

Introduction

The Haitian Revolution as Refusal and Reuse

The cost of Americanization, of equality, is to forget. In black culture a narrative of antagonism is inscribed in its memory.

Hortense Spillers

To make a transition successfully, you need to be armed.

Samuel R. Delany

The Haitian Revolution is a grand refusal to forget. In defiance of our current conjuncture's predilection for amnesia, Haiti as the first slave rebellion turned successful revolution (success defined here as the creation of a sovereign state) continues to be an inspired site of investigation for a remarkable range of artists and activist-intellectuals in the African Diaspora. Qualifying the Haitian Revolution as such assumes a particular set of understandings about *firsts* (the question of beginnings) and *successes* (the question of ends). Such assumptions merit interrogation, in other words, they are sites of and sites for critical thought. The plays and related objects of study examined in this book constitute staged repetitions of the Haitian Revolution. In our current political climate where revolutionary antecedents are, at best, shortchanged for their theoretical richness and, at worst, forgotten, Haiti brazenly insists on reminding. Radical historiography on the Haitian Revolution, chronicling its combative trials and tribulations, constitutes one of the most fecund, conceptually rich subfields in African diasporic studies.¹ Its heroes, its plotlines, and its military-strategic components continue to warrant novelistic, operatic, cinematic, and painterly attention. The following is an examination of twentieth-century theatrical production's relationship to the political and methodological insights of the long nineteenth century's Haitian

Revolution from a tragic vantage point (tragedy as form and philosophical posture). It builds upon previous scholarship on C.L.R. James and Haiti to argue that we must pay greater attention to the aesthetic properties and speculative potential of such writings.

Haitian revolutionary strivings chart a path where everything seems to have happened first, if not earlier: (1) a sequence of antislavery armed resistance and *marronage* cohering as state sovereignty; (2) the military defeat of all the major European colonial powers constituting a palimpsest war of decolonization; (3) the hesitancy of the United States to recognize the new nation as preface to multiple U.S.-led military interventions and occupations; (4) ruthless almost immediate postwar reincorporation into a global matrix of insidious economic debt; and (5) Haitian dilemmas around organizing production (the collectivization of agriculture—Toussaint’s policy of “military agrarianism”) that precede twentieth-century challenges in Russia and China but are often prefixed with proper names from these sites, for example, referring to certain nineteenth-century Haitian agrarian production designs as “Stalinist.” Haitian revolutionary precedents generate so much *use* in comparative, analogical, geopolitical, and, ultimately, theoretical valences.

This book is a call to take questions of radical leadership seriously. Dramatic staging, in its vocation of arranging bodies onstage, is well equipped to think both problems of leadership, as well as what Michael McKeon concisely identifies as a key tenet of dialectical method: “All ‘wholes’ may be, on the one hand, divided into their constituent parts, and on the other, collected into more inclusive wholes of which they themselves constitute one part.”² The Haitian revolutionary dramas presented in this study constitute exercises in thinking sets in motion. Such sets refuse to relinquish the challenge of staging the dialectical dance of part/whole, division/recombination, assertion of presence/absence—the active working toward one’s own redundancy—all of which is implied when utilizing the expedient shorthand: the interdependence of leadership and mass base.

I offer readings of dramatic performances by C.L.R. James, Edouard Glissant, Lorraine Hansberry, Paul Robeson, Eugene O’Neill, Sergei Eisenstein, and Orson Welles as sites of political knowledge. I conclude with a discussion of Malcolm X’s 1964 Oxford Union Presentation Debate’s interpretation of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*’s “taking up arms against a sea of troubles” (III.i.57–60) and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*’s brief mention of philosopher Baruch Spinoza’s excommunication, which I relate to a dream detailed in Spinoza’s *Letter 17*. This book’s central claim is both urgent

and modest: quite simply it argues that the aesthetic properties bound to this cluster of dramatic works offers up political insight and constitutes a field ripe for speculative thinking on the interrelationship between Black radical pasts, presents, and futures, as well as the continued relevance of leaders and masses in Black revolutionary struggle. Radical reading has to reclaim the freedom to trace many kinds of mediation, from the inconspicuous to the world-historical, from dream-work to the *actuality* of revolution, from the anecdotal and gestural to the conceptual and *geistige*.³ Evoking Jean-Luc Godard's designs for cinema, these plays constitute a theater of ideas. I advance prior attempts to talk about aesthetic organization's relationship to revolutionary organization. C.L.R. James's notion of tragedy developed in his theatrical and historical writings on Haiti foregrounds questions of revolutionary subject formation and representation central to those working from a Black radical vantage point. Theatrical and aesthetic endeavors act as springboard for thinking about the problem of leaders and masses in processes of revolutionary overhaul—the intersection of stagecraft with statecraft. Tragic form facilitates balancing the imperative to theorize individual political leadership's interdependence on collective mobilization and collective knowledge. Tragedy as the literary form par excellence for staging the dialectic of freedom and necessity is configured theoretically from a Black radical position as the interplay between democracy, self-determination,⁴ and revolution. The problem of the gulf separating leader and mass staged by this cluster of plays should be thought of as symptomatic of the project of Black Revolution's labor to think the constitutive (tragic) gap and dialectical relationship between: (1) democracy: radical inclusion within existing political coordinates; (2) self-determination:⁵ the right to choose within existing political coordinates; and (3) revolutionary overhaul: transformation of existent political coordinates into something radically new. From the orientation of a global Black Liberation Movement each of these three at any given moment constitutes a revolutionary threat to the hegemonic ordering of things. Rarely are they inseparable. This resonates with Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis's shrewd warning against "revolutionary maximalism": "The trick is to avoid the revolutionary maximalism that, in the end, helps the neoliberals bypass all opposition to their self-defeating policies."⁶ The urge to dismiss an intervention as stunted reformism is usually a mistake—a mistake only as grave as asserting such reformism as endgame. The plays examined here stage that theoretical problem, that tripartite dialectical interplay, and constitute a laboratory for exploring its lineaments. Taken

as a whole, this book ultimately argues that a Black revolutionary horizon is still an unsurpassable political project and imperative of radical political desire.⁷ It is the condition of possibility to think and actualize a different system to surpass our current neoliberal coordinates. It represents the greatest theoretical reserve to fashion socialism for the Americas, the imperative that C.L.R. James insisted on when he demanded that “every principle and practice of Bolshevism needs to be translated into American terms.”⁸

*Haitian Revolutionary Drama as “Imitations I Can Use”:
On the Application of Brecht’s Messingkauf Dialogues*

“Imitations I Can Use” comes from Bertolt Brecht’s *Messingkauf Dialogues* (1939–1942), a theatrical dialogue in which the German Marxist poet-playwright attempts to write theoretical essays through other means—experimenting with genre, in this case, the closet drama or Socratic dialogue. Brecht claims a radical democratic tradition of Modern German letters, starting with Goethe’s “Prelude in the Theatre” from Book One of *Faust*. In *The Messingkauf Dialogues*, The PHILOSOPHER, Brecht’s stand-in character, tells an actor and dramaturge: “I’m looking for a way of getting incidents between people imitated for certain purposes; I’ve heard that you supply such imitations; and now I hope to find out if they are the kind of imitations I can use.”⁹ This offends some of the other characters that view the function of theater as edifying aesthetic experience that should principally resist utilitarian functions. In the cast of characters, it is “The ACTRESS” who is the most politically engaged. With complimentary brevity, Brecht lists her as “The ACTRESS [who] wishes the theatre to inculcate social lessons. She is interested in politics.” *Der Messingkauf* means literally “the purchaser of brass.” Brecht as The PHILOSOPHER is interested in the theater as “an apparatus” to convey certain representations “between men” in the service of negating and overcoming capitalist political economy. Yet with characteristic dialectical flair, his title-example is submerged in the logics of utilitarian capitalist exchange: “I can only compare myself with a man, say, who deals in scrap metal and goes up to a brass band to buy, not a trumpet, let’s say, but simply brass. The brass dealer ‘ransack[s] your theatre for events between people.’”¹⁰ He reduces the instrument to its elemental components. “Just brass” strips the instrument (the apparatus) of its sentimental claims trumpeting the

edifying impact of theater all the while preserving its fetish character as precious metal. A callous exchange-value as tool chips away at the aura of the theatrical performance. This is in the service of his political project to transform capitalism, a socioeconomic system that in its very essence prioritizes exchange over use yet works via an interplay of exchange-value and use-value that cannot be uncoupled. Indeed this is a *useful* optic to think of the plays examined in this study. Brecht (and James for that matter) was certainly interested in aesthetic value and entertainment. But the political function of dramatic works remains paramount. The discussion of plays that follow will be approached as “useful imitations”—springboards for artist-intellectuals to think through organizational problems related to the Haitian Revolution.

The analytical preoccupations of C.L.R. James and Brecht constitute one of the main theoretical frames informing my readings of twentieth-century Black radical theatrical production and historiography revisiting the Haitian Revolution. The other is an encounter between James and Raymond Williams. I’m interested in the cluster of ideas that coalesce around the proper names of C.L.R. James, Bertolt Brecht, and Raymond Williams and utilize these ideas to engage committed representations of the Haitian Revolution. Haiti is the generative site *par excellence* for creative work by African diasporic artist-intellectuals attempting to break free from impasses in their respective political conjunctures. Revisiting Haiti acts as a solvent against political ossification.

This analysis takes some of its philosophical cues from the ongoing work of Alain Badiou (and Sylvain Lazarus) on the relationship between proper names and singular (radical) political events:

The point from which a politics can be thought—which permits, even after the event, the seizure of truth—is that of its actors, and not its spectators. It is through Saint-Just and Robespierre that you enter into the singular truth unleashed by the French Revolution, and on the basis of which you form a knowledge, and not through [Immanuel] Kant or François Furet.¹¹

Consider three points. (1) Badiou’s formulation privileges the revolutionary actors themselves as sites of knowledge and access (Saint-Just and Robespierre) over theoreticians of the event (Kant and Furet). It insists upon simultaneously undermining such an opposition, since certainly Saint-Just and Robespierre were also theoreticians. (2) Fittingly, Badiou casts his cautionary note on historical methodology in the language of the

theater—both actors and spectators. (3) The category of theoretical spectatorship for Badiou is wide enough to encompass multiple centuries: both Kant and Furet fit the bill. Implied here is not just that the actors themselves constitute sites of philosophical knowledge but that the profundity of revolutionary events is in one sense coterminous with their very proper names. In another sense, such revolutionary pasts are re-accessed every time such proper names are evoked. Dramatic form in its enactment and repetition of revolution invigorates the organizational political forms of Black radical struggle while also enacting new vitality and conceptual density in order to transform a world. In this regard, the plays examined here constitute new purchase of life for the proper names related to this history. Twentieth-century plays dip back to an eighteenth- and nineteenth-century revolution and establish a fecund site to engage both Brecht's and Badiou's thinking. Hence the rationale for the generous periodization that is the long nineteenth century: twentieth-century artistic representations of a revolution that commences in the eighteenth century, completes its initial push in the early nineteenth century, animates Black radical culture work in the twentieth century, and continues to reverberate. The literary form I call the Black Radical Tragic builds on this scholarship and offers an aesthetic and critical lens to understand how genre choice, strategies of staging, and questions of mediation are keys for both theatrical and historical imaginings of the Haitian past and its relationship to a transformative future. I offer readings of a series of plays that pose the question: What insights are gained when we link problems of aesthetic organization with problems of revolutionary organization?

Chapter Overview

Chapter 1 looks at three North American and European avant-garde uses of the Haitian Revolution in performance and cinema theory: Eugene O'Neill's Haiti play, *The Emperor Jones* (1920), Orson Welles's radio-play on the Haitian Revolution, *Hello Americans*, Episode 3, "Haiti" (1942), and the Soviet film director Sergei Eisenstein's discussion of the Haitian Revolution and Alexander Dumas's *The Count of Monte Cristo* essay "A Course in Film Treatment" (1932), as well as an account of how a Russian novel about the French and Haitian revolutions structured one of Eisenstein's lessons in his professional role as distinguished professor of film craft at the VGIK (State Cinema Institute in Moscow, 1932–1935). It demonstrates how dramatic

works and preparatory stages in crafting dramatic works (in the case of Eisenstein) function as a laboratory for political thinking. These three culture workers chart Haitian revolutionary lines of flight, retreat, and attack.

Chapter 2 reads the 1967 revisions of C.L.R. James's play *Toussaint Louverture* (1936)—retitled *The Black Jacobins*—and Edouard Glissant's *Monsieur Toussaint: A Play* (1961) as two case studies to further explore the tragic as a way of talking about the relationship between leader and masses in the Black Radical Tradition. C.L.R. James prefigures the writing of his historical study on Haiti by composing and staging a play about Toussaint L'Ouverture in London shortly prior. I am interested in the differences, both strategic and structural, between James's play and the history. There are interesting implications of this unusual situation, where a play seems to have some formative relationship to a historical work on the same topic. I trace this via a revised version of the play written decades after James's historical study. James's revision tempers the individual bravado of Paul Robeson's performance as Toussaint L'Ouverture. Robeson haunts James's revision process, informing how his subsequent drafts figure the revolutionary leader's interdependence on the masses. The play anticipates the theatrical language employed in James's historical text. The theatrical reviews of James's play form a counterarchive, a way to capture the fleeting nature of a performance whose various iterations C.L.R. James scholars have gone to great lengths to sort and track. Through an analysis of Glissant's theoretical work on theater in Martinique, I enact a comparative Anglophone and Francophone analysis of Caribbean theatrical production. Glissant experiments further with James's formal use of stage directions and headings in his own Haiti drama to theorize theater's role in combating alienation and cultivating a sense of national identity in Martinique, with special attention paid to thinking about the interrelationship between the living and the dead.

Chapter 3 examines "tragedy as a force of dialectical mediation" in C.L.R. James's history, *The Black Jacobins*. It begins with a theoretical-aesthetic excursus that examines how James's London journalism prefigures his Haiti work, specifically his intimate engagement with questions of bodily compression and expansion in a certain Rodin sculpture witnessed upon his arrival to London. By way of Hazel Carby's stellar work on bodily compression, I put a series of Robeson photographs in dialogue with the insights of Rainer Maria Rilke (Rodin's secretary) on the work of his employer. I juxtapose Carby's formulation on the problem of thinking Paul Robeson as a political comrade and one of Brecht's final short poems

as a way to think problems of mediation. Building on Robert Hill's scholarship, I discuss Hill's assertion of Robeson as representative for James of a heroic example of Black masculinity that shatters the colonial framework inherited by the British colonial legacy in Trinidad. James provides a useful example of narrative and theoretical triangulation—in his case, questions of form and the study of the Haitian Revolution (alongside the French and Russian revolutions) and the political challenges of his 1938 London milieu organizing against Italy's aggression against Abyssinia (now Ethiopia). Here I engage the accounting of James's use of tragedy in David Scott's brilliant study, *Conscripts of Modernity*. James's modification of both Aristotle's *Poetics* and Marx's critique of "The Great Man Theory" in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* offers an opportunity to analyze how James reads both texts and employs a strategy of what I call direct substitution, often in contrast with his steadfast dedication to a method that insists on thinking dialectically the relationship of severance and continuity.

Chapter 4 engages the Pan-Africanist dramas of Lorraine Hansberry as a way for her to think about questions of scale, leadership, and internationalism apropos of the civil rights movement. Her posthumous play *Les Blancs* represents a key flashpoint in the history of Black theater that explicitly connects the struggle of Black masses to the fate of nations on the African continent waging wars of decolonization. The scale of her dramatic field cognitively maps *the whole* of the capitalist world system. Her unfinished piece of musical theater, *Toussaint*, transforms her childhood infatuation with the Haitian struggle into a work of stagecraft. Through the use of musical tropes, creative manipulation of stage action, and deeply philosophical discourse presented in dialogue, Hansberry builds on O'Neill's and James's staging of Haiti's protracted liberation war. Hansberry's Pan-Africanist dramas resonate with the challenges of mapping the totality of a world. She privileges revolutionary use over a less generative revolutionary morality and employs the European classical music tradition to do certain work in her opera on Haiti. I revisit an earlier line of thought that suggests for James (and arguably for Mozart and Da Ponte), Don Giovanni constitutes a drive rather than an individual character. The opera works as a vengeance machine or vengeance ensemble. Hansberry's critique of Jean Genet's employment of dramatic abstraction is a way to criticize both American racism and French colonial policy in Algeria—a short interlude on George Jackson helps clarify the theoretical stakes of her stagecraft choices. My conclusion departs from Haiti only to return. I examine Malcolm X's reading of *Hamlet* during the 1964 Oxford Union

Presentation Debate and the discussions Malcolm engaged on Haitian revolutionary leadership with one of his companions, Caribbean writer Jan Carew, as well as Malcolm X's *Autobiography's* representational defiance of the excommunication of Baruch Spinoza for what it has to say about radical fidelity and a set of Haitian revolutionary reading protocols.

Dispersed throughout these pages are discussions of three keyword clusters: (1) self-determination; (2) firsts/repetition; and (3) mediation/immediacy. They serve as a clarifying role, a pedagogic aid that helps bring online the theoretical stakes and Hegelian resonances of this study, stakes that more often than not function by way of demonstration and juxtaposition rather than declaration—a dialectic of showing as opposed to telling. I begin with the most vexed: the compound formulation, self-determination.

Self-Determination

The equality of nations and their right to self-determination is also a fundamental tenet of socialist doctrine. In its fully developed form, as elaborated in the work of V. I. Lenin, the right of nations to self-determination includes not just the right to cultural autonomy but also to full political independence. As in the case of the liberal theories already cited, however, for Lenin recognition of the right to nations to self-determination in principle does not, of course, imply an *a priori* endorsement of secessions and state divisions. This is because it is theoretically impossible to say in advance which solutions will allow for the optimal implementation of such rights in specific situations. Hence, Lenin argues, proletarian socialism “confines itself, so to speak, to the negative demand for recognition of the *right* to self-determination, without giving guarantees to any nation, and without undertaking to give *anything* at the *expense* of another nation.”

Joe Cleary

I'm ceded—I've stopped being Theirs—

Emily Dickinson

Amiri Baraka provides the following definition of self-determination in the 1993 updated version of the 1979 book-length essay *The Black Nation* (subtitled *The Afro American National Question*), a study commissioned

by *The Afro American Commission of the Revolutionary Communist League (MLM)*, in which he served as chair:

Self-determination is the right of nations to decide their own destiny. This is a democratic and political right; it includes also the right to political secession. Self-determination for oppressed nations is a major demand of the proletariat. Oppressed nations have the right, and through national liberation struggles and wars, achieve the power to decide their own destiny. Only by recognizing this right and concretely supporting the struggles of oppressed nations can the proletariat of the oppressor nation have principled unity with the proletariat of the oppressed nation in the common struggle against imperialism.¹²

Baraka immediately follows this gloss by referring readers to Lenin's writings on the "National and Colonial Questions."¹³ I want to engage this formulation by lingering on *the question of questions*. A radical lexicon of questions might initially strike a contemporary student of Left movements as antiquated holdover from an early twentieth-century period rife with proletarian revolution, wars of decolonization, and screaming debates over correct political lines. A series of questions posed at some point by the Left—"The Women Question," "The Jewish Question," "The Negro Question," and "The Agrarian Question"—read as sidebars, something to be picked up and discarded, secondary priorities vis-à-vis the main task of proletarian revolution. Instead, why not take these formulations at face value, in other words, as actual questions—in the case of self-determination—a contingent, open-ended process and problematic that prioritizes mass participation and indeterminate outcome over easy resolution? A questioning political project that cannot fully define its content since such content is determined by way of revolutionary overhaul, crafting unknown future outcomes and thwarting present predictions—the theoretical unknown that Joe Cleary signals by way of Lenin. An etymological probing of *determine* of self-determination certainly warrants this. In Raymond Williams's analysis, *determine*, far from signaling a tidy, reductive fait accompli, charts a tension between *absolute* (determined) ends, contingent uncertainties, and prioritization of process over outcome:

Determine came into English C14 from fw *determiner*, oF, *determinare*, L, rw *terminare*, L—to set bounds to. Several formulations with the Latin prefix *de* are complicated in meaning, but in this case the sense of "setting

bounds” is dominant in all early uses. The difficulty and the later ambiguity arouse when one of the applied senses, that of putting a limit and therefore an end to the process, acquired the significance of an absolute end. There are many processes with an ordinary limit or end, for which **determine** and its derivatives have been regularly used: a question or dispute is **determined** by some authority, and from this use, and the associated legal use in matters like leases, there is a more general sense which is equivalent to “decide”: e.g.,] “on a date to be **determined**.” Associated with this is the sense which is equivalent to “settle”; fixing by observation, calculation or definition. What is distinct about all these uses is that **determining** is some fixed point or act at the end of a process, and that this sense carries with it no necessary implication, and usually no implication at all, that the specific character of the ultimate decision or settlement or conclusion is inherent in the nature of the process. **Determination** resolves or completes a process; it does not prospectively control or predict it.¹⁴

I want to encourage here a determination that “resolves or completes a process” but only to begin anew another process (the furthering of revolutionary goals) at another plane of struggle, accompanied by another set of problems, another set of contradictions, and, yes, another set of questions. To argue such a claim is teleological misses the point because it ignores indeterminacy of outcomes, which only appear as necessary after the fact and after contingency has its way. Different planes of struggle do not necessarily mean progressively higher planes. It most certainly “sets bounds”—in the case of Baraka’s polemic, self-determination bounds his narrative both as a reading strategy for American history and as a fully developed Black radical *haltung* (a Brechtian idea signifying posture or stance). Self-determination as historical reading practice/*haltung* coheres Baraka’s analysis. It organizes a narrative synthesis that includes examination of employment statistics, demographic/migration shifts, analysis of slavery and political economy, state-terroristic and extralegal repression of Black Reconstruction governments, the history of constitutional amendments, and an excoriating précis of socialist and communist formations’ abdication of solidarities vis-à-vis global Black radical movements. In this regard, it is and it is not about solely a question of land, state sovereignty, and the right of nations. Here I encourage readers to consult the stellar scholarship of philosopher Omar Dahbour, particularly his formulation of “self-determination without nationalism (or liberalism).”¹⁵ However, in the case of Haiti, sometimes the question of state sovereignty is in fact

the radical question to ask, especially as it relates to the state's challenges to weather the ravages of global capital. This is surely the case in James Weldon Johnson's collection of essays, *Self-Determining Haiti*, which analyzes and forcefully condemns, among other things, the impounding of the revenue of Haiti by the National City Bank of New York in 1914 as well as the manipulation by the U.S. State Department as it relates to various U.S.-Haiti interstate conventions. Such is the prehistory of a series of military occupations and geopolitical U.S. interferences against Haitian sovereignty. Black self-determination is not solely a radical repurposing of a top-down Wilson-era conceptualization of international law. Yet it most certainly dialectically repurposes such conceptualization toward radical ends. Self-determination is a protocol for reading, one that demands keeping Black radical priorities front and center in theoretical-historical analysis and in evaluating "exacting solidarities."¹⁶ In this regard, the essential and insightful work of scholars such as Brent Hayes Edwards and Cedric Robinson, in their respective concern for thinking through the "autonomy of Black Radicalism," might be read as what Baraka refers to as "vectors of self-determination."¹⁷

Before proceeding to C.L.R. James on "The National Question" and concluding with how this discussion relates to thinking philosophically about Hegel and Haiti, let us examine an earlier example from Baraka on Black self-determination, the conclusion of his 1968 commentary on the Impulse recording "New Wave in Jazz":

These, and the others I mentioned before, names names, to conjure with, no one should forget. OK, speak of them as personalities if you want to. Sonny Murray is a ghost, listen to him thrash and moan with "Holy Ghost." Listen to Louis Worrell, Charles Tayler, Don Ayler, closely because they are newer and might be telling you something you never bargained for. Listen to Trane, Ornette, Sun-Ra, Milford Graves, Tchicai, Brown. Listen to everybody beautiful. You hear on this record poets of the Black Nation.

New Black Music is this: Find the self, then kill it.

Here you get a demonstration of the tenuous relationship between a *self* (found then killed) and a liberated aggregate of selves. The self that is extinguished here can be thought as an aesthetic analogue to the revolutionary leadership as vanishing mediator—the only responsible vanguard model. Political work in order to qualify as radical work should strive toward its redundancy. Vanishing's abrupt immediacy is augmented by way of a

protracted voluntarism. Properly pedagogic—the ends and means sync. Vanishing leaves a trace. Baraka’s declaration of the jazz phonograph as archive of the “poets of the Black Nation” implies here the very notion of Black national liberation. I read this almost algebraic formulation (“New Black Music is this: Find the self, then kill it”) as part taunt, part aspiration. Taunt because the structure of this sentence, mathematical in its force on both aisles of the colon, encourages a mediation that it forcefully denies. “New Black Music” is not like this—it *is* this. “Find the self, then kill it” as aspiration is not just a temporal projection into a liberated future because the poets of the Black Nation are not only here, their here-ness can be heard.

C.L.R. James is consistently hostile in regards to thinking Black self-determination bound up with a land base. I argue here for a viable form of Black self-determination to be found in James, despite such reservations. This viability is apparent when you examine chronologically a cluster of his interventions on the matter. So much of the identification of the Haitian Revolution as a pivotal *first*, autonomous radical statecraft won by an awesome series of armed struggles and strategic feats, is wrapped up philosophically and politically in matters of self-determination. In James’s “Preliminary Notes on the Negro Question” (1939), a record of his conversations with Trotsky, we witness hostility to the self-determination thesis, written off by James as an idealist form of separatism. Yet there is also a consistent reckoning with the fact that American Blacks constitute the most militant segment of the population. On “black chauvinism” and the question of self-determination James writes, “In the concrete instance, black chauvinism is a progressive force, it is the expression of a desire for equality of an oppressed and deeply humiliated people. The persistent refusal to have ‘self-determination’ is evidence of the limitation of black chauvinism in America. Any excessive sensitiveness to black chauvinism by the white revolutionaries is the surest way to create hostilities and suspicion among the black people.”¹⁸ Both Baraka’s and James’s seemingly opposite conclusions dovetail in productive ways. James cedes to “black chauvinism” not just a “progressive force” but, implied here, a progressive materialist (“concrete”)¹⁹ force to effect radical transformation. For James “black chauvinism” is limited by the lack of what he views as the “refusal” of self-determination. However, such a radical refusal in another sense is an example of the very self-determination he shuns—choice that can be submitted to and is a product of thought.

In James’s “The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem in the United States” (1948), this tension gives way to a non-hesitant, active

lauding of the “independent Negro Struggle.” He employs a national terminology to advance his claims, all in the service of raising the problem of leadership within a Lenin-inspired framework:

We say, number one, that the Negro struggle, the independent Negro struggle, has a vitality and validity of its own; that it has deep historic roots in the past of America and in present struggles; it has an organic political perspective, along which it is travelling; to one degree or another, and everything shows that at the present time it is traveling with great speed and vigor. . . .

[Lenin] says that the dialectic of history is such that small independent nations, small nationalities, which are powerless—get the word, please—*powerless*, in the struggle against imperialism *nonetheless* can act as one of the ferments, one of the bacilli which can bring on to the scene the real power against imperialism—the socialist proletariat.

Let me repeat it please. Small groups, nations, nationalities, themselves powerless against imperialism, nevertheless can act as one of the ferments, one of the bacilli which will bring on to the scene the real fundamental force against capitalism—the socialist proletariat.

In other words, as so often happens from the Marxist point of view from the point of view of the dialectic, this question of the *leadership* is very complicated.²⁰

Very complicated indeed. James presents a plea, a hedge against amnesia (“Let us not forget”) in the form of a *reading-seeing* protocol. Note James’s implication that cultural forms (and institutions) are sites for heavy analysis. James demands a “complex seeing” (a prerogative of John Berger’s that I’ll touch on later) of the actuality of Black radicalism in existent institutions. Like Baraka’s listening session, such radicalism is both tomorrow and already here:

Let us not forget that in the Negro people, there sleep and are now awakening passions of violence exceeding, perhaps, as far as these things can be compared, anything among the tremendous forces that capitalism has created. Anyone who knows them, who knows their history, is able to talk to them intimately, watches them at their own theaters, watches them at their dances, watches them at their churches, reads their press with a discerning eye, must recognize that although their social force may not be able to compare with the social force of a corresponding number of organized

workers, the hatred of bourgeois society and the readiness to destroy it when the opportunity should present itself, rests among them to a degree greater than in any section of the population in the United States.²¹

Consider one final example from C.L.R. James. At the start of his 1967 London talk entitled “Black Power,” James recites what he will theorize in the form of a greeting: “Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, Black Power.”²² His stated purpose is to clarify Black Power, designated by him first as *slogan* and then as *banner*: “What I aim to do this evening is to make clear to all what this slogan Black Power means, what it does not mean, *cannot* mean.” I want to signal how James thinks self-determination, charting “Black Power” by way of a return to the Haitian Revolution and Lenin’s attack on those who would characterize the Irish rebellion of 1916 disparagingly as a putsch. James accomplishes this feat as a response to three Kantian questions: What do I know? What must I do? What may I hope? He tops off this inventory of questions with a philosophical rejoinder: “*every determination is negation.*” Note the repetitive emphasis on study and the interrelationship between democracy and socialism as it relates to Black struggle:

I had studied Lenin in order to write *The Black Jacobins*, the analysis of a revolution for self-determination in a colonial territory. I had studied Lenin to be able to write my book on *World Revolution*. I had studied Lenin to be able to take part with George Padmore in his organization that worked for the independence of all colonial territories, but particularly the territories of Africa. I therefore was in a position from the very beginning to state my position and to state it in a discussion that some of us had with Trotsky on the Negro question 1939.

The position was this: the independent struggle of the Negro people for their democratic rights and equality with the rest of the American nation not only had to be defended and advocated by the Marxist movement. The Marxist movement had to understand that *such independent struggles were a contributory factor to the socialist revolution*. Let me restate that as crudely as possible: the American Negroes in fighting for their democratic rights were making an indispensable addition to the struggle for socialism in the US. [This is a key component of Baraka’s line on self-determination, democracy, and socialist transformation.] I have to emphasize this because it was not only a clarification in the darkness of the Trotskyist movement on the Negro struggle in 1938–39. Today, 1967, I find in Britain here

a confusion as great as I found in the US in 1938, and nowhere more than among the Marxists.

Now I am going to quote for you one statement by Lenin in which he states the basis of his argument. His actual political programme you will find in the resolutions which he presented to the Second Congress of the Third International on the question of self-determination, and in that resolution specifically you will find that he mentions the Negroes in the US. But the basic argument which was the foundation of Lenin's policy is stated many times in the debates that he carried on before 1917 on the right of nations to self-determination, and I will quote particularly from his sharp observations on the Irish rebellion of 1916:

To imagine that social revolution is conceivable without revolts by small nations in the colonies and in Europe, without the revolutionary outbursts of a section of the petty bourgeoisie *with all its prejudices*, without the movement of non-class-conscious proletarian and semi-proletarian masses against the oppression of the landlords, the church, the monarchy, the foreign nations, etc. . . . to imagine that in one place an army will line up and say, "we are for socialism," and in another place another army will say, "we are for imperialism," and that this will be the social revolution, only those who hold such a ridiculously pedantic opinion could vilify the Irish rebellion by calling it a "putsch."

Lenin is very angry and though often very sharp he is not often very angry. He explains how the Russian revolution of 1905 came:

The Russian revolution of 1905 was a bourgeois-democratic revolution. It consisted of a series of battles in which all the discontented classes, groups, and elements of the population participated. Among these there were masses imbued with the crudest prejudices, with the vaguest and most fantastic aims of struggle; there were small groups which accepted Japanese money, there were speculators and adventurers, etc. *Objectively*, the mass movement broke the back of tsarism and paved the way for democracy. For that reason the class conscious workers led it.

Now it is necessary to continue straight on with Lenin, because he seems to me to have had some experience, some feeling, that people would not understand what socialist revolution was. And this is one of his sharpest passages. I give it to you in full so that you may see how strongly he feels

on what is for him a vital constituent of the phrase, but the way in which he underlined what he considered absolutely necessary to the understanding of what a socialist revolution was:

The socialist revolution in Europe *cannot be anything else* than an outburst of mass struggle on the part of all oppressed and discontented elements. Sections of the petty bourgeoisie and of the backward workers will inevitably participate in it—without such participation, *mass* struggle is impossible, without it no revolution is possible—and just as inevitably will they bring into the movement their prejudices, their reactionary fantasies, their weaknesses and errors. But *objectively* they will attack *capital*, and the class conscious vanguard of the revolution, the advanced proletariat, expressing this objective truth of a heterogeneous and discordant, motley and outwardly incohesive, mass struggle, will be able to unite and direct it, to capture power, to seize the banks, to expropriate the trusts (hated by all, though for different reasons) and introduce other dictatorial measures which in their totality will amount to the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the victory of socialism, which however, will by no means immediately “purge” itself of petty-bourgeois slag.

Now the moment Trotsky agreed that the independent Negro struggle for its democratic rights was part of the way to the social revolution, the Trotskyist movement accepted it. They accepted it but I don't think they really understood it. At any rate, in 1951 my friends and I broke irrevocably and fundamentally with the premises of Trotskyism, and as independent Marxists, we advocated this policy, this Leninist policy, on the Negro question, and we believed that at any rate we understood this question thoroughly. We did not know what this policy contained in it. I began by telling you that early this year I listened to Stokely Carmichael and was immediately struck by the enormous revolutionary potential which was very clear to me. But I had no idea that before the end of the year I would hear from him the following:

We speak with you, comrades, because we wish to make clear that we understand that our destinies are intertwined. Our world can only be the third world; our only struggle for the third world; our only vision, of the third world.

Stokely is speaking at the OLAS Conference, and the Negro movement in the US, being what it is, he makes very clear that this movement

sees itself as a part of the Third World. But before very long he says what I knew was always inherent in his thoughts, if not always totally plain in his words. I wish you to appreciate the gravity and the weight which a man who speaks as Stokely has been speaking must give to the following words:

But we do not seek to create communities where, in place of white rules, black rulers control the lives of black masses and where black money goes into a few black pockets: we want to see it go into the communal pocket. The society we seek to build among black people is not an oppressive capitalist society—for capitalism by its very nature cannot create structures free from exploitation. We are fighting for the redistribution of wealth and for the end of private property inside the United States.

In the opinion of myself and many of my friends no clearer or stronger voice for socialism has ever been raised in the US. It is obvious that for him, based as he is and fighting for a future of freedom for the Negro people of the US, the socialist society is not a hope, *not what we may hope*, but a compelling necessity. *What he or any other Negro leader may say tomorrow, I do not know.* But I have followed fairly closely the career of this young man, and I leave you with this very deeply based philosophical conception of political personality. He is far away out, in a very difficult position, and I am sure there are those in his own camp who are doubtful of the positions he is taking, but I believe his future and the future of the policies which he is now advocating does [*sic*] not depend upon him as an individual. [They depend] upon the actions and reactions of those surrounding him and, to a substantial degree, not only on what you who are listening to me may hope, but also on what you do.²³

A balance sheet and trajectory of these three C.L.R. James pronouncements on self-determination: (1) 1939: a simultaneous hostility to territorial formulations of Black self-determination alongside an acknowledgment of the “concrete” revolutionary force of “black chauvinism.” (2) 1948: the lauding of “the independent Negro struggle,” one that has “a vitality and validity of its own.” (3) 1967: a praise song of “Black Power” as vector of self-determination, arguably in which the precedent and theoretical antecedent is the Haitian Revolution. Black Power as “banner” because although James wants to maintain its essence as anti-imperialist, anticapitalist, militant demonstration of autonomy, it is tasked to accommodate the diversity of Black political tendencies and class formations,

comparable to what for Lenin makes the Irish Rebellion of 1916 and his own Russian Revolution effective models for study. In summation, Black self-determination, by way of Baraka and James, can be thought of as a generative example of *supplementary logic*: “an endless linked series, ineluctably multiplying the supplementary mediations that produce the sense of the very thing that they defer.”²⁴ It is posture and standpoint, reading strategy and narrative cohesion tool. It has a relationship to a land base that it perpetually evades. It builds up leadership in combination and recombination as quickly as such leadership is surpassed. It determines and negates.

I conclude this discussion by thinking about the Hegelian philosophical pedigree of *the self* in self-determination. For Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel self is a question of will. Here are two relevant passages from the second part (the “Morality” section) of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*:

As self-determination of will is at the same time a factor of the will’s conception, subjectivity is not merely the outward reality of will, but its inner being. . . . This free and independent will, having now become the will of a subject, and assuming in the first instance the form of the conception, has itself a visible realization: otherwise it could not attain to the idea. The moral standpoint is in its realized form the right of the subjective will. In accordance with this right the will recognizes and is a thing, only in so far as the thing is the will’s own, and the will in it is itself and subjective. . . .

In morality self-determination is to be construed as restless activity, which cannot be satisfied with anything that is. Only in the region of established ethical principles is the will identical with the conception of it, and has only this conception for its content. In morality the will is as yet related to what is potential. This is the standpoint of difference, and the process of this standpoint is the identification of the subjective will with the conception of will. The imperative or ought, which, therefore, still is in morality, is fulfilled only in the ethical sphere. This sphere, to which the subjective will is related, has a twofold nature. It is the substance of the conception, and also external reality. If the good were established in the subjective will, it would not yet be realized.²⁵

Thinking the relationship between self and will in Hegel as it relates to the Saint-Domingue Revolution is essential to philosopher Frank Kirkland’s rigorous and principled critique of Susan Buck-Morss’s *Hegel, Haiti, and*

Universal History, a work that famously argues that revolution in Haiti inspired Hegel's "Lord and Bondsman" (sometimes referred to as "Master and Slave") section in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). One of Kirkland's main goals is to complicate our understanding of what Hegel means by his premise that "blacks do not have history in the 'true sense of the word.'"²⁶ I will not pretend to do this penetrating analysis justice here in terms of full coverage. That would be impossible without capitulating the whole arc of the argument precisely because what Kirkland enacts here is a slow, detailed "reconstruction" of how Hegel's philosophical categories engender or reject Buck-Morss's assertion of Hegel's Haitian revolutionary influence. Kirkland's essay resists summary by way of its model expository design.

Kirkland brings front and center philosophical primacy in engaging Hegel's categories and uses it to complicate Buck-Morss's anecdotal/philosophical synthesis. He spells out the inextricably linked relationship between Hegel's ideas of race and history (his racialism) and his theorization of his notion of "natural spirit." This is in service of his overall project to reexamine both Hegel's relationship to the Saint-Domingue Revolution²⁷ and Buck-Morss's argument about such, by insisting that one has to show how Hegel's philosophical concepts warrant or unwarrant claims about his views on Blacks and history, in general, and the Saint-Domingue Revolution in particular. Kirkland faults Buck-Morss's interpretation for relying "too heavily on what Hegel has said or not said rather than on what his philosophy is warranted to say or not."²⁸ Pursuing such a path leads to the conclusion that despite the fact that "Hegel never laid out this thesis with respect to Africans. . . . Nothing from his idealism would preclude it." Kirkland is by no means arguing that Hegel believed in the equality of races; he rather insists "we should not confuse Hegel's views on the comparative levels of development with the levels of development themselves. The development stage of any given race must be variable. A racial hierarchy may be rigid. By virtue of races' accomplishments, however, the stages of development cannot be and hence, the hierarchy cannot be constantly in stasis."²⁹ I want to signal two interrelated points: (1) Kirkland's theorization of *the right to revolution* and (2) how his meditation on Hegel's philosophical categories engenders his periodization of the Saint-Domingue Revolution. Kirkland's periodization charts "eight thresholds" of Haitian revolutionary activity. On "the right" to revolution:

Hegel's critique pertains to the idea that the *right* to act under the idea of freedom neither can be nor include the right to revolution. The capacity for

or the act of revolution are not the right to it. On this point, Hegel agrees with Kant that there can never be a right to revolution, but with a major difference. Kant regards revolutions as matters of the “state of nature.” They are catastrophes spurred “naturally” by a sovereign when s/he violates the rights of the people and by people’s belief that they have a right to rebellion for themselves against the sovereign for such violation. However, for Kant, both the sovereign and the people are wrong. The sovereign as a despot vacates the civil state to re-enter, rather than to exit, the “state of nature.” The people are oriented toward acting under the idea of freedom outside of their obligation to enter and remain in the civil state.

Hegel, on the other hand, does not regard revolutions as steps back into the “state of nature.” They are rather action-repertoires of violent resistance, which fail necessarily to be effective rationally in a normative sense. To be rationally effective in a normative sense is for a free person to have a justifying reason for an action or action-repertoire whose authority would rest on political arrangements enabling such a reason to be institutionally recognized. It is impossible, Hegel maintains, for revolutionary activity to be rationally effective in a normative sense. Albeit free, it cannot sustain a reason whose authority rests on political institutions incorporating it as a norm to be acknowledged. The “negative freedom” as Hegel puts it, exhibited in revolutionary activity is “the destruction of the whole subsisting social arrangement, the elimination of individuals who are objects of suspicion to any social arrangement, and the annihilation of any organization which tries to rise anew from the ruins.”³⁰

In the periodization below, the following acronyms are employed: SDR (Saint-Domingue Revolution), SASC (Hegel’s “*Self-Alienated Spirit-Culture*”), SD (Saint-Domingue), and PhS (*The Phenomenology of Spirit*):

For the sake of a “Black Atlantic” reconstruction of SASC, the SDR was the first “racial revolution.” Hence it cannot avoid, even philosophically, the role racial chauvinism played in it. It involved enslaved blacks and creoles as well as free persons of color (post-1791) increasingly acquiring freedom and the right to act freely over 13 years of conflict crossing eight thresholds: (a) the previously mentioned slave insurrection (1791); (b) the collapse of SD’s colonial system and the immediate abolition of slavery in SD (1793); (c) warfare against England and Spain on behalf of France (1793–1798); (d) the general acquisition of the right to act freely in SD for one and all from France (1794); (e) SD’s attempted yet failed transformations from a

plantation colony to a free society (1795–1800); (f) the constitutional maintenance of the right to act freely, under French sovereignty, in SD for one and all (1801); (g) the violent campaign against France’s attempt to turn SD back into a plantation colony and forfeit SD’s constitutional maintenance of the right to act freely for all its people (1802–1804); and (h) the constitutional emergence of both Haitian sovereignty and self-determination of one and all as Haitian people to think, act, and live rightly under the idea of freedom (1804).

From enslaved bossales and creoles to black insurgents against enslavement to guardians of emancipation and the right to act freely for one and all, there is a development and transformation of an ethno-racial people now responsible for the development and transformation of SD from an institutionalized plantation slave colony to an emergent and promising free society. All of this can be rendered consistent with both Hegel’s PhS, under SASC, and his later philosophical position.³¹

Adjudicating whether or not the sequence of events in Saint-Domingue coheres to Hegelian philosophical categories on the *right* of revolution does not abdicate the responsibility to *think* such revolution. Kirkland expertly inhabits what I’m calling Haitian Revolutionary Reading Protocols in his insistence on disaggregating the different “thresholds” that cohere in what we call the Haitian Revolution. In a sense, the Haitian Revolution is an abstraction that assumes and subsumes its component parts, parts that become manifest by way of reading. Taking the time to concede to this history a site to think Hegelian philosophy proffers a sort of care that inspires a delineation of different stages and different actors in these events. This is why his essay insists on mostly naming this sequence the Saint-Domingue Revolution. Self-determination is one facet, one crossed-over threshold in a series. In the words of anthropologist Gary Wilder, self-determination in the Black radical context is not a “ready-made solution.”³² How one parses such a series has everything to do with what archive one examines to calibrate beginnings and ends. Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*’s coupling of self-determination with will is an opportunity for the German idealist philosopher to think subject-object relations, freedom, and how such internal struggles of will get materialized vis-à-vis variable and in motion “external reality.”

The theoretical overture that follows resonates with the proper name (Toussaint) *L’Ouverture*—The Opening. It is a political primer for the entire work, an *opening* up of its theoretical stakes, sometimes by way of

examples not directly referencing Haiti but speaking to it nonetheless. Staking the *how* of this associational claim by way of modeling, in other words, by way of its dialectical presentational structure, is its main task: “The principle of the organization of thinking is in actual fact the ‘content’ of the work.”³³ The *how* is actualized continuously by way of mediation.

An interview with C.L.R. James in the November 1971 issue of *Black World* is subtitled “Pan-Africanism: A Directory.”³⁴ The discussions in the next pages constitute further entries in an ever-expanding Pan-African directory. Consider Gordon K. Lewis’s gloss of Caribbean intellectual use and theorization of the proper name Toussaint, itself a roster of political openings:

The varying and, at times, glaringly contradictory interpretations of the figure of Toussaint L’Ouverture are as good an example of the matter as any. For De Vastey himself, Toussaint, like Henri Christophe, is one of the great father figures of the new nation. For Ardouin, he is a tool of the whites in the struggle, because of his hatred for mulattoes. This irreconcilable difference of opinion was followed by other writers—both Haitian and foreign, and extends into the twentieth century itself. For James Stephen, Toussaint becomes the incarnation of the Oroonoko legend of the westernized, white black man, whose virtues are set off against the vices of the Emperor Napoleon. For Schoelcher he is essentially a good man corrupted by too much power—a view that naturally suggested itself to a disciple of Tocqueville. For Aimé Césaire—coming to the twentieth century writers—he is the catalyst that turns a slave rebellion into a genuine social revolution. For the Haitians François Duvalier and Lorimer Denis, he is a noble spirit fighting against the greed of the whites and the prejudices of the mulattoes, almost as if Duvalier was presaging his own elevation to black power as the historical successor to Toussaint. For C.L.R. James, finally, Toussaint takes on the form of a great revolutionary leader who has lost contact with the masses and lacks an ideology, almost as if James were perceiving in Toussaint a historical anticipation of the failure of the Russian Revolution after 1917 in its Stalinist phase to create a genuinely classless society.³⁵

The overture enacts a method (etches out, pries an “opening”) within which to think about dramatic usages of the Haitian revolutionary long nineteenth century. It constructs a tradition within which I want to operate. Adding to Lewis’s inventory, I rehearse an overall methodology that presents a relay-circuit from Brecht to Williams to Fanon to James to

Brecht. The impact of such a relay-circuit simultaneously stakes its own claims on dramatic representations of the Haitian Revolution and charts directions for further use.

“The sound of that name the preceding century had quaked.”³⁶ Michael Löwy’s astute analysis of Thesis XII of Walter Benjamin’s “On the Concept of History” (1940) clarifies: “The German text speaks not just of the ‘sound’ of his name [that of Auguste Blanqui], but of its *Ezzklang*, its sounding out like brass, and this is doubtless a reference to the tocsin, the alarm bell this armed prophet figuratively sounded to warn the oppressed of imminent catastrophe.”³⁷ In the pages that follow, tragedy is pried away from its generic and classical moorings. It sounds an alarm by way of its evocation of proper names. Tragedy is retooled as a way of approaching history as though we can buy brass there.