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ABSTRACT

In Hegel's system, all identities are unstable. Beings and concepts continually become their others in order to remain themselves. This notion of being-fluid powers Gayl Jones' novel *Corregidora*, in which the protagonist's personal identity comes from the identities of others with whom she interacts – including her ancestors, who suffered the cruelties of slavery. Blues music, by which Jones' novel is inspired, also embodies and performs the presence of enslaved ancestors, and of the African-American community as such, in present-day African-American individuals. This article therefore offers Hegelian readings, based on his theory of identity as fluid, of *Corregidora*, the blues, and the African-American identity performed in these artworks. Through these readings, I propose, following Hegel, that all identities be denied fixed definitions, in favor of fluid ones that allow for change and the sublation of otherness – even Hegel's identity. With Paul Taylor, whose theory of post-black aesthetics relies on the fluidity of racial classifications, I argue for Hegel's relevance to African-American aesthetics, despite his just classification as a white racist.

KEYWORDS

Hegel, Gayl Jones, *Corregidora*, blues, post-black aesthetics, fluidity

Hegel's Being-Fluid in *Corregidora*, Blues, and (Post-)Black Aesthetics

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When someone writes, "there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found" in "the Negro," it is understandable that in certain contexts, such as African-American aesthetics, his bigotry might overshadow his other remarks, germane though they may be.¹ Anachronisms aside, it hardly seems possible that the proponent of this nonsense could contribute to reflections on blues song or a "blues novel" – both of which are said to address the very "essence of the black experience" – even if he is G.W.F. Hegel.² Yet Hegelian readings of Gayl Jones' 1975 novel *Corregidora*, as of blues aesthetics, from which this novel takes its form and content, are not just plausible but illuminating. Hegel's philosophy can take us right to the heart of what's at stake in these important African-American artforms. Likewise, in their expressions of black identity, *Corregidora* and the songs that inspired it enact what might be Hegel's most perspicacious idea: the instability of identity. Self and other, singularity and plurality, subject and substance, creator and created continually become one another whilst remaining themselves in the fluid becoming that is being.

Few interpreters of "black" music and literature openly acknowledge their Hegelian connections. With rare exceptions, as we'll see, those who do mark Hegel's echoes tend to do so with omissions of his

name or descriptions of his ideas as racist obstructions. Hegelian analyses of blues music and literature nevertheless corroborate what audiences, authors, and scholars of these artforms claim to hear in them. Granted, the Hegel we read today isn't just the man who penned the asinine remark above. It's the latest Hegel who seems, at times, to be of almost common mind with blues aesthetics, particularly as he's read by Frederic Jameson (2010), Catherine Malabou (2005), and Jean-Luc Nancy (2002). Not that any of these thinkers mention blues. Rather, it is my contention that Hegel, his postmodern readers, early blueswomen and an important "blues novelist" sometimes perform one another unwittingly.

To recognize identity as fluid and contingent is to build a solid platform whence we might perceive that seemingly oppositional phenomena, "black" culture and "white" philosophy, always-already shade into each other. Not in the sense of assimilation: this is not a case of "white" norms, such as certain artworld politics, forcing black artists to conform. Nor is it a matter of proving that African-Americans are brainwashed by "white" culture to the extent that, having lost sight of their uniqueness, they *can* only make art in conformity with "white" norms. No: I will demonstrate that for Hegel, the becoming-otherness of self-sufficient individuals *is* the engendering of their self-sufficiency.

Further, I suggest that Hegelian readings of African-American artworks are exercises in post-black aesthetics, as outlined by Paul Taylor. Propelled by Hegel's concept of fluidity, post-black aesthetics discourage the confinement of "black" art and "black" people – by extension "white" thought, "white" people, and even racist thought – to any fixed categories. These include stereotypical conceptions that preclude those who are not black (or "not black enough"), from responding intelligently and empathetically to Afro-American art. The bottom line: we can use Hegel's ideas to propel our thinking beyond scholarly, aesthetic, and philosophical segregation – in spite of Hegel himself.

• Fluidity •

Otherness, plurality, contingency, and fluidity *constitute* self-sufficient singularity, identity, and individual being. This principle goes by many names in Hegel's *Logic* and *Phenomenology*, among them: fluidity, Spirit,

absolute knowing, substance–subject, negativity, dialectic, sublation, determinate being, self–consciousness, “the /that is *We* and the *We* that is /.”³ Everything in Hegel’s system aspires to this multiplicitous condition. Its countless names are buzzwords signaling the presence of his shadow in later thinkers’ ideas.

The gist of the principle: each individual is unified with and delineated from its other; each individual is formed by and gives form to its other. This applies to individual things, concepts, and subjects, such as human subjects. The *other* of a given individual can be another person, a separate thing, an alternate concept, or “substance.” For Hegel, *substance* is everything there is: the “totality” of universalities, possibilities, and particulars that comprises the concrete world.⁴ These particulars include sociocultural and historical circumstances, as well as the persons and things that form situations. Being an individual means becoming all these things while sustaining oneself. It means relating to oneself by relating to others. In Hegel’s *Logic*, “A determinate, a finite, being is one that is in relation to an other; it is a content standing in a necessary relation to another content, to the whole world...[I]t is only through such relation that it essentially is what it is.”⁵

In fact, existence is a continual movement of becoming–other: as I join in relationships with others, I become those relationships. And that relating alters me, changes me into the other of what I had been. Being is “a union which can only be stated as an *unrest of incompatibles*, as a *movement*” that “involves the spontaneous vanishing,” or change, of that which is.⁶ Thus, being is dialectical.

[W]e call dialectic the higher movement...in which seemingly utterly separate terms pass over into each other spontaneously...a movement in which the presupposition *sublates* itself. It is the dialectical immanent nature of being and nothing to manifest their unity, that is, becoming, as their truth.⁷

Something is sublated when it “enter[s] into unity with its opposite,” at which point it “cease[s]” and is “preserve[d].”⁸ A being becomes its other in order to remain itself. For example, a person is sublated by her sociocultural surroundings. They define her by eradicating her individuality – by placing her as “just another” member of a group (e.g. black blues singers active in the ‘20s) – which eradication *assures* her individuality by distinguishing her from other people of different sociocultural circumstances (e.g. Bessie Smith from Tracy Chapman or Belle Mann). At the same time, an individual sublates her sociocultural

circumstances by absorbing them into her identity: she thereby cancels their universality ("blues singer" applies to Smith in a singular way valid for her alone), changes and preserves it (without individuals like Smith, the category "blues singer" would not mean what it does). Even in thinking about myself, building my self-conscious identity, I formulate my uniqueness in terms of cultural norms established by others. I sublimate these norms in my uniqueness even as they sublimate my uniqueness. Sublimation is resistance and surrender, making and being made. A "person" is thus "a culturally formed rationality which has *made* itself into what it is."⁹

Sublimation is embodied, lived. We pass into others, and they into us, physically and sensibly, not just conceptually. For instance, in *Corregidora*, the physical appearance and deportment of the narrator, Ursa, cause her to be pushed and pulled in and out of unity with socially constructed concepts: "black," "passing," "Spanish," "American."¹⁰ This pushing and pulling isn't just in Ursa's mind. Other people see her slip between racial categories. They treat her accordingly, ask demeaning questions such as "What are you?"¹¹ Thus, gliding to and from conceptions is physically palpable, as people's reactions to Ursa's multiplicity affect the sights and sounds that comprise her interactions with the sensible world: "Then when I was just walking down the street minding my own business, these two [black] women in a car. 'You red-headed heifer,'" they said.¹² Ursa physically instantiates racial and nationalistic concepts just as they *become* her. She and the concepts, along with their associations and consequences, absorb and affect each other, forming and being formed by each other's visibly and audibly fluid identities.

Throughout the *Phenomenology*, Hegel uses the term *fluidity* in several contexts related to subjective self-certainty and fixed definitions, all of which are illusive. By practicing and promoting fluidity of thought, Hegel challenges himself and his readers to break free of fixed categories in general – in philosophy, personal identity, and ordinary naming.

Nowadays the task before us...consists in actualizing and spiritually animating the universal by means of the sublimation of fixed and determinate thoughts...Thoughts become fluid when pure thinking, this inner *immediacy*, takes cognizance of itself as a moment, that is, when pure self-certainty abstracts from itself – it does not consist in merely omitting itself, or setting itself off to one side. Rather, it consists in giving up the *fixity* of its self-positing as well as the fixity of the purely concrete, which is the I itself in contrast to the distinctions of its content – as the fixity of distinctions which, posited as existing within the element of pure thought, share that unconditionedness of the I.¹³

Even "I" connotes an illusive "fixity" that should be "given up." Hegel emphasizes that to say "I am I" is meaningless and empty; such an "I" can only refer to something that has no being at all.¹⁴ For I am nothing without my distinctions, which as socially constructed concepts exist separately from myself: I am "a blues singer," I am "black." Similarly, distinctions cannot exist without something to bear them: there is no concept called "blues singer" without extant or imagined blues singers.

This is not to say there is nothing we can reasonably call "I," that I can't differentiate myself from other beings or concepts. I am a singular, self-sufficient subject *even as* I am the substance of the world, *even as* I am the concepts that comprise my distinctions, fluid interactions between otherness and independence. "The I is the content of the relation and the relating itself. The I is itself in its both confronting an other and at the same time reaching out over and beyond this other, which, for the I, is likewise merely itself."¹⁵ Similarly, others are themselves even as they are the life I live.¹⁶ This too is fluidity: "This very fluidity, as self-sufficiency in-parity-with-itself, is [my and my others'] *durable existence*."¹⁷ My independence from others is my fluidity with and through them.¹⁸

Altogether, substances and subjects, their unities and differences are all fluidity. The fluid process of living is simultaneously that which lives.

Within the universal fluid medium, life in its *motionless* elaboration of itself into various shapes becomes the movement of those shapes, that is, life becomes life as a *process*. The simple universal fluidity is the *in-itself*, and the distinction among the shapes is the *other*. However, by virtue of this distinction this fluidity itself becomes *the other*, since it now exists *for the distinction* which exists in and for itself and which is thus the infinite movement by which that peaceful medium is consumed. As such, it is life as *living things*.¹⁹

This life is not peaceful multiculturalism or idyllic ecological harmony. It is a violent life. In fluid being-as-becoming, although one's self-sufficiency is preserved by interactions with others, aspects of oneself are nonetheless mutated and consumed. Fluidity is "pure negativity" and "unrest," "doubling" as "self-restoring parity."²⁰ Perpetual instability and change, constant consuming and being-consumed – arduous, painful. Otherness constantly disrupts my independence, uproots my sense of myself. I am ruptured from without as I drive myself into others. Breaking them again and again as I am broken. Hegel cautions: do not overlook "the suffering, the patience, and the labor of the negative."²¹

Spirit only wins its truth when it finds its feet within its absolute disruption. Spirit is not this power which, as the positive, avoids looking at the negative, as is the case when we say of something that it is nothing or that it is false, and then, being done with it, go off on our own way on to something else. No, spirit is this power only when it looks the negative in the face and lingers with it. This lingering is the magical power that converts it into being.²²

Lingering with the negative is the subject itself, which is substance and their mediation.²³ Fluidity is the process of being-as-becoming invaded and independent. The traumatic invasion of Ursa's subjectivity by other subjectivities, especially her ancestors' and husbands', exquisitely exemplifies and elucidates this process, as I'll describe below.

Recent readings of Hegel emphasize being-fluid as the effort and performance of living undertaken by all beings: the work of being-oneself as the pain of being-broken. I am "the infinite work of negativity," says Nancy.²⁴ This work, "restlessness," is what and how I am, think, and do. Simply by being, I am an irruption and explosion, recurrently "opening the present, opening space and time, opening the world and the 'I,' and throwing existence into its restless exigency."²⁵ This exigency is the need to "manifest" before others, an impulse in every being to give itself to others in singularity and relation.²⁶ Manifestation is the effortful self-presentation of individuals to others, inevitable in a populated world.

The "gift" of manifestation must be physically sensible. "[S]ensibility...make[s] the other come about for the subject, and makes the subject for itself in what becomes *its* other."²⁷ For Nancy, sensation is itself the "incessant movement and activity" of being-fluid, "being torn away from subsistence...away from fixed determination."²⁸ Malabou affirms: sensation is a relation that throws a subject into crisis. Sensing an other, one must struggle to remain oneself.²⁹ Thus sensation is an effort and a giving-away, likewise a mediation and shared ground between sensor and sensed. Being present, speaking and writing are sensible acts of manifestation-before-others.

But, Nancy suggests, art is a more "fulfilled" manifesting, a richer gift.³⁰ Through art we may present deeper aspects of our being-fluid that elude language – through blues-singing, for instance, as I will discuss. As evidenced by Hegel's flock of terms, no single linguistic category can capture the unstable, motley fluidity of being, the "common vertigo" that all things suffer.³¹ But the creative acts and material changes characteristic of art are effective communicative enactments of going-out-from-oneself as remaining-oneself, as Jameson and Malabou attest.

For Jameson, works are effortful acts of all kinds: ethical, utilitarian, creative, or otherwise. A “work as a message or a communication” is an effort in which fluid being-as-becoming “achieve[s] a very special kind of recognition from other people.”³² Recognition of its work-as-gift affirms the fluid self’s existence to itself. In a work, an individual addresses other individuals and the world at large by means of shared constructions like cultural norms. As such, works, including artworks, are acts by individuals made of and for all individuals. Works instantiate or perform the presence of “the collective within individuality,” a form of the otherness within singularity.³³ Jameson underscores the collectivity, to whom I present and whom I draw on in presenting, as presupposed. Nonetheless I form this collectivity by being part of it, even as it is the substance of which I am formed. My recognition of and by the collective is thus my reconciliation with a part of myself.³⁴ When the working, creating, singing “I” unifies with those who listen and respond, the “I” confirms its own existence to itself.³⁵

The importance of making and doing to the achievement of self-conscious fluid identity suggests to Jameson a “handicraft ideology” at the root of Hegel’s identity-theory. By “working,” “interven[ing] in [the] world,”³⁶ one comes to a sense of the other as oneself, a “feeling of the alien existence [as] self-feeling.”³⁷ For Hegel, this feeling is “happiness.”³⁸

Malabou’s synonym of choice, Hegel’s term “plasticity,” further accentuates the materiality of being-fluid and its relationship with creativity.³⁹ Cued by plastic artworks, plastic as polymer, plastic explosives, plasticity in the brain and other phenomena, Malabou reads plasticity as a “capacity to receive form and a capacity to produce form.”⁴⁰ Plastic beings “lend themselves to being formed while *resisting* deformation” – as in marble underneath a chisel, a standard blues form made new by an improviser, a man molding himself out of cultural universals.⁴¹ Being-plastic is “synthetic,” “explosive,” “violent”; it is between presence and absence, passivity and action.⁴² Thus, “Plasticity’s native land is the field of art.”⁴³

To summarize: contemporary readings of Hegel describe being-fluid as a self-made effort, formed by and out of otherness, that according to its own impulse must be performed for others in a way they can experience with their physical senses. Artistic creation is one such performance. Musical performance, even improvised performance of the

kind that characterizes blues and jazz, is an effortful act of presentation in which one draws, sometimes unwittingly, on sociocultural norms in a communicative gesture. This presenting is interactive and formative: in improvising blues, I draw on otherness in presenting myself to others, affecting them; and their responses affect me and my presentation.

To take a simple example, while improvising over blues changes, I throw in a quotation from Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*. The effect on my audience is appreciable: those who recognize the tune applaud my integration of the stately "Promenade," and its reminiscences of Russian folk tunes, with the rhythmic and formal strictures of American blues. In response to the applause, I plan to repeat the quotation later in my solo. With their response to my performance, my audience assumes an active role in shaping that same performance. My improvisation also constitutes otherness in the form of musical conventions, for example the twelve-bar blues form, which originated with someone other than me in some other time and place. These conventions are learned, remembered, passed down; they are attributes of the musical cultures in which blues participates. Thus my performance is partly molded by forces other than my own, and I in turn affect these forces by performing them.

To put this another way: in personal extemporizations, improvising musicians perform (play, play with, and play on) memories – their own, others', and cultural memories. Nina Sun Eidsheim and I recently investigated the diverse ways in which conscious and subconscious memories determine what goes on in improvised musical performance.⁴⁴ We found that, as much as any performance, Jones' novel *Corregidora* enacts memory's effects on blues singing. But a multifaceted relation with the past comprises just one aspect of the unending performance that is Hegelian fluidity. As I revisit *Corregidora*, I'll consider not just how interactions with the past form what Ursa lives and sings, but also how her relations with present listeners, with Jones' readers, and with the construct known as "African-American cultural identity" make the fluid identity that she makes into song.

• Corregidora •

Blues singer Ursa Corregidora is thrown down a flight of stairs by her first husband, Mutt. As a consequence of her injuries, she must undergo a hysterectomy. To twenty-five-year-old Ursa, this operation renders her a complete failure and makes her existence pointless; because several generations of Corregidora women have inculcated her with the idea that her only purpose is to create the next generation, who will bear unwritten tales of the family's dark history into the future. Ursa recounts her ordeal in the novel that bears her name.

Corregidora is the debut novel of the Kentucky-born, African-American author Gayl Jones. Since its publication in 1975, this novel has engendered mixed (but inevitably strong) feelings in its readers, exciting as much controversy as admiration. While some reviewers undertake heated polemics against the book's violent and sexually explicit content, other scholars employ psychology in attempts to make sense of Jones' disturbing plot and unusual narrative voice.⁴⁵ Still others try to rationalize the strangeness of Jones' story and its structure, which will be evident in my discussion below, by relating them to musical structures – specifically, to the blues.⁴⁶ But as Casey Clabough notes, "philosophical" readings of the book are scarce.⁴⁷ I'd like to attempt such a reading based on Hegel's being-fluid, which may shed light on *Corregidora's* themes, complex voices, and the "philosophical purposes" behind Jones' vivid portrayals of sexual violence.

I read *Corregidora* as a performance of a substance-subject performing her fluid identity: a violent becoming rife with joining and breaking. Ursa lives and sings her own traumatic past; the memories and voices of other persons; plus the cultural memories and constructions that are still considered vital to African-American identity. Ursa's identity is as much others' as her own, as much a collective and somewhat abstract movement as a personal becoming that struggles to achieve both self-subsistent singularity and communal acceptance.

The otherness in Ursa consists largely of her ancestors' memories and voices. In compulsive retellings, her grandmother and great-grandmother recount tales of their enslavement under "Old man Corregidora...Portuguese slave breeder and whoremonger."⁴⁸ Like her

mother before her, and even as a very young child, Ursa's made to listen close, repeatedly. She learns that Corregidora hired out her Great Gram as a prostitute, and fathered her grandmother and mother. History is forced to overlook this man's perversity: all written documents attesting to the existence of slavery are destroyed as soon as the institution is abolished.⁴⁹ So to create living testimony to Great Gram's and all slaves' suffering, each Corregidora descendant burns into the next the duty to "make generations" and keep the truth alive through them. As a force their witnessing outlasts every individual and all attempts to snuff it out.⁵⁰

The retellings are vivid, angry, desperate, and so frequent that Great Gram's tales are like etchings on Ursa's memory and body.⁵¹ Throughout their lives, she and her mother feel physically compelled to produce children but, largely because Great Gram's horrible story is all they know of men, they are unable to foster healthy relationships. Moreover, in a compulsion to repeat her ancestors' ordeal, Ursa consistently chooses abusive male partners. As shared trauma, *otherness* determines her self-image, the reason for her existence, the function she envisions for her body, and the way she perceives and interacts with other people. In the manner Hegel described, Ursa's determinate being *is* this fraught relationship with others.

Jones' narrative style accentuates individuals' fluidity not only in their slippage in and out of categories, but also as the absence of clear boundaries between characters. Ursa's first-person narration is actually polyphonic: her imagination speaks to her in others' voices; her interior monologues are always interrupted by other people's thoughts, usually her ancestors' or her ex-husbands'. For example, while considering how she should feel about Mutt, now that he's grown violent, Ursa finds her thoughts broken into: first by fears of long-dead Great Gram; then, mid-sentence, echoes of her mother.

Is it more his fault than mine? Naw, when you start thinking that way. Naw, that nigger's to blame. What's bothering me? Great Gram, because I can't make generations. I remember everything you told me, Great Gram and Gram too and.

*Good night, Ursa baby. Good night, Irene. Honey, I remember when you was a warm seed inside me, but I tried not to bruise you. Don't bruise any of your seeds. I won't, Mama.*⁵²

Here Ursa is addressor and addressee; her voice is hers and her mother's, sliding in and out of others, in and out of self-sufficiency.

Jones' male characters are similarly unstable. Ursa imagines a conversation in which Mutt addresses her just as Corregidora addressed Great Gram, his "little gold piece." Mutt's voice becomes Corregidora's, then that of Ursa's second husband, Tadpole.⁵³ Because she *is*, in part, her ancestors, the man who abused them is among her abusers, who likewise share his identity. By the end of the novel, "It was like I didn't know how much was me and Mutt and how much was Great Gram and Corregidora..."⁵⁴

For Donia Allen, the persistent interruption of Ursa's thoughts by others' voices evidences a "lack of emotional space [that] reflects the extent to which boundaries between characters are confused" – or fluid.⁵⁵ The same applies to boundaries between Ursa as an individual and the mid-twentieth-century African-American community to which she belongs. She lives, Nancy would say, in "common vertigo."⁵⁶

Several scholars, including Clabough, read Ursa's (private and inherited) memories of abuse as "intersections of personal and cultural traumas."⁵⁷ Slavery in all forms is considered "traumatic experience" for the African-American community, says Jennifer Griffiths, implying that the trauma and its residues "exist within the cultural and familial framework" common to African-Americans.⁵⁸ "Ursa's narrative stands as a collective memoir to the suffering endured by [all] black women in slavery as well as an articulation of black women's ability to endure," adds Jennifer Cognard-Black.⁵⁹ For Joyce Pettis, therefore, to read *Corregidora* is to investigate its reflections of "black culture."⁶⁰

The point is: for many readers, Ursa's fluid identity embodies African-American cultural identity in general, which is equally a fluid becoming of past into present, self into other. All cultural identities are similarly fluid: all communities are defined by their histories and their relationships to other communities. But African-American identity includes the collective memory of slavery in the Americas. Ursa therefore exemplifies the unique fluidity of American blackness as well as the concept of fluidity, which qualifies all communal identities. Thus, with his notion of being-fluid, Hegel identifies the condition that enables living African-Americans to define themselves according to collective memories.⁶¹

It's a struggle for Ursa to maintain a sense of individuality. Crowded by others, she rarely has room to think about herself. "I would

rather have sung [Mama's] memory if I had to sing any. What about my own? Don't ask me that now."⁶² One's alienation of oneself, during relations, enables individuality. But alienation–relation – rifting oneself, guzzling others – is painful. Hegel says "individuality" is "consumed...in preserving itself at the expense of the universal...However, the sublation of individual durable existence is, conversely, equally its own engendering."⁶³ For Nancy, "being–affected [as] a determinate relation to the other" is the essence of pain that is nonetheless crucial to individuality.⁶⁴ "Pain is precisely the element of the singularity of separation [of a self from itself]...It occurs as the alteration of its subsistence, and thus as its self awakened in its alterity...To undergo pain is therefore to feel oneself singular."⁶⁵

Foregrounding the necessity of relation–as–pain, of lingering with the negative, could be the "philosophical purpose" behind Jones' frank portrayals of sexual violence. These joinings are brutal, humiliating, sometimes incomplete.⁶⁶ In my view, these scenes enact the damaging and being–damaged that compose everyday being: the exigent but cruel penetration of the self by otherness. In fact, Jones underscores the essentiality of breaking and being–broken by demonstrating how violent relations may control an ordinary life. Punctuated by these vicious encounters, *Corregidora* is not a linear trajectory but a presentation and performance, setting–forth and enactment, of a being–fluid that "looks the negative in the face."⁶⁷

I say "presentation" rather than "trajectory" because despite all her suffering, despite attempts to revise her relationships with men, her mother, and her ancestors' legacy, Ursa seems to have changed little by the end. This isn't a widespread view. Most scholars conclude that by singing the blues, Ursa works through her traumas and looks forward.⁶⁸ However, such readings don't devote enough attention to the fact that Ursa takes Mutt back. She does so out of renewed desire and, as I read it, out of vengeance. She recalls her hatred for him even as she accepts his invitation.⁶⁹ And as they renew their sexual relationship, Gram's voice breaks into her thoughts, reminding her that Great Gram had done something – never said what – that humiliated and enraged Corregidora so that he wanted to kill her. Ursa calculates what that might have been; she returns to Mutt *in order* to do this thing to him.⁷⁰ Meanwhile he asks her not to let her ancestors' experiences color their relationship; she begs him not to bloody the relationship with abuse.⁷¹ Neither promises a thing, because they *haven't* overcome their disrespect for one another. Mutt

knowingly retains abusive tendencies, and Ursa keeps letting Corregidora dictate her actions.⁷²

The point of the continual process of self-othering and returning-to-self that comprises being-fluid isn't to "resolve" by "moving on" from otherness or selfness. Rather sublation, unifying opposites, involves both ceasing and preservation, change and remaining-the-same. As I see it, the point of Jones' novel is not to execute a narrative trajectory that relies on the positing and resolution of conflict, but to present an extreme (yet far from uncommon) manifestation of being-process as sublation: concurrent resistance and surrender to conflict. Ursa performs this process, living it; and Jones performs it by presenting Ursa's life-experience.⁷³

For Jones, being-fluid is a kind of blues performance. She calls *Corregidora* her "blues novel."⁷⁴ Ursa's singing is communicative work, a "talent" and a "craft" through which she's compelled to manifest her being-fluid before others.⁷⁵ "They squeezed Corregidora into me, and I sung back in return...in the whole way I drew out a song. In the way my breath moved, in my whole voice."⁷⁶ After her hysterectomy, singing the blues becomes Ursa's only means of fulfilling her filial duty. By singing her ancestors' story so that others may acknowledge it, she affirms her mothers' truth and their presence within her. Singing her own compositions in a striking voice shaped by her own suffering, Ursa also manifests her singularity. In Jameson's terms, blues is the "work" through which Ursa performs the "collectivity within [her] individuality."⁷⁷ In Malabou's, Ursa is plasticity: formed by her ancestors' past and her own troubles, she gives form to bluesy creations.

As Hegel recognized, fluidity's inherent instability enables it to evade fixation even in language. For Ursa, blues can go where language can't: "to explain it, in blues, without words, the explanation somewhere behind the words. To explain what will always be there."⁷⁸ Her past, the traumatic otherness in her, is audible in her songs and the timbre of her voice. After Mutt's attack, a listener reports:

Your voice sounds a little strained, that's all. But if I hadn't heard you before, I wouldn't notice anything. I'd still be moved. Maybe even moved more, because it sounds like you been through something...Like Ma [Rainey], for instance, after all the alcohol and men, the strain made it better, because you could tell what she'd been through. You could hear what she'd been through.⁷⁹

In fact, says Ursa, "I sang because it was something I had to do, but [Mutt] would never understand that."⁸⁰ He attacks her because he resents her career as a blues singer, which enables her financial independence and self-expression before others. In Hegelian terms, he tries to prevent her from achieving a self-sufficient identity mediated by relationships with others and affirmed by others' recognition, in order to cement her dependence on him.⁸¹ He aims to silence her, nullify her work, cancel her manifestation, and thus make her meaningless, effectively annul her existence.

But Ursa sings the blues even in her dreams. Imagining her ancestors, she sings them in the three-line (AAB) form of standard twelve-bar-blues lyrics. She daydreams "Old man Corregidora" in a pair of blues verses.

*While mama be sleeping, the ole man he crawl into bed
While mama be sleeping, the old man he crawl into bed
When mama have wake up, he shaking his nasty ole head
Don't come here to my house, don't come here to my house I said
Don't come here to my house, don't come here to my house I said
Fore you get any this booty, you gon have to lay down dead...*⁸²

In a subtler example:

*But you got to make generations, you go on making them anyway. And when the ground and the sky open up to ask them that question that's going to be ask. They think it ain't going to be ask, but it's going to be ask. They have the evidence and give the verdict too. They think they hid everything. But they have the evidence and give the verdict too.*⁸³

We could hear "And when the ground..." as the opening of a three-line blues with the last line repeated (concerning evidence and verdicts). Alternately, we may hear a repeated "question" followed by a repeated "verdict." The latter is still blues: call-and-response is the archetype of blues forms. In twelve-bar blues, the first two lines sound a call to which the last responds; and each line itself comprises two clauses in a call-response structure.

As Jones said in an interview, most blues lyrics are about "blues relationships...out of a tradition of 'love and trouble,'" which represent Afro-American cultural memories of slavery and racism.⁸⁴ I'll say more about this below. Here I want to emphasize that since all Ursa lives and sings are "blues relationships," her life *and its novelized presentation* are blues performances.

Jones even formats important dialogues as twelve-bar blues.⁸⁵

"If that nigger love me he wouldn't've throwed me down the steps," I called.
"What?" She came to the door.
"I said if that nigger loved me he wouldn't've throwed me down the steps."
"I know niggers love you do worse than that," she said.⁸⁶

A poignant example forms the final strains of the novel: a blues by Ursa and Mutt, in which Mutt, saying nothing in the final line, fails to provide a verbal response to Ursa's call.

"I don't want a kind of woman that hurt you."
"Then you don't want me."
"I don't want a kind of woman that hurt you."
"Then you don't want me."
He shook me till I fell against him crying. "I don't want a kind of man
that'll hurt me neither," I said.
He held me tight.⁸⁷

Jones calls this "ritualized dialogue." "[I]n ritualized dialogue, sometimes you create a rhythm that people wouldn't ordinarily use...[Y]ou change the rhythm of the talk and response and you change the rhythm between the talk and response...both things take the dialogue out of the naturalistic realm – change its quality."⁸⁸ In the examples above, speech takes on the quality of blues song. As musical performance, Jones' novel turns its readers into listeners.

In Hegel's thought, effortful and sensible self-giving, and the receiving audience's recognition, are partly formative of being-fluid. Similarly, says Clabough, "Jones believes the input of the hearer, even if the listener is also the speaker, serves as a kind of reaffirming agent for the rendered narrative, making it more genuine and beneficial for the speaker."⁸⁹ Cognard-Black describes a working reader-listener who destabilizes her identity through that of the other. "[L]istening is work, a productive strain. Listening is that tender and precarious act of attempting true empathy, of putting oneself in the proverbial shoes of another character or person...and in *Corregidora*, listening on the part of a reader is a process of acknowledging that Ursa and her foremothers can reveal something cutting and vital..."⁹⁰

Jones' blues brand themselves on our memories too. She performs consequences of being: relationships are vital even as they tear us to

pieces. She sings in multicolored polyphony; screams and brutal taunting mix in with her songs. All this is otherness that I, a reader–listener, absorb into myself – *Corregidora*, with its ghosts, is part of the substance that forms my fluid subjectivity. Ursa and Jones forcefully disrupt my self-sufficiency as I struggle to bear their violence and understand their split, jagged narrative. At the same time, their fluidity is affirmed and altered by my recognition of their struggles. In Hegel’s words, “Each is, in its own eyes and in that of the other, an essence immediately existing for itself which at the same time exists for itself in that way only by way of this mediation. They *recognize* themselves as *mutually recognizing each other*.”⁹¹ Listening to Jones’ blue fluidity, I recognize my own. Thus in her way (a performative, interactive way – a blues way), Jones brings her reader–listener to “absolute knowledge”: painful awareness of the disruptive, integral existence of otherness in myself.

• Blues •

Early reviewers of *Corregidora* named its author a blueswoman.⁹² The shoe fits. *Corregidora* shares classic blues structures and themes: the twelve–bar form, “love and trouble,” enslavement and freedom, sex and abuse, neverending dissatisfaction and the compulsion to repeat (tonally speaking, the twelve–bar blues could circle indefinitely). Jones affirms: “the main focus of *Corregidora*...is on the blues relationships or relationships involving brutality...[since p]erhaps brutality enables one to recognize what tenderness is.”⁹³ So if *Corregidora* is a blues performance: given that this novel may embody Hegel’s notion of being–fluid, can we say that blues music embodies this notion too?

In my view: yes. The meat of *Corregidora* and Hegel’s system, being–fluid, is also a motivating impulse of the blues. In blues, a self-sufficient individual, molded and riddled by otherness and collectivity, is compelled to present herself to other complex individuals. Robert Switzer says it well. “Where the blues is truly radical is in its continual breaking down of barriers...[T]he blues song has indefinite boundaries as to origin and conclusion, is a confluence of forces and events rather than a discrete entity.”⁹⁴ Jones’ fascination with the blues has similarly “to do with meanings and things having a lot of different meanings at once...Blues acknowledges all different kinds of feelings at once. How do we know, for

instance, 'Sometimes he is a bad dark man' isn't really a repetition of 'Sometimes he is a good dark man'? That's what really interests me. Ambiguity."⁹⁵ The pertinence to the blues of Hegelian being-fluid is evident, although it is not named, in hearings of classic blues by other venerable authors and in the identity-forming, community-shaping roles deemed acceptable for blues by African-Americans.

The individual as collective, the past in the present, is the fluid identity that's typically sung in blues – in African-American improvised music generally, says George Lewis, or in what he calls "Afrological" improvisation, which is guided by the principles that underlie black identity. In Lewis' view, "the African-American improviser, coming from a legacy of slavery and oppression, cannot countenance the erasure of history. The destruction of family and lineage, the rewriting of history and memory in the image of whiteness, is one of the facts with which all people of color must live."⁹⁶ As in Ursa's blues, the past is alive and sung in African-American music of the present: the identity of the contemporary African-American improviser is that of his ancestral others. Lewis implies that individual memories of slavery solidified into a communal memory, a formative aspect of present-day African-American cultural identity "with which all people of color must live."

Additionally, the African-American improviser sings a "personality" comprised of *present* others. "[T]he development of the improviser in improvised music is regarded as encompassing not only the formation of individual musical personality but the harmonization of one's musical personality with social environments, both actual and possible."⁹⁷ Thus, for Amiri Baraka, "the Blues Aesthetic is not only historical and carrying all the qualities that characterize the African-American people, but social in the same way. It must be how and what black life is and how it reflects on itself."⁹⁸

Hegel said it like this, *vis-à-vis* personality in general: "the history of the cultural maturation of the world...constitutes the substance of the individual, that is, his organic nature. – In this respect, the cultural maturation of the individual regarded from his own point of view consists in his acquiring all of this which is available, in his living off that inorganic nature and in his taking possession of it for himself."⁹⁹ In Hegelian terms, the blues is work, executed by and through individuals, that gives and presents African-American cultural fluidity to others.

At the same time, says Lewis, "One important aspect of Afrological improvisation is the notion of the importance of personal narrative, of 'telling your own story.'"¹⁰⁰ Blues is often described as a formative encapsulation of African-American cultural identity that also emphasizes individuality. As Baraka put it:

Even though its birth and growth seems [*sic*] connected finally to the general movement of the mass of black Americans into the central culture of the country, blues still went back for its impetus and emotional meaning to the individual, to his completely personal life and death. Because of this, blues could remain for a long time a very fresh and singular form of expression.¹⁰¹

Yet, this individual *is* "the African-American as such" or "the Negro as such," Baraka implies: each black man or woman is the entire African-American race and culture. Thus:

the intensely personal nature of blues-singing is also the result of what can be called the Negro's "American experience"...[T]he insistence of blues verse on the life of the individual and his individual trials and successes on the earth is a manifestation of the whole Western concept of man's life, and it is a development that could only be found in an American black man's music.¹⁰²

"In this view," writes Karen Ford, "even the focus on the individual (supposedly an apolitical emphasis) suggested by the ubiquitous blues

Slave to the Blues

by Thomas Dorsey,
recorded by Ma Rainey, 1925

Ain't robbed no bank, ain't done no hangin' crime
Ain't robbed no bank, ain't done no hangin' crime
Just been a slave to the blues, dreamin' 'bout that man of mine

Blues, please tell me do I have to die a slave?
Blues, please tell me do I have to die a slave?
Do you hear me pleadin', you going to take me to my grave

I could break these chains and let my worried heart go free
If I could break these chains and let my worried heart go free
But it's too late now, the blues have made a slave of me

You'll see me raving, you'll hear me cryin', 'Oh, Lord, this lonely
heart of mine!
Whole time I'm grieving, from my hat to my shoes
I'm a good hearted woman, just am a slave to the blues.

theme of lost love and estrangement, signifies the larger problem of the dispossession of blacks in America."¹⁰³

As *Corregidora* demonstrates, abusive sexual relationships sometimes have roots in social problems, like slavery and racism. Angela Davis points to several songs by Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith in which "representations of pain suffered by women in their sexual relationships often also

seem to be metaphorical allusions to pain caused by the material hindrances of sexism and racism.¹⁰⁴ For instance, in "Slave to the Blues," Rainey equates the content expressed in blues – blues relationships, love and trouble, the burden of otherness in selfness – with slavery.¹⁰⁵ In its "blurring of the sexual and the social," the private and the shared, blues enacts what Hegel calls the "consumption" of individuality by collectivity, that equally "engenders" individuals.¹⁰⁶

Consequently in the blues, as in Jones' blues novel, sexuality is no longer a private affair.¹⁰⁷ Consider Rainey's

"Sweet Rough Man"¹⁰⁸ and Smith's "Spider Man Blues"¹⁰⁹: explicit portrayals of horrifying sexual violence. The idea is that listeners might hear reflections of themselves in Ma's and Bessie's words, and recognize their part in the collective that shares the "larger problems" signified by sexual trauma.¹¹⁰ According to Davis, Bessie Smith's "popularity was a result of the black community's ability to identify her greatness as an artist and to discover themselves and their lives – women and men alike – in her work."¹¹¹ As such, "Smith was an articulator and shaper of African-American identity and consciousness."¹¹² Articulation or communication, bringing-forth, says Hegel, is such exigent work because the recognition of others is formative and affirmative of one's collective-individual identity. Blues is indeed urgency, an "impulse" to manifest personal and cultural "blues feelings" so that listeners may acknowledge and sublimate them – rendering them shared burdens, easier to bear.¹¹³ Ralph Ellison:

The blues is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism. As a form, the blues is an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically.¹¹⁴

Sweet Rough Man

by J. Sammy Randall and Ma Rainey, 1928

I woke up this mornin', my head was sore as a boil
I woke up this mornin', my head was sore as a boil
My man beat me last night with five feet of copper coil

He keeps my lips split, my eyes as black as jet
He keeps my lips split, my eyes as black as jet
But the way he love me makes me soon forget

Every night for five years, I've got a beatin' from my man
Every night for five years, I've got a beatin' from my man
People says I'm crazy, I'll explain and you'll understand

My man, my man, Lord, everybody knows he's mean
My man, my man, Lord, everybody knows he's mean
But when he starts to lovin', I wring and twist and scream

Lord, it ain't no maybe 'bout my man bein' rough
Lord, it ain't no maybe 'bout my man bein' rough
But when it comes to lovin', he sure can strut his stuff.

Spider Man Blues

by Bessie Smith and Harold Gray, 1928

Early in the mornin' when it's dark and dreary outdoors
Early in the mornin' when it's dark and dreary outdoors
Spider man makes a web and hides while you sleeps and
snores

Never try to sleep, mean eyes watch me day and night
Never try to sleep, mean eyes watchin' day and night
Catch every fly as fast as she can light

That black man of mine sure has his spider ways
That black man of mine sure has his spider ways
Been crawlin' after me all of my natural days

I'm like a poor fly, spider man, please let me go
I'm like a poor fly, spider man, please let me go
You've got me locked up in your house and I can't break down
your door

Somebody please kill me and throw me in the sea
Somebody please kill me and throw me in the sea
This spider man of mine is going to be the death of poor me.

Note Ellison's accord with Hegel, via Jameson and Nancy: work, communication, creation, sensible manifestation as exigent drives toward affirming recognition. Ellison also echoes Hegel's and Jones' insistence on lingering with the negative.

Some blues scholars even rely on quasi-Hegelian language, though his name never comes up. One example is the "self-alienating double consciousness" that Andrew Scheiber hears in the relationship between jazz and blues.

Given my observations above, Scheiber's concept could apply to blues alone. The double consciousness:

pull[s] in opposite directions, mapping contradictory ideological imperatives onto the black subject — one emphasizing personal, dynamic self-stylization and self-invention and the other defining selfhood primarily in terms of shared historical, cultural, and emotional affinities...one having to do with innovative freedom and the other with the interpersonal and collective affinities that bind the community to its past and to one another.¹¹⁵

In another example, Bruce Baugh points out that although hearing oneself in Ma and Bessie "opens up the possibility of understanding the world differently, it nonetheless constitutes a negation of one's self, and so produces not exhilaration but anxiety."¹¹⁶ The blues is thus a "dual negation of self and world"; as Switzer puts it, a "recovery of the experience of the negative."¹¹⁷ Hegel's resonance is patent in this driving force of blues: the painful fluidity of identity that craves the recognition of others.

The philosophical potential of blues was for many years undermined by black and white intellectuals, as in Ellison's refusal to hear "the consolation of philosophy" in such music. Davis explains that:

black intellectuals associated with the [Harlem] Renaissance largely underestimated the value of African-American blues and jazz...On the one hand, it [blues] was the one art form within black culture that had retained the vigor of the culture's historical realities. It furnished evidence of race identity and race consciousness. On the other hand, it was the target, like the culture as a whole, of racist characterizations such as "savage," "primitive," and "undeveloped."¹¹⁸

Only Langston Hughes, and later writers like Jones, Toni Morrison, and August Wilson, credited blues with the expression of philosophical ideas. Wilson, whose fictionalized Ma in his 1982 play *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* is "drive[n] to arrive at truths through voice and music," believes that blues is indeed an "entire philosophical system."¹¹⁹ Hegel would be hard pressed to disagree.

• Hegel and (Post-)Blackness •

Baraka and Cognard-Black intimate an awareness that Hegel's ideas could contribute significantly to comprehensive analyses of blues, *Corregidora*, and the fluid African-American identity sung in both. At the same time, these scholars and others seem to attempt to deny his relevance.

In an article on black aesthetics, Baraka describes blues as an enactment of "the One is Two dialectic."¹²⁰ When "[w]e blues or jazz up...One is Two. One Breaks into Two."¹²¹ Each individual is its other: singular identity breaks into plurality, and blues performs this fluidity. Baraka attributes the One-is-Two to Marx, summoning Nietzsche and Lenin in addition.¹²² "One is two, as Lenin said, explaining the dialectic in *The Philosophical Notebooks*. Everything is itself and something else at the same time, i.e., what it is becoming."¹²³ It is well known that Marx was a direct respondent to Hegel, and that significant portions of Lenin's *Notebooks* are extended commentaries on Hegel's *Logic* and other works. It's more than likely that the dialectic Baraka attributes to Lenin is actually Lenin's reading of Hegel's ideas, specifically being-fluid, rather than Lenin's own thought. Nonetheless, Baraka prefers to cite Hegel's

philosophical descendants instead of the progenitor of the dialectic that forms the crux and rhythm of Baraka's argument. Hegel's absence is conspicuous because of the extent to which Baraka seems to go out of his way to align himself with the German-Idealist tradition by naming Marx, Nietzsche, and Lenin.

In a comparable move, Cognard-Black concedes Hegel's relevance to *Corregidora* only as a representative of the white oppression Ursa has to overcome. Mutt and Ursa, *Corregidora* and Ursa's ancestors, are for Cognard-Black reflections of the "master and slave" figures in Hegel's *Phenomenology*.¹²⁴ She formulates a surmise in accordance with Hegel's own: that "masters" are only independent because slaves depend on them.¹²⁵ I read the master-slave example as an idiosyncratic enactment of being-fluid: I achieve my self-sufficiency via my relationship to others who are equally self-sufficient and dependent. Thus the master-slave dialectic exemplifies *Corregidora's* driving force, being-fluid. Yet Cognard-Black reads the dialectic *as a whole* – and here Hegel is named and quoted – as something Ursa must elude. She must "sidestep the master-slave dialectic...[because] the crucial method of protecting herself against silencing whiteness (including its agent, Mutt Thomas) is for Ursa to establish an antidiscourse to the white imaginative landscape; and necessarily, Ursa must conceive of herself as opposite to the forces that suppress, repudiate, and erase her selfhood."¹²⁶

However, I have demonstrated: first, that the "forces that suppress" Ursa's selfhood also constitute it; second, that this continual, paradoxical becoming *is* the Hegelian dialectic, which finds expression in the master-slave figures; third, that Hegel's concept of being-fluid aptly characterizes African-American cultural identity. Nonetheless Cognard-Black assumes that Hegel's philosophy represents "the white imaginative landscape" and nothing more. In writings like Baraka's and Cognard-Black's, why is Hegel's philosophy – though it qualifies a key aspect of African-American identity and formative impulses in important African-American music and literature – guarded against, misattributed, and derogatorily relegated to the realm of "whiteness"?

In my view, the answer has nothing to do with the theory of being-fluid, but with the man who conceived it, with who he was and what he thought outside this theory. He takes pains to underscore cannibalism and tyranny in his descriptions of Africa. "The Negroes indulge, therefore, that perfect contempt for humanity, which in its bearing on Justice and Morality is the fundamental characteristic of the race."¹²⁷ Thus "The peculiarly

African character is difficult to comprehend, for the very reason that in reference to it, we must quite give up the principle which naturally accompanies all *our* ideas – the category of Universality.”¹²⁸ With the boorish claim that “our” (read: his) ideas cannot apply to black people, Hegel shoots himself in the foot: he undermines any potential for universality that may reside in his own theories. Perhaps this is why Baraka omits his name, and Cognard-Black cannot see past his “silencing whiteness.”¹²⁹

Can we think beyond Hegel’s bigotry rather than consigning him to oblivion or obsolescence, “savagery” or “primitiveness” (or misreading him, as some do, in order to exaggerate his racism)?¹³⁰ As Susan Buck-Morss pleads in “Hegel and Haiti”: can we not “rescue” Hegel’s philosophy “from the uses to which white domination has put it?”¹³¹ Can we read the valuable contributions that Hegel’s thought on being-fluid can make to philosophical considerations of African-American music, literature, and identity, in a manner that allows the *idea itself* to achieve its greatest potential – even though some of that potential results from the very fact that the idea was coined by a *particular* racist white man who also happened to be a great philosopher?

Let me put this another way. Does the fact that I inherited the brownness of my skin from my Bermudian grandfather, who inherited his mahogany coloring from his enslaved African grandparents, make me more qualified than *Hegel* to speak *philosophically* about anything, blues and black identity included? Musicologist Guthrie Ramsey would answer in the affirmative. To him, the “cultural experience” of blackness automatically grants an author the “authority” to address blues and other “black music” intellectually.¹³² I cannot hold with this view. In my opinion, the very fact that we can glean insight on African-American art and identity from such as Hegel, says something about the status of race-thinking in scholarship and philosophy in general.

Recent sociological and philosophical work turns the influence of race-thinking on scholarly, political, and philosophical discourses into a question rather than a given.¹³³ To take a Hegelian perspective on this question: I don’t believe Hegel would countenance the wholesale elimination of racial concerns from philosophical considerations of identity or aesthetics. Whether it’s inherited from our ancestors or constructed by those around us, race and race-thinking constitute aspects of *substance*, the totality of otherness that forms each individual subject. Substance is

inescapable, as is being-fluid. But through them both, individuality and self-sufficiency persist – which means each individual can decide, for himself or herself, how to approach races, race-thinking, and racism.

In my opinion, Hegel's idea of being-fluid is his authority, and mine, and that of any intellectual approach to African-American identity and art. Hegel's identity is as fluid as anyone's, particularly now that he's not here to conduct himself in ways that risk suggesting otherwise. He's not *only* the ignorant penman of the racist remarks in *The Philosophy of History*, even though he is that author as much as he is the *Phenomenology's*. The latter Hegel, who is yet the former, just may have hit upon certain universalities in spite of himself. Baraka and Cognard-Black sense this, I think, despite themselves – otherwise they would not have surrendered to the allure of certain ideas.

Paul Taylor does so without shame, in his indispensable theory of "post-black aesthetics." Post-black aesthetics is "an approach to expressive culture that reflects [artists'] experiences of a world in which racial boundaries are blurry...blackness ceases to be a foundation and becomes a question."¹³⁴ "For post-black thinkers, nationalist ideas about cultural self-determination and about a unique African personality have been supplanted by individualist and often apolitical aspirations, and by appeals to intra-racial diversity and interracial commonalities."¹³⁵ Consequently, "post-black aesthetics treats blackness not as its source but as its subject," recognizing that "[d]istinct human populations, such as they are, shade into each other."¹³⁶

The defining characteristic of post-blackness is thus *fluidity*.

[T]he traditional meanings of blackness, the meanings that took their most recent form in the soul-era [1960s and '70s] politics of respectability and black power, are too confining. New meanings have emerged: new forms of black identity that are multiple, fluid, and profoundly contingent, along with newly sophisticated understandings of race and identity...We might say that to be post-black is to experience the contingency and fluidity of black identity, to have to wrestle with the question of how to orient one's self to the various options for black self-consciousness, and to do all of this while relating one's self to the similarly fluid meanings and practices of the wider society.¹³⁷

This fluidity is Hegel's fluidity: post-black identity remains itself "while relating" and "orienting" itself to equally fluid otherness. For Taylor, it is just such fluidity that enables the "post" in his understanding of blackness.

Post-blackness is not un-black or nullified blackness, but sublated blackness: in post-black aesthetics, "traditional" black identity undergoes cessation *and* preservation. "Posterizing," naming a phenomenon as *post*-something, "enjoin[s] those who would engage in it *to embrace and to reject the past*, while also embracing but remaining wary of the present."¹³⁸ Taylor finds the roots of the posterizing enterprise in Hegel's philosophy, in his notions of the "end of art" and "end of history."¹³⁹ These ideas are grounded in the more general notion that categories such as "art" do not have fixed definitions. In Hegel's *Aesthetics*, "art points beyond itself": what art means, its function relative to philosophy and its ability to represent truth, changes ("ends" or is negated) even as the constituents of art, such as music and poetry, remain what they are.¹⁴⁰ For Taylor, "race takes the place of art on Hegel's scheme...it is free to do or be anything, or nothing, without historical consequence."¹⁴¹ At the same time, in post-black aesthetics, "race is in the position of Geist [Spirit]" as self-conscious contingency.¹⁴²

The point is, the concept of post-blackness does not entail overlooking race, race-thinking, and racism in aesthetics or any other discourse. It's not a matter of casting aside the painfully charged history that yet informs African-American identity. It's rather a perspective that relinquishes *any* presupposed fixity, in the interest of ensuring that African-Americans – and Caucasian philosophers – may live and be more than that history, in addition to it. Classic blues like Ma Rainey's, and blues-based fiction such as *Corregidora*, achieve just such self-aware fluidity. Hegel helps us recognize their accomplishment. And Taylor not only legitimates Hegelian readings of African-American art as exercises in (post-)black aesthetics; but also, by recognizing the philosophical potential of the relationship between black identity and Hegel's conception of being-fluid, affirms the fluidity of Hegel's identity.

• Notes •

I'd like to extend special thanks to Nina Sun Eidsheim for setting my sights on the path that led at last to this essay, also to Joanna Demers and the anonymous *Evental Aesthetics* reviewers for their invaluable feedback.

¹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (London: Dover, 2004), 110-11.

² James Cone quoted in Andrew Joseph Scheiber, "Jazz and the Future Blues: Toni Morrison's Urban Folk Zone," *Modern Fiction Studies* 52, no. 2 (2006): 473.

³ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *System of Science, First Part: The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Terry Pinkard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), §177. Emphasis original. In my view, "absolute knowing" is the weakest term. In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel aims to develop his reader's "culturally immature standpoint" to the truthful perspective of "absolute knowing," by demonstrating how various kinds of relationship between subjects and substance sublate other relationships and the parties involved (§28). Thus, "absolute knowing" is not only a fact that the subject learns about herself – the fact that she could not exist independently of her world – but also the unstable state of being-as-becoming via sublation of and by others. "Absolute knowing" is self-conscious fluidity of identity; it is the interactive act of being that each individual perpetually performs. I find the term somewhat misleading, in part because the word "knowing" risks obscuring the embodied, experiential nature of being-fluid. Hegel himself seems wary of the term: it appears only five times in the body of the *Phenomenology*.

⁴ "Substance is the absolute, the actuality that is in and for itself in itself as the simple identity of possibility and actuality, absolute essence containing all actuality and possibility within itself..." Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller (Amherst, New York: Humanity Books, 1969), 578.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 90-91. Emphasis original.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 105. Emphasis added.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁹ Hegel, *System of Science, First Part: The Phenomenology of Spirit*, §21. Emphasis original.

¹⁰ Gayl Jones, *Corregidora* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), 70-71.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 70, 71.

¹² *Ibid.*, 73. In another example, Sal, a black woman who is normally cool towards Ursa because of the relatively pale color of Ursa's skin, suddenly becomes friendly. Ursa realizes that this is because she, Ursa, has just married a very dark-skinned man. In the time it takes to sign a marriage contract, Ursa transmutes in Sal's eyes from "passing white/Latina" to "black," thus from an object of resentment to one of approval. Jones, *Corregidora*, 69-70.

¹³ Hegel, *System of Science, First Part: The Phenomenology of Spirit*, §33. Emphasis original.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, §167.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, §166.

¹⁶ "For its part, the object [otherness], for which self-consciousness [the I] is the negative, has likewise for us, that is, in itself, returned into itself, just as consciousness, for its part, has done the same. By way of this reflective turn into itself, the object has become *life*." *Ibid.*, §168.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, §169.

¹⁸ In fact, in Hegel's view, when a mind or thinking subject fails to take part in being-fluid, denies that it is other minds and the surrounding world as much as it is itself, and instead rigidly insists on its separation from the world and other beings, this mind is diseased. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. William Wallace (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1894), §404-08.

¹⁹ Hegel, *System of Science, First Part: The Phenomenology of Spirit*, §171. Emphasis original.

²⁰ "[W]hat is at rest, is self-moving, that is, it is subject. Its abstract power to move is *being-for-itself*, that is, pure negativity...The purpose [of being] which has been worked out, that is, existing actuality, is movement and unfolded coming-to-be. However, this very unrest is the self, and for that reason, it is the same as the former immediacy and simplicity of the beginning because it is the result which has returned into itself. – What has returned into itself is precisely the self, and the self is self-relating parity and simplicity." *Ibid.*, §22. See also §18. Emphasis original.

²¹ *Ibid.*, §19. The "suffering" that attends fluidity is also apparent in the *Philosophy of Nature*. Here an organism's life consists of the nourishing destruction and consumption of external entities, and the destruction and consumption of the organism itself by disease – all of which Hegel names "fluidity." See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), §353-65. Also ———, "The Philosophy of Nature," in *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline and Critical Writings*, ed. Ernst Behler (London: Continuum, 1990), §286-95.

²² Hegel, *System of Science, First Part: The Phenomenology of Spirit*, §32.

- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative*, trans. Steven Miller and Jason Smith (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 5. Emphasis original.
- ²⁵ Ibid., 24.
- ²⁶ Ibid., 33.
- ²⁷ Ibid., 47.
- ²⁸ Ibid., 50.
- ²⁹ Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, trans. Lisabeth During (London: Routledge, 2005), 32-34.
- ³⁰ Nancy, *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative*, 53-4. Religion and philosophy are yet "higher" means of truth-presenting than art, according to Hegel's *Aesthetics*.
- ³¹ Ibid., 18. Jameson calls this Hegel's "form-problem": the challenge Hegel faces in attempting to present the fluid subject-as-other "without allowing the terms of any of [the constituent] oppositions to harden over into a specific philosophical thesis." Fredric Jameson, *The Hegel Variations* (London: Verso, 2010), 84.
- ³² Jameson, *The Hegel Variations*, 66.
- ³³ Ibid., 67.
- ³⁴ Ibid., 44, 85.
- ³⁵ Ibid., 91.
- ³⁶ Hegel, *System of Science, First Part: The Phenomenology of Spirit*, §356, 222.
- ³⁷ Jameson, *The Hegel Variations*, 72-73. Quoting Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 132. See also Hegel, *System of Science, First Part: The Phenomenology of Spirit*, §222.
- ³⁸ Hegel, *System of Science, First Part: The Phenomenology of Spirit*, §356, Jameson, *The Hegel Variations*, 64.
- ³⁹ The term "plasticity" (*plastische*) seems to appear just once in the *Phenomenology* (§64 in Pinkard's translation), but features more extensively in Hegel's *Aesthetics* and *Philosophy of History*. See for instance his discussion of sculpture in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T.M. Knox, 2 vols., vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), 119-20.
- ⁴⁰ Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, 9.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., 8. Emphasis original. See also 10, 72-3, 181.
- ⁴² Ibid., 9, 18.
- ⁴³ Ibid., 8. See also 68-9, 71-3.
- ⁴⁴ Nina Eidsheim and Mandy-Suzanne Wong, "Corporeal Archaeology: Embodied Memory in *Corregidora* and Contemporary Music," in *Sounding the Body: Improvisation, Representation, and Subjectivity*, ed. Gillian Siddall and Ellen Waterman (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, forthcoming).
- ⁴⁵ See for instance: Casey Howard Clabough, *Gayl Jones: The Language of Voice and Freedom in Her Writings* (Jefferson, NC: McFarlan, 2008), Jennifer Cognard-Black, "'I Said Nothing': The Rhetoric of Silence and Gayl Jones's *Corregidora*," *NWSA Journal* 13, no. 1 (2001), Jennifer Griffiths, *Traumatic Possessions: The Body and Healing in African American Women's Writing and Performance* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009).
- ⁴⁶ Donia Elizabeth Allen, "The Role of the Blues in Gayl Jones's *Corregidora*," *Callaloo* 25, no. 1 (2002).
- ⁴⁷ Casey Howard Clabough, "Toward an All-Inclusive Structure: The Early Fiction of Gayl Jones," *Callaloo* 29, no. 2 (2006): 649.
- ⁴⁸ Jones, *Corregidora*, 8-9.
- ⁴⁹ As Ursa puts it, "they burned all the slavery papers so it would be like they never had it." Ibid., 9.
- ⁵⁰ "...I'm leaving evidence," says Great Gram. "And you got to leave evidence too. And your children got to leave evidence. And when it come time to hold up the evidence, we got to have evidence to hold up. That's why they burned all the papers, so there wouldn't be no evidence to hold up against them...The important thing is making generations. They can burn the papers but they can't burn conscious, Ursa. And that what makes the evidence. And that's what makes the verdict." Ibid., 14, 22.
- ⁵¹ More on bodily memory's role in *Corregidora* in Eidsheim and Wong, "Corporeal Archaeology: Embodied Memory in *Corregidora* and Contemporary Music." Also Griffiths, *Traumatic Possessions: The Body and Healing in African American Women's Writing and Performance*. And Camille

Passalacqua, "Witnessing to Heal the Self in Gayl Jones's *Corregidora* and Phyllis Alesia Perry's *Stigmata*," *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the U.S.* 35, no. 4 (2010).

⁵² Jones, *Corregidora*, 41. Italics and indentation original.

⁵³ "Your pussy's a little gold piece [Corregidora's phrasing], ain't it Urs [Mutt's nickname for Ursa]? My little gold piece." "Yes." "Ursa, I'm worried about you, you so dark under your eyes [Tadpole's recent complaint]." *Ibid.*, 60.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 184.

⁵⁵ Allen, "The Role of the Blues in Gayl Jones's *Corregidora*," 269.

⁵⁶ Nancy, *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative*, 18.

⁵⁷ Clabough, "Toward an All-Inclusive Structure: The Early Fiction of Gayl Jones," 646.

⁵⁸ Griffiths, *Traumatic Possessions: The Body and Healing in African American Women's Writing and Performance*, 70.

⁵⁹ Cognard-Black, "'I Said Nothing': The Rhetoric of Silence and Gayl Jones's *Corregidora*," 41.

⁶⁰ Joyce Pettis, "'She Sung Back in Return': Literary (Re)Vision and Transformation in Gayl Jones's *Corregidora*," *College English* 52, no. 7 (1990): 789.

⁶¹ An interesting aside: because Ursa lives in multiple "times" – her present, her past, and others' pasts and presents – time does not "pass" in a smooth, linear manner in Jones' novel. Years of Ursa's life fall into the voids between chapters; and as Camille Passalacqua points out, Jones' consistent use of "flashbacks," as in the quotation above, "results in the collapse of time and reality...The persistent instability of time and narrative voice reflect the disorder and disorientation of Ursa's consciousness as she attempts to find a secure identity." For Malabou, the plasticity of concepts in general entails the plasticity of time in Hegel's thought: time itself has a plastic identity, with multiple and conflicting definitions. Time is not a container in which things exist but is itself the becoming of things as their fluid identities. The nonlinearity of time in Jones' narration is the "disorder" of Ursa's identity. "My veins are centuries meeting...Stained with another's past as well as our own. Their past in my blood. I'm a blood." Passalacqua, "Witnessing to Heal the Self in Gayl Jones's *Corregidora* and Phyllis Alesia Perry's *Stigmata*," 143, Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, 14-17, Jones, *Corregidora*, 45-46.

⁶² Jones, *Corregidora*, 103.

⁶³ Hegel, *System of Science, First Part: The Phenomenology of Spirit*, §171. Emphasis original.

⁶⁴ Nancy, *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative*, 41.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Take Ursa's relations with Mutt, with Tadpole; Gram's and Great Gram's relations with *Corregidora*; Ursa's parents' relations with each other. All are fierce and demeaning. See for example Jones, *Corregidora*, 83-84, 74-75.

⁶⁷ Hegel, *System of Science, First Part: The Phenomenology of Spirit*, §32.

⁶⁸ The analyses previously cited by Allen, Clabough, Griffiths, and Passalacqua are examples of such optimistic readings, as are commentaries by Sirène Harb, Claudia Tate, and Missy Dehn Kubitschek. As Clabough puts it, "the blues tradition is the repetitious healing formula Ursa employs to reconcile her identity...[T]he blues functions as an innovative linguistic salve for the personal and cultural violence of the past." Clabough, "Toward an All-Inclusive Structure: The Early Fiction of Gayl Jones," 651-53. Stephanie Li credits Ursa's investigation of her mother's past as the source of her own healing. Sirène Harb, "Memory, History and Self-Reconstruction in Gayl Jones's *Corregidora*," *Journal of Modern Literature* 31, no. 3 (2008), Missy Dehn Kubitschek, *Claiming the Heritage: African-American Women Novelists and History* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991), Claudia C. Tate, "Corregidora: Ursa's Blues Medley," *Black American Literature Forum* 13, no. 4 (1979), Stephanie Li, "Love and the Trauma of Resistance in Gayl Jones's *Corregidora*," *Callaloo* 29, no. 1 (2006).

⁶⁹ "I wanted to say I can't come back, but I couldn't say anything. I just looked at him. I didn't know yet what I would do. I knew what I still felt. I knew that I still hated him." Jones, *Corregidora*, 183.

⁷⁰ This humiliation is the oral sex act, which appears as a slave's means of undermining his or her master in *Corregidora* and in other novels of slavery, such as Sherley Anne Williams' *Dessa Rose*. See *Ibid.*, 184, Sherley Anne Williams, *Dessa Rose* (New York: W. Morrow, 1986).

⁷¹ Jones, *Corregidora*, 184.

⁷² Elizabeth Swanson Goldberg corroborates my point of view with her more unusual reading. According to Goldberg, "by structuring her novel in a pattern of traumatic repetition, Jones offers neither the satisfactory closure of a linear narrative (of either progress or decline), nor the

redemptive healing of a circular narrative." Even at the end of the novel, "Ursa exhibits the behavior of a person *still in pain*..." Elizabeth Swanson Goldberg, "Living the Legacy: Pain, Desire, and Narrative Time in Gayl Jones' *Corregidora*," *Callaloo* 26, no. 2 (2003): 446-47. Emphasis original.

⁷³ As Nancy puts it, "experience" is "not only the passage from a 'one' to an 'other,' but the one, in this passage, finds its truth in the other, and thus touches upon and unsettles its own ground." Nancy, *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative*, 14. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: "Consciousness knows and comprehends nothing but what is in its experience, for what is in experience is just spiritual substance, to be precise, as the *object* of its own self. However, spirit becomes the object, for it is this movement of becoming an *other to itself*, which is to say, of becoming an *object to its own self* and of sublating this otherness. And experience is exactly the name of this movement within which the immediate, the non-experienced, i.e., the abstract (whether the abstract is that of sensuous being of 'a simple' which has only been thought about) alienates itself and then comes round to itself from out of this alienation." Hegel, *System of Science, First Part: The Phenomenology of Spirit*, §36. Emphasis original.

⁷⁴ Gayl Jones and Michael S. Harper, "Gayl Jones: An Interview," *The Massachusetts Review* 18, no. 4 (1977): 700.

⁷⁵ Jones, *Corregidora*, 30.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁷⁷ Jameson, *The Hegel Variations*, 67.

⁷⁸ Jones, *Corregidora*, 66.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁸¹ See Hegel, *System of Science, First Part: The Phenomenology of Spirit*, §189-96.

⁸² Jones, *Corregidora*, 67. Italics and indentation original.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 41. Italics and (lack of) indentation original.

⁸⁴ Jones and Harper, "Gayl Jones: An Interview," 700.

⁸⁵ Allen addresses the relationship between blues and Jones' "ritualized dialogue" in greater depth. Allen, "The Role of the Blues in Gayl Jones's *Corregidora*."

⁸⁶ Jones, *Corregidora*, 36-37.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 185. Cognard-Black provides a fascinating discussion of silences and failures to respond in *Corregidora*. Particularly telling is the extent to which Ursa fails to respond to her husbands, as often as they do to her. See Cognard-Black, "'I Said Nothing': The Rhetoric of Silence and Gayl Jones's *Corregidora*," 50-55.

⁸⁸ Jones and Harper, "Gayl Jones: An Interview," 699.

⁸⁹ Clabough, "Toward an All-Inclusive Structure: The Early Fiction of Gayl Jones," 653.

⁹⁰ Cognard-Black, "'I Said Nothing': The Rhetoric of Silence and Gayl Jones's *Corregidora*," 57.

⁹¹ Hegel, *System of Science, First Part: The Phenomenology of Spirit*, §184. Emphasis original.

⁹² For instance, Raymond Sokolov, "A Woman Who Sings Blues: *Corregidora*," *New York Times Book Review* (25 May 1975), Ivan Webster, "Really the Blues," *Time* 105 (16 June 1975), Tate, "*Corregidora*: Ursa's Blues Medley." Interestingly, Andrew Scheiber makes the quasi-Hegelian implication that for Jones and other African-American writers coming of age during the 1970s, the very gesture of summoning blues, which was at the height of its popularity in the 1920s, is like a flashback that unites the past and present and engages the fluidity of time. Scheiber writes that "blues had been effectively superseded as a point of musical cultural reference by other, more urban and contemporary black musical forms [e.g. free jazz] – making its literary resuscitation by writers like Jones, [Alice] Walker, and [Toni] Morrison a significant contrarian gesture in an intellectual atmosphere that, in Madhu Dubey's apt phrasing, is characterized by an 'opposition of the oppressive past and the free future.'" Scheiber, "Jazz and the Future Blues: Toni Morrison's Urban Folk Zone." Scheiber quotes Madhu Dubey, *Black Women Novelists and the Nationalist Aesthetic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 95.

⁹³ Gayl Jones and Claudia C. Tate, "An Interview with Gayl Jones," *Black American Literature Forum* 13, no. 4 (1979): 147.

⁹⁴ Robert Switzer, "Signifying the Blues," *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, no. 21 (2001): 41-48.

⁹⁵ Jones and Harper, "Gayl Jones: An Interview," 700.

- ⁹⁶ George E. Lewis, "Improvised Music after 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives," *Black Music Research Journal* 16, no. 1 (1996): 233.
- ⁹⁷ *Ibid.*: 234-35.
- ⁹⁸ Imamu Amiri Baraka, "The Blues Aesthetic and the Black Aesthetic: Aesthetics as the Continuing Political History of a Culture," *Black Music Research Journal* 11, no. 2 (1991): 105.
- ⁹⁹ Hegel, *System of Science, First Part: The Phenomenology of Spirit*, §28.
- ¹⁰⁰ Lewis, "Improvised Music after 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives," 241.
- ¹⁰¹ Imamu Amiri Baraka, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York: W. Morrow, 1963), 67.
- ¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 66.
- ¹⁰³ Karen J. Ford, "These Old Writing Paper Blues: The Blues Stanza and Literary Poetry," *College Literature* 24, no. 3 (1997): 95.
- ¹⁰⁴ Angela Y. Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (New York: Pantheon, 1998), 81.
- ¹⁰⁵ Transcribed by Angela Davis, in *Blues Legacies* 243.
- ¹⁰⁶ Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday*, 81, Hegel, *System of Science, First Part: The Phenomenology of Spirit*, §171., quoted in full above.
- ¹⁰⁷ "Sexuality is not privatized in the blues. Rather, it is represented as shared experience that is socially produced." Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday*, 91-92.
- ¹⁰⁸ Transcribed by Angela Davis, in *Blues Legacies* 247.
- ¹⁰⁹ Transcribed by Angela Davis, in *Blues Legacies* 339.
- ¹¹⁰ R.A. Lawson says it nicely. "The blues was a collective form of commiserating; bluesmen sang of their sad existence, and from 'this [the] listener took heart for he shared his predicaments and his fortunes and was reassured' that 'they were common to them both.'" R. A. Lawson, "The First Century of Blues: One Hundred Years of Hearing and Interpreting the Music and the Musicians," *Southern Cultures* 13, no. 3 (2007): 54. Lawson draws from Paul Oliver, *Blues Fell This Morning: Meaning in the Blues* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 269-73. And Samuel Charters, *The Poetry of the Blues* (New York: Oak Publications, 1963), 107-08.
- ¹¹¹ Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday*, 142.
- ¹¹² *Ibid.*
- ¹¹³ "Blues feelings" is Ursa's turn of phrase. Jones, *Corregidora*, 50.
- ¹¹⁴ Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (New York: Random House, 1953), 78.
- ¹¹⁵ Scheiber, "Jazz and the Future Blues: Toni Morrison's Urban Folk Zone," 482-83.
- ¹¹⁶ Baugh, Bruce. "Left-Wing Elitism: Adorno on Popular Culture," quoted in Switzer, "Signifying the Blues," 39.
- ¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 39-40.
- ¹¹⁸ Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday*, 149-50.
- ¹¹⁹ August Wilson, quoted in Doris Davis, "'Mouths on Fire': August Wilson's Blueswomen," *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the U.S.* 35, no. 4 (2010): 166.
- ¹²⁰ Baraka, "The Blues Aesthetic and the Black Aesthetic: Aesthetics as the Continuing Political History of a Culture," 104.
- ¹²¹ The passage in full: "Roll over, Beethoven, we cry, and relate it to us over and under any way. We blues or jazz up, syncopate any and every. We are incumaters [sic] and syncopaters. One is Two. One Breaks into Two." *Ibid.*: 106.
- ¹²² "Two is One, says [sic] [Thelonious] Monk and [Karl] Marx." *Ibid.*: 104. For Baraka on Nietzsche, see 107.
- ¹²³ *Ibid.*: 106.
- ¹²⁴ Hegel, *System of Science, First Part: The Phenomenology of Spirit*, §189-96.
- ¹²⁵ Cognard-Black, "'I Said Nothing': The Rhetoric of Silence and Gayl Jones's *Corregidora*," 51.
- ¹²⁶ *Ibid.*: 52. See 50-51 for Cognard-Black's readings of Hegel.
- ¹²⁷ Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 113.
- ¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 110. Emphasis original.
- ¹²⁹ Indeed, Babacar Camara observes that "Many African scholars [not just African-Americans] reject G.W.F. Hegel because of his theses on Africa." Babacar Camara, "The Falsity of Hegel's Theses on Africa," *Journal of Black Studies* 36, no. 1 (2005): 82. Susan Buck-Morss makes a laudable but

halfhearted attempt to rescue Hegel by proposing that the master-slave dialectic, in which slaves emerge victorious, might have been inspired by the successful revolution of Haitian slaves that took place during Hegel's time, and which he probably read about. She points out that his *Philosophy of History* and *Philosophy of Right* call for the abolition of slavery, suggesting that Hegel praised the victorious black Haitians in his thought and conversation. But he made no attempt to acknowledge them in the *Philosophy of History* which, Buck-Morss suggests, might not have received the care that went into his other work – although this is no excuse for racism. Buck-Morss concedes that "Hegel was perhaps always a cultural racist if not a biological one." Susan Buck-Morss, "Hegel and Haiti," *Critical Inquiry* 26, no. 4 (2000): 864. See also ———, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009).

¹³⁰ Here I am thinking of Ronald Jackson, who misreads Hegelian fluidity. Jackson takes this to mean that what something is, is measured according to and made valid by what it is not – ergo a black person is, is decided upon and judged legitimate (or not) by white people. Hence in order to survive, according to the terms of Hegelian dialectics as Jackson reads them, black people must assimilate to whiteness. "[I]f the Hegelian dialectic is practiced and reified by Blacks," Jackson says, "then only one destiny can result: 'Whiteness.'" This interpretation deliberately exacerbates Hegel's impression as a racist. However, as my analysis has shown: driven by sublation (which is at once cessation and preservation), Hegelian fluidity entails not the assimilation of oneself to the other, but *becoming-other whilst remaining oneself*. What results is not assimilation but a plural identity – a notion quite the opposite of racism. Ronald L. Jackson, "Black 'Manhood' as Xenophobe: An Ontological Exploration of the Hegelian Dialectic," *Journal of Black Studies* 27, no. 6 (1997): 742. I have borrowed Angela Davis' terms, cited above: "savage" and "primitive," drawn from early black intellectuals' dismissals of blues.

¹³¹ Buck-Morss, "Hegel and Haiti," 865.

¹³² Guthrie P. Ramsey, "Who Hears Here? Black Music, Critical Bias, and the Musicological Skin Trade," *The Musical Quarterly* 85, no. 1 (2001): 18. Ramsey acknowledges the "cultural chauvinism" that sometimes surrounds scholarship on black music: a certain "territorialism, mysticism, or, if I might use a vernacularism here, 'it's a black thing, you wouldn't understand' sloganism" (6). Yet he claims that an analysis of music by a black artist must convey "'professional' or 'confessional' blackness" (32). Confessional blackness is synonymous with "cultural experience" or "childhood experience" which, if one has the right kind, bestow upon one the "authority" to speak about black music (18, 35). Professional blackness "consists of complex theoretical explanations of identity and culture" of unspecified nature that scholars may acquire through "specialized training" (32-33). According to Ramsey, even an eminent (white) musicologist like Gary Tomlinson should justify his analytical insights on African-American jazz-rock fusion artists, by tying them to his biographical experiences (25).

¹³³ See for instance Joshua Glasgow, "A Third Way in the Race Debate," *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 14, no. 2 (2006), Joshua Glasgow and Julie Schulman, "Is Race-Thinking Biological or Social, and Does It Matter for Racism? An Exploratory Study," *The Journal of Social Philosophy* 41, no. 3 (2010), Kwame Anthony Appiah and Amy Guttmann, *Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998). See also Paul Taylor's work, cited below.

¹³⁴ Paul C. Taylor, "Black Aesthetics," *Philosophy Compass* 5, no. 1 (2010): 10.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*: 10, 3.

¹³⁷ ———, "Post-Black, Old Black," *African American Review* 41, no. 4 (2007): 626-27.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*: 629. Emphasis added.

¹³⁹ The "end of art" and "end of history" appear in the *Aesthetics* and *Phenomenology*, respectively. *Ibid.*: 636-40.

¹⁴⁰ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T.M. Knox, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), 103.

¹⁴¹ Taylor, "Post-Black, Old Black," 638.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

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