United States.

This is how I would describe Obama’s true magic trick, his art of disappearance in that primary race: he continued to skip over being stuck in one place and one identity, and he did this in one of the most powerful forums of representation, US electoral politics. Please do not understand me as calling Obama a charlatan or even a chameleon. To the contrary, he demonstrated excellent

skills in the very old game of political mastery by remaining fluid. He adroitly demonstrated his control of particular levers in coalescing power in US society. The blending of the story of the Founding Fathers’ perfect union with that of the future of immigrants and of great-grandchildren of slaves and slave owners was an expression of that fluidity.

Does race as a technology mean that Obama, by pulling this magic lever, was not perceived as a black person by his audience? No; it means that there was no prejudgment, or at least much less prejudgment, of what it is to perceive a black person. Now, it took a lot of work on Obama’s and all our parts to find space in our hearts, minds, and psyches even to approximate a level playing field. As the then candidate pointed out, that is the work cut out for the nation, the work of perfectibility. Did Obama’s achievement in the primary race speak to the progress of the American people in moving away from a de facto racist culture? Or did it speak to a political machine understanding the right message for a time and a people—in short, a manipulation of power? It has to be some of both, as the Obama candidacy was a timely one, even as it was surely an expression of power. Race became, in the hands of Obama in that speech, a levered mechanism in an overall campaign for the electorate, as opposed to a contraption by which he was framed.

**Man a Machine: The Historical Production of Perfectibility Mechanism**, as in a “levered mechanism,” is a term that may describe a crank, device, or even some kind of fantastic lubricating engine, such as the one invented by Elijah McCoy in 1872. (The Afro-Canadian engineer McCoy [1843–1929] made his fame and fortune in the US with the invention of an automatic lubrication technology, the Lubricating Cup, that became ubiquitous in mechanical engines of the time. The phrase “the real McCoy,” which entered the American lexicon in the late nineteenth century, refers to his invention.) The mechanism of race, however, is not a metal or wood contraption, but rather a thing that functions systematically. Or, more exactly, it is not a thing

itself but an array of procedures—“a means by which an effect or result is produced,” a collection of techniques that create certain people as “things.”<sup>13</sup>

Scholars of the history of race generally argue that the advent of the transatlantic slave trade originated the modern system of racial meaning, one that has enacted (and continues to enact) ideological, material, and political realities based on the devaluation of peoples who are not Western or white.<sup>14</sup> By law and by act, chattel slavery reduced people to objects or animals.<sup>15</sup> In rendering *certain* people machines—dumb and mute ones, who have no proper voice—a structural position of mastery had been encoded in the machine itself. Under such circumstances, nonwhite peoples were often treated as objects for sale, as things rather than as subjects, and this set in motion a binary logic of master/slave, man/machine, or man/beast with deep and long consequences for Western culture as a whole and for the fate of black, brown, and yellow people in particular. Think of the myth of John Henry, the “man-machine” whose heart burst when he pitched himself in battle against a steam engine.<sup>16</sup> That is a hero’s story. Some of the more brutal and perverse ways in which people have been subjected as racial beings are far less romantic. Harriet Tubman, the great abolitionist, told the story of being pitched against a mule in a dragging contest on the plantation where she was held. Her owners marveled at the woman’s power to pull like an animal or a machine. What they missed was her steely will to get the hell out of there—which she did.

This essay takes as one of its premises that we live with the legacy of a Western culture in which scientific discovery and mechanical progress were the preeminent gauges by which to assess the evolution of a nation or of an ethnic group. Michael Adas argues that technological advancement established “the new sense of what it meant to be civilized and the conviction that only peoples of European descent measured up to standards appropriate to the industrial age.”<sup>17</sup> According to Adas, the Enlightenment inaugurated an age of reason that established hierarchies of inequality through a normative evaluation of racial difference. In this period, the synchronic development of a rationalist worldview,

which valued scientific innovation and technological invention as the markers par excellence of advanced culture, also arose. Adas describes a post-Enlightenment racist worldview that spans nations and subsequent eras. In his logic I find a conception of race as a mechanism, as a tool, which has been applied with powerful, lasting results to modern society and its structure.

The stories, events, images, and actions discussed in this essay represent individual acts of transgression that reorder the power structure of a system (a particular society, a specific locale, a place and time). These acts are often short lived, but their effects carry on. The tension in these locations between individual agency (autonomy of action and self-presence of being) and the normative culture disrupts the status quo. I relate several heroic stories drawn from individuals who have gathered in loose or formalized affinities to overthrow tyranny. But to elucidate the general mechanisms that create or continue oppressive forms of inequality, we must also attend to the networks of power: the material and ideological structure of the machine.

Since the mapping of the human genome, race has made a very public reappearance as an important biological calculus of difference. The critical race and science studies scholar Jenny Reardon underlines this historical turn. “I turn to those statements that historians, social scientists, and scientists alike have cited as marking scientists’ rejection of race: the 1950 United Nations Economic and Social Council’s (UNESCO) Statement on Race and population geneticists’ statements about race at the inception of the Human Genome Project,” she writes.<sup>18</sup> It is the “postracial” understanding of science to which Reardon refers when stating, “far from marking the decline of racial science and the ascendancy of claims about human equality, subtle differences among statements about the biological meaninglessness of race acted to shore up the power of biological experts and political actors to differentiate humans racially for the purposes of knowing and governing them” (40).

Reardon’s analysis of contemporary scientific practice exposes an explicit reauthorization of race as a proper measurement of human difference. The shift we see from the implicit use of race to the new explicitly racial science appears to be a change



in degree, not of kind: “Thus, I argue, we should not be surprised when contemporary claims about the biological meaninglessness of race are accompanied by claims about the *meaningfulness* of race, as it is the former that have often enabled the latter” (40). Part of what Reardon points to is the scientific shift at the beginning of the twenty-first century that places racial differences on the microlevel of the genetic, where such differences can purportedly be read as a mark of destiny as easily as a measurement of such difference back in the Victorian era.

The primary fight between the new brand of genetic racialists and contemporary racial constructionists, such as Reardon, takes place on the contested ground of science versus ideology: each camp believes it sees more clearly. For example, on the side of the genetic racialists, in a renowned *New York Times* op-ed piece, the French scientist Armand Marie Leroi asserted the validity of race in scientific research, arguing that its reappearance in science made for a public value, that is, was of great help in medical diagnosis and development.<sup>19</sup> In another field, the physical anthropologists Vincent Sarich and Frank Miele claimed that race was the essence of evolution, implying that genetic inheritance foretells group and individual behavior. They see race as a predictive trait that determines human variation from swiftness of foot to intelligence.<sup>20</sup>

On the other hand, the racial constructionist argument attempts to liberate race from biological essentialism. Those who have participated in this endeavor for many years face the frustration of not merely the reinscription of racism in science but also, in light of new technology in genomic deciphering, the damnable speed of this authentication. Since the 1970s the evolutionary biologist Richard Lewontin has consistently argued, particularly in the face of increasingly minute scales of genetic information, that we, as scientists and as members of society, do not know how race means, what it means, and where it is located genetically. He summarized this point of view in a 2003 lecture at the University of California, Berkeley, titled “The Concept of Race: The Confusion of Social and Biological Reality.”<sup>21</sup>

The historian of science Evelyn Hammonds used the ensuing uproar around the Leroi op-ed piece to critique the field

of race and genetics as a whole. In her summary of the scholarly and scientific debates on “race as a cultural construction” versus “race as a determinist biological reality,” Hammonds writes, “those scientists who continued to use race, Lewontin argued, did so less for scientific reasons than for ideological ones. . . . For Leroi and those unnamed scientists who support his view, Lewontin’s 1972 work opened the door to the politicization of race in science. They have characterized those ascribing to the view that race is socially constructed as ‘race deniers’—people who refuse to acknowledge what any child can see.”<sup>22</sup> As Hammonds notes, this call to “what any child can see” raises the ghost of science past, such as Victorian craniology and other “mismeasures of man”; this new breed of “racial realists” creates an ontology around the visible markers of race. “Indeed, Leroi and others argue,” she continues, “[that] these clear visible markers signal deeper differences within our bodies which are expressed in the differences in our genes.” In the frame of early twenty-first century scientific research, race is no longer a purely visual category, since it is dispersed across tiny points of genetic mappings. Virtual renditions of invisible processes replace the historical value of ocular proof. The addition of supercomputing to decode the human genome intensified this virtual modeling of humanness and the central role of computer graphics in representing the permutations of genetic data. In the popular imagination, models and simulations have replaced the public display of the genitals of Saartjie “Sarah” Baartman (the “Hottentot Venus”) as the locus of prurience and exhibition.<sup>23</sup> In a sense, race has been rendered a technology by science itself, since it is now figured in sequences of code. There is no cranium to measure, but rather tendrils of information that cross continents. What used to be a matter of flesh and blood is now highly abstracted data. Race has been made information. The adjustment suggested by the concept of race as technology is one away from race as information (i.e., race considered only in terms of quantifiable—and thus reessentialized—data) and one toward race conceived as tool (as the possibility for production and creativity).

The concept of race as technology does not directly refute the recent truth claims of genetic readings that can allegedly offer

a precise diagnosis of heredity and predict health and intelligence. Very little in this analysis addresses the potential of a “truth” of a biological reality of race that determines behavior, potential, or action. Rather, my argument relies on an idea of ethical judgment. If we as a culture agree to uphold certain standards of decency and justice, then all must be included in the social contract as equals. Many people today agree that to direct statistical probabilities around genotype toward a determinist understanding of race forecloses on the future of particular individuals and groups. We understand such a judgment to be unethical and essentially incorrect. The question is: how do we advance an ethical choice toward broader cultural adoption when it remains much easier to rely on the habit of stereotype and the cliché of prejudice?

The flexibility of mechanical joints made possible by McCoy’s lubricating engine lay outside the particular engine it drove. My hypothesis is that the metaphor of the levered mechanism, with its denotation of functionality as opposed to intrinsic element, may be applied to instantiations of race. Treating race as a levered mechanism, as a function that can be manipulated in one direction or another, enables greater freedom of movement. Since the invention of race, its value as a sign of difference has continually been readjusted. Neither ignoring the history of slavery nor turning a blind eye to its legacy, a rigorous conception of race suggests that agency is possible within repressive systems and that this agency often renegotiates the tools of mastery.

In addition to agency and other such lubricating engines, I would introduce one last tool to the arsenal of race as technology. It has no moving parts or special computing power but is a time-honored mechanism by which humans have extended their perception of the world. In the 1970s the cyberneticist Gregory Bateson asked: is a blind man’s cane part of the man?<sup>24</sup> What Bateson’s question points to is a fundamental shift in Western conceptions of autonomy: the human subject, in a cybernetic system, is always set in relation to other kinds of agents, such as machines. I ask the reader to rest with the formula: race as a technology—as a prosthesis of sorts—adds functionality to the subject, helps form location, and provides information. The cane cannot, in effect,

be separated from the blind man if he is to function, and yet, as a thing, as an instrument, it has no intrinsic meaning.

Bateson’s cybernetic logic helps us negotiate a terrain that is new to us all in the opening years of the twenty-first century, in which visual perception cannot necessarily be trusted to discern the meaning of an object or an event. Coded information and invisible transmissions, such as those produced by and through cybernetic relays of all sorts, create a virtual architecture on top of the perceived reality of our cities and selves. Appearance and perception, particularly in the age of simulation, do not offer a direct line to truth or even meaning. Since we have no guidelines outside of our inheritance, we primarily repeat societal habits around race, which reflect the ingrained and unreflective stereotypes of prejudice. For example, if white is conventionally understood as powerful and privileged in a colonial society, what happens when we encounter a force that destroys the societal expectation? What would it mean to pass for neither white nor “native,” but for something in between that is thoroughly disruptive?

### **Mechanical Reproduction:**

#### **The Female Terrorist in *The Battle of Algiers***

Traditionally, in American “passing” narratives, the (usually female) black subject passes for white, thus leading a life racked with shame and self-destructive urges.<sup>25</sup> Racial passing, however, is not always passing for white. It can, on occasion, be passing into a subject position that gives one greater leverage. Such is the case in *The Battle of Algiers*, in which the viewer gets an early cinematic glimpse of the Muslim woman as terrorist. Pontecorvo, the Italian Marxist neorealist director, arrived in Algiers soon after liberation and casted locals, many of whom had participated in the insurgency and none of whom were actors. *Battle* reframes freshly made history in a cinematic space, moving from the real to the projected with such a startling effect that, forty years later, the US Pentagon used it as a training reel for the war in the Iraq.<sup>26</sup>

This film presents the colonial contest between the French and the Algerians, who are on the brink of revolt. *Battle* does not



The women of *The Battle of Algiers* (dir. Gillo Pontecorvo, Italy/Algeria, 1966)

address the black-versus-white history that dominates the race discourse of the US; instead it speaks to global colonial relations through the particulars of the Algerian uprising. While screening the primarily unseen of Muslim culture at the time to the West, *Battle* presents a story of uprising that exposes the hidden philosophy of a terrorist cell structure (distributed, not hierarchical). What we see as viewers and what the colonial forces fail to see in the diegetic space sustains a dramatic tension throughout the film. In the case of the colonial French army guarding the borders between native and French quarters, the elision of visual marker between friend and foe proves deadly.

In the film, a group of three women fighting for Algerian liberation meet in a shack with a maker of tiny, handheld bombs, which can fit in a handbag or bicycle basket or under a soda shop counter. Each woman dons a disguise that allows her to smuggle herself and her deadly prize across the cordoned area patrolled by French troops. The scene in which the women unveil and then mask themselves in Western clothes and manner simultaneously titillates and terrifies. In it, the viewer peers into the intimacy of a private home and watches women, who would be covered, disrobe from Muslim garb to Western. The youngest of the group bleaches her hair blond and puts on a sleeveless top. The beautiful, slightly older woman, with velvety movements and a low voice, puts her

brunette hair into a trendy flip and wears a smart skirt and top to go to a popular bar. With a dusky complexion and classically Maghreb countenance, the oldest still appears “native” in her Western garb. She will take her son with her to cross the border, the boy providing an additional level of decoy. The scene in which the cell leader comes to approve the women for their mission is a poignant one, eliciting mixed emotions from the cell leader and the women themselves, from pride in their bravery to fear and confusion at the sight of their transformation. Each woman hides by being in plain sight; removing her veil, she is then hidden—a purloined letter sent to drop bombs.

The effect of the women’s transformation is precise and deadly. Each moves to her designated target—a milk bar for teenagers with a jukebox, a café where the bourgeoisie relax, and the Air France lounge at the airport—and blends into the environment. The women flirt, cajole, or sit quietly, depending on the context, to pass through undetected as they leave their murderous prizes under the bar, or a couch, or a stool. They succeed not because they look French but rather because they look colonized. By blending in and disappearing, the women become lethal figures, focusing in on their targets—with their own countercolonial gaze as it were—and destroying the space. The women appear to be participating in the dominant culture even as they are sent to chip away at it and to help create the psychological conditions of terror.

The Algerian women, I argue, are passing *as passing*—neither as French nor as Western, but as something that works to get across the border. Does it make a difference what they pass for? If the goal is to bomb a café, they just need to get through. Demonstrating how a terrorist cell operates, they invisibly infiltrate the enemy—an infiltration that is the stuff of nightmares on both sides of the line. This particular brand of subterfuge, where one passes for the enemy, breeds an extremely treacherous form of simulation. The subject demonstrates a mobility that makes everyone uncomfortable, for how can we affirm that the agent is not a double agent and so on? The actor must maintain her role, keeping it pitch perfect, and then return to the fold. Yet she has already disrupted borders of identity and power relations in making the

cross from colonized subject to agitator. When she goes back to her “proper place,” she returns transformed. The complex relationship revealed to us as viewers points to a continuum in which seeing and being are put in uneasy relation. We see with our own eyes that our eyes, that what we see, cannot be trusted. Yet for the film to work politically and aesthetically, the women must be made visible to viewers. Cinematically, the visual character of their passing causes great interest (if not pleasure) for the viewer, for beauty is part of the trick.

The youngest woman leverages her situation by flirting with a border guard, joking with him about her upcoming trip to the beach and her already lovely suntan. As a strategy against a Western colonizer, the trope of masking and unmasking tracks throughout the film. In the scene just prior to the women’s cultural cross-dressing, three men, insurgents, don women’s clothing (veiling themselves) to get past French cops. The shift between “cultural drag,” what the women do, and traditional drag, what the cross-dressing men do, explicitly plays with gender by highlighting the visual particularities of Muslim culture. *Hijab*, the Muslim concept of modesty that leads to the donning of *jilbab*, the traditional Muslim women’s robe and veil, saturates the screen. The clothes become a technology of sorts within the specificities of place, time, and nation. Paradoxically, by working with a cultural injunction not to show, the film presents dynamic strategies on code switching—appearing to be what one is not. Passing as passing becomes, strategically, a transgender and transnational affair.

The manipulation of context that *Battle* presents, wherein the subaltern reappropriates the signs of power, has its temporal limits: unless the uprising is successful, it only temporarily realigns power. But sometimes a trapdoor is all that is needed, initiating a temporary transformation of the conditions of access, control, and communication. The French general Jacques Massu crushed the actual Battle of Algiers of 1956, on which the film is based. From that initial clash, the spirit of insurgency was later revived in the successful general strike of 1957.<sup>27</sup> The pinnacle of *Battle’s* visual power lies with the filmic reproduction of devastation, enacted by the nameless and the faceless.

## Difference Engines

By acknowledging a relationship between race and technology, we also recognize the ways in which certain forms of systematic violence, social injustice, and the presumption of cultural mastery function today. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, we have seen an eruption in types of fundamentalisms (cultural, religious, political) that enliven racial (and racist) essentialisms. Race as technology formulates race as a productive aspect of human subjectivity that is contingent to use or application, *like a tool*.

Historically, we have witnessed race used in a violent and coercive manner, where the concept is applied as a measuring rod, a tool of subjection by a particular group, law, or practice. The other side of such an application does not change the functionality of race (its tool-like properties), but rather changes the position of the subject, reorienting the perceived value and meaning of race. Stiegler’s and McLuhan’s analyses of technology as prosthesis alert us to the possibility that a tool, as with Bateson’s blind man and cane, may not be ancillary, discrete, or even separable from its agent. If indeed we currently find ourselves in a moment at which the material and historical terms of race are being reconsidered toward ends both open and reductive, how we engage race as an extension of ourselves constitutes a key question.

The mapping of the human genome has created an unprecedented database of human biological information. This explosion of genetic data and analysis gives new energy to statements concerning race and the “reality of human differences” by scientific figures such as Leroi and others. With this bounty of information, we risk reducing race to the sum of its genetic parts. Scientists, historians, and social scientists such as Lewontin and Hammonds have offered critiques of this reinscription of a biologically and culturally determinist reading of race.

In asking the reader to consider race as technology, I also participate in the critique of racial instrumentalization, but in a fashion that exploits the nature of technology toward the human and the affective as opposed to toward dehumanization. Paradoxically, I engage terms such as *denaturing* and *disruption* to reach this goal of removing race from an overdetermined history of lack and

toward a revaluation in productive difference. I engage a similar double gesture in linking disinterest (a quality that is neither embedded nor exclusively subjective) with delight (a quality of pure affect).

My emphasis on race as tool argues for a greater, rather than lesser, degree of agency. The oratory of Obama in his March 2008 Philadelphia address and the women depicted in the film *The Battle of Algiers* provide two examples of such a reordering of race. To make this argument, I have also theorized the mobile agent, whose lightness enables his or her being not to be mired entirely in traditional historical constructions. I use the postscript of this essay to discuss more directly the question of temporality in a concept of race as technology.

### Postscript:

#### The Aesthetics of Disappearance (Black Temporality)

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Italian artist Giacomo Balla broke with the cobwebbed history of representational painting to create, with his futurist band of merry-makers, bold strokes of motion where only still life had existed before. We see with *Plastic Construction of Noise and Speed* (1915, polymer construction) a relief painting of chaos. For the artwork Balla harnessed properties that by definition are formless—noise and speed—and massaged them into a visual syntax. It is a strategy that the Italian futurists used in sound design (Luigi Russolo), text (Filippo Tommaso Marinetti), and visual works (e.g., Balla). The delicate balance that is struck, and sometimes destroyed, is one between total disorder—a level of nonsense that disrupts all human syntax—and the *periodic* recurrence of syntax. The futurist “tempo” can be expressed as explosion followed by a syntactical renegotiation of the altered system (sound, visual, or textual).

Near the close of the century, the American literary and film theorist James Snead also took up the trope of speed—the effects of the temporal—to assess the impact of modernism on art, industry, and culture. In the medium of theory, Snead struggled with many of the same issues as had the Italian futurists, such as

wrestling with the giants of Western history (G. W. F. Hegel, in Snead’s case) and destroying icons (the dashing of images of Africa and India on the part of the theorist). If one may compare a painting to an essay, *Plastic Construction of Noise and Speed* and Snead’s 1981 essay, “Repetition as a Figure of Black Culture,” critically figure a temporality of a mobile agent.

Snead offers in “Repetition” a temporal reading of the black figure in Western culture. He discusses the structure of cultural transformation not in terms of progress (the standard Enlightenment concept) but in terms of repetition. “Transformation,” he writes, “is culture’s response to its own apprehension of repetition.”<sup>28</sup> Snead underscores that it is the apprehension of repetition in culture that constitutes the cultural shift. He supports this nonlinear theory of “progress” by compiling a list of conceptual couples that move through the essay, maintaining a continuous tempo of “push-me-pull-you”: progress/regress, secreting repetition/revealing repetition, leitmotif/cut, and, ultimately, self/other. In these binaries, the “other” of Africa remains the “unthought” of the European “self.” Snead bases his own authority to make such judgments within and between cultures on the “objectivity” and “historicity” bequeathed by Western philosophers such as Hegel. That is, Snead recognizes that the ability to produce a certain kind of critique relies on a long ideological tradition in philosophy (of which Hegel is in some senses the iconic practitioner) that defines subaltern nations, such as African countries and India, in their absence—they are stipulated as nations *outside time*.<sup>29</sup>

He goes on to argue that repetition as a figure of black culture is a disruptive modality that provokes a peculiarly late modern self-consciousness: one that recognizes the randomness—or, even more threatening—the meaninglessness of the signifier.<sup>30</sup> His key figure for this kind of temporal disruption is the cut. He does not mean the filmic cut that brings together disparate materials or even the cut-up method of collage in Surrealism, wherein sense is made across divergent media and sensibilities. This is a cut that behaves more like a break or a disruption of syntax, similar to the sensibility of the Italian futurists. Snead offers as an example of this temporal aesthetic the accelerated tempo and improvisatory char-

acter of bebop. He also argues that high modernist writers, such as James Joyce and Gertrude Stein, bring the black—the disruptive, the cut—out in language. Snead makes clear from the variety of his examples that black is no longer exclusively linked to a people but has been extended and rendered into a sensibility.<sup>31</sup> The essay posits black repetition as a sign of pure alterity—the thing that differs from itself with no other meaning than its differing. Snead argues that with modernism Europe becomes black or the “immanent.” Hegel’s vision of European progress, Snead states, reveals itself to be the latent expression of black repetition.<sup>32</sup> The signs of this teleological change, he explains, from “forward” to “circular,” are evident in the cultural artifacts of modernist art.

Snead saves the explosive resolution, the somewhat apocalyptic salvation of Western culture by black culture, for his conclusion. “The outstanding fact of the late twentieth-century European culture,” he states, “is its ongoing reconciliation with black culture.”<sup>33</sup> One might say that Snead renders the black of modernism, whether it is black or white artists using the method of the cut, into a fairly melancholy revenge on the law and order of Western culture. To gain the black, one disjoints the Western trajectory of reason—or, rather, time is already out of joint. Understanding black as negation, however, as Snead’s essay does, leaves nothing with which to replace the fallen Western paradigm except for fragments of its past. Indeed, Snead thinks along a particular trajectory of race as technology. He locates an instrument, the cut of blackness, that possesses function, but not a particular identity. In lieu of an inherited formulation of subjectivity, Snead theorizes a dispersed being, one that relies on the action of motion to formulate itself. In a sense, we end up with a subject designed like a series of Joseph Cornell boxes—amalgamations of detritus that have been preciously assembled into a new order of meaning.<sup>34</sup> Somehow, within the noise and speed of contemporary being, there is yet the silhouette, the dim figure of our mobile agent. The question remains: how does this subject find its way?

## Notes

1. See my later discussion of the anthropologist Henri Leroi-Gourhan, the philosopher Bernard Stiegler, and the media theorist Marshall McLuhan for detailed support of this statement in attributed fields.
2. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Technology.”
3. In the 1950s, UNESCO, an international consortium of scientists, announced with great impact to social and applied science research that race did not exist as a field of scientific inquiry. UNESCO, *The Race Concept: Results of an Inquiry* (Paris: UNESCO, 1952).
4. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 47.
5. Kant writes, “Suppose someone asks me whether I consider the palace I see before me beautiful. I might reply that I am not fond of things of that sort, made merely to be gaped at. Or I might reply like the Iroquois *sachem* who said that he liked nothing better in Paris than the eating-houses. . . . I might even go on, as Rousseau would, to rebuke the vanity of the great who spend the people’s sweat on such superfluous things” (45).
6. Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, trans. Richard Beardsworth and George Collins (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).
7. André Leroi-Gourhan, *L’homme et la matière (Man and Materials)* (Paris: A. Michel, 1943).
8. Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, 50–51, emphasis original.
9. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man* (1964; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).
10. The transcript of the speech comes from “Barack Obama’s Speech on Race,” *New York Times*, 18 March 2008.
11. In *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*, ed. Deborah McDowell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), one of four autobiographies, Douglass tells the story of the “beast made a man,” by which he indicates his own awakening from slave to free person that occurred well before he actually crossed into free territory.

12. Speaking at the American University, 28 January 2008, Senator Kennedy endorsed Obama and compared Obama's vision to that of his brother, the late president John F. Kennedy.
13. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Mechanism."
14. A short list of such scholars and particular works on the subject of race and modern systems of racial meaning would include Anthony Appiah, "Racism," in *Anatomy of Racism*, ed. David Theo Goldberg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 3–16; Paul Gilroy, *Between Camps: Race, Identity, and Nationalism at the End of the Colour Line* (London: Penguin, 2000); Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1996); Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Nancy Leys Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain, 1800–1960* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1982); George W. Stocking Jr., *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); and UNESCO, *The Race Concept*.
15. For example, one can look at how the black person is objectified in slave law: "The *Code noir*, a conglomeration of loosely assembled laws drawn from early Spanish and French colonial works, as well as strands retained from Roman slave law, established in the late seventeenth century the basic outlines that would govern black slavery in America through the nineteenth century. The Code attempted to address, as all slave law does, the classical anxiety of holding a person property. It is also, I would argue, a legal history that tells the story of how black became a fetish." Beth Coleman, "Pimp Notes on Autonomy," in *Everything but the Burden: What White People Are Taking from Black Culture*, ed. Greg Tate (New York: Broadway, 2003), 74.
16. Colson Whitehead's *John Henry Days* (New York: Doubleday, 2001) offers a fantastic meditation on the subject of the John Henry mythology.
17. Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 195.
18. Jenny Reardon, "Decoding Race and Human Difference in a Genomic Age," *Differences* 15 (2004): 40.
19. Armand Marie Leroi, "A Family Tree in Every Gene," *New York Times*, 14 March 2005.
20. Vincent Sarich and Frank Miele, *Race: The Reality of Human Differences* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2004).
21. Richard C. Lewontin, "The Concept of Race: The Confusion of Social and Biological Reality" (paper presented as part of Charles M. and Martha Hitchcock lectures at the University of California, Berkeley, 19 November 2003). Lewontin is the author of several books on the subject, including *Biology as Ideology: The Doctrine of DNA* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1992) and *Human Diversity* (1982; New York: Scientific American Library, 1995).
22. Evelyn M. Hammonds, "Straw Men and Their Followers: The Return of Biological Race," Social Science Research Council, 7 June 2006, [raceandgenomics.ssrc.org/Hammonds](http://raceandgenomics.ssrc.org/Hammonds).
23. The Hottentot Venus has become an iconic figure representing the misuse of black people, particularly black women, under the auspices of Victorian science. See the paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould's discussion of Baartman as a public curiosity exhibit in Gould, "The Hottentot Venus," in *The Flamingo's Smile: Reflections in Natural History* (New York: Norton Press, 1985), 291–305.
24. Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Ballantine, 1972).
25. See Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929; New York: Norton, 2007) for a canonical example.
26. David Ignatius reports on the 2003 Pentagon screening, describing the instructive way in which this feature film was being put to use: "A Pentagon flier announcing the film puts it in eerie perspective: 'How to win a battle against terrorism and lose the war of ideas. . . . Children shoot soldiers at point blank range. Women plant bombs in cafes. Soon the entire Arab population builds to a mad fervor. Sound familiar?' David Ignatius, "Think Strategy, Not Numbers," *Washington Post*, 26 August 2003.
27. For a historical account of the Algerian war, see Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria, 1954–1962* (New York: Viking, 1978).
28. James Snead, "Repetition as a Figure of Black Culture," in *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (New York: Routledge, 1984), 59.

29. In his masterwork *Phenomenology of Spirit*, as well as in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, Hegel develops profound structures to gauge the value of peoples and types of work. Blacks and architecture tend to be at the bottom of the systems.
30. The history of defining the relations of “sign” and “signified” is a long and complicated one in linguistics and literary theory. In the case of Snead’s argument, what he points to is the gap in meaning between the sign of blackness, its figuration, and the meaning of that figuration.
31. For a discussion of the white appropriation of black forms without the “weight” of black experience, see Tate, *Everything but the Burden*.
32. In several respects, the argument proves quite alarming. Not only does Snead deconstruct Western culture, but in his dismantling of white subjectivity, he never constructs a black subjectivity as anything other than the other of the white—a bad or absent reflection.
33. Snead, “Repetition,” 75.
34. This is the fate of human subjectivity in William Gibson’s novel *Neuromancer* (New York: Ace Books, 1984). In that case it is an artificial intelligence floating in space that assembles the Cornell boxes.

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72.21: *Sculptural Construction of Noise and Speed*, construction of aluminum and steel on painted wood mount, 40 1/8 × 46 1/2 × 7 7/8 inches, Giacomo Balla, 1914–1915 (reconstructed 1968). Courtesy Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. Gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn, 1972.