

Perpetual Slavery

Ralph Lemon, Cameron Rowland and the Critique of Work

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Abstract

Mediating and preceding the question about the current state of the relays between art and work – as practices, as institutions, as social forms – is the question of how we are to understand ‘work’, when slavery has (over) shadowed the foundation of capitalism in ‘free’ labour from the ‘rosy dawn’ (Marx) of its expansion. The analysis of art through its ‘conditions’, as Adorno wrote, is an inquiry into its historical possibility, which means that the history of art and the history of freedom must be read through and against one another. This essay will investigate the scope of these inquiries into this philosophical-historical thicket in two bodies of work by contemporary artists working in the United States who work through images of labor haunted and structured by the historical experience of slavery.

At the level of form, both artists engage the legacy of modern art’s self-negation by adapting the strategies of anti-art to the demands of their shared content—an inquiry into the experience of freedom in bourgeois society after the world historical experience of abolition.

The “idyllic or comic” ending of the first volume of *Capital* tells the story of a frustrated would-be capitalist in colonial Australia:

[Mr. Peel] took with him from England to the Swan River district of Western Australia means of subsistence and of production to the amount of £50,000. This Mr Peel even had the foresight to bring besides, 3,000 persons of the working class, men, women, and children. Once he arrived at his destination, “Mr Peel was left without a servant to make his bed or fetch him water from the river.” Unhappy Mr Peel, who provided for everything except the export of English relations of production to Swan River!^[1]

Relayed in order to chastise a political economist for misunderstanding colonialism—the economist in question projected the conditions of the metropole across the world, forgetting that capital is first and foremost a social relation, not an objective one—the anecdote offers a quiet image of freedom. This hardly audible escape has received less attention than the din that concludes the chapter on the historical law of capitalist accumulation, in which the death knell of capitalist private property clangs as “the integument is burst asunder” under its own weight and according to the system’s own laws of motion, capitalist expropriators are expropriated in turn.^[2] Fredric Jameson sings the praises of the Australian model, calling attention to this stealing away *en masse* of the

colonial working class “a mesmerizing image of liberation,” one of few such pictures rooted neither in reaction nor conservation to populate the critiques of political economy. A complementary image, even more enchanting, can be found in the *Grundrisse*:

The Times of November 1857 contains an utterly delightful cry of outrage on the part of a West-Indian plantation owner. This advocate analyses with great moral indignation—as a plea for the re-introduction of Negro slavery—how the *Quashees* (the free blacks of Jamaica) content themselves with producing only what is strictly necessary for their own consumption, and, alongside this “use value”, regard loafing (indulgence and idleness) as the real luxury good; how they do not care a damn for the sugar and the fixed capital invested in the plantations, but rather observe the planters’ impending bankruptcy with an ironic grin of malicious pleasure, and even exploit their acquired Christianity as an embellishment for this mood of malicious glee and indolence. They have ceased to be slaves, but not in order to become wage labourers, but, instead, self-sustaining peasants working for their own consumption. As far as they are concerned, capital does not exist as capital, because autonomous wealth as such can exist only either on the basis of direct forced labour, slavery, or indirect forced labour, wage labour. Wealth confronts direct forced labor not as capital, but rather as *relation of domination*; thus, the relation of domination is the only thing which is reproduced on this basis, for which wealth itself has value only as gratification, not as wealth itself, and which can therefore never create *general industriousness*.^[3]

Remarkable in the story, and in the glee with which Marx relates it, are the implications for the infernal question of historical transition—the integration of capital’s prehistory into the ever-expanding violence of its self-determining system. The thirty odd years that lapsed between the emancipation of slaves in the West Indies and the publication of the slaver’s article was not enough time to enable capital to usurp abolition and transform the ex-slaves into dispossessed workers, given to “general industriousness” and compelled by the need to sell their labor power on the market. Despite that agricultural production in the colonies occurred at an industrial scale and for a world market, bourgeois social relations did not take hold. The picture is rather unlike the promise given in the *Communist Manifesto*, where “all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic” ties binding subordinate classes to their “natural superiors” would be rationalized by liberal equality needed by the revolutionary bourgeoisie’s mode of production. Whereas this transition ought to replace traditional fetters with only “naked self-interest, callous cash payment” emancipation—the *embourgeoisement* of formal (legal) social relations in this instance emboldened the refusal of labor.^[4]

Cedric Robinson’s history of black radicalism reformulates this trajectory in terms of racial capitalism—where proletarianization was always and inexorably a racializing process, even internal to, and at the advent of, Europe—on which model the emergence and global expansion of the capitalist mode of production was “less a catastrophic revolution (negation) of feudal social orders than the expansion of these social relations into the larger tapestry of the modern world’s political and economic relations.”^[5] A theorist such as Frank Wilderson would cleave the figures entirely from one another, arguing that, unlike the figure of the worker whose political horizon is the democratization of production, the slave demands that production halt because “work is not an organic principle for the slave.”^[6] While the *Manifesto*’s rhapsodic portrayal of the ruthless but progressive bourgeois revolution may have, in truth, been more a literary device than a scientific insight, and late Marx may have put a finer point on the prophetic dimension of such polemics—it seems to be the case that the emancipation not realized in society as a whole found some kind of fulfillment in art. The history of Western art in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is dominated by this incessant liquidation of traditions. Like the bourgeois class was supposed to have done for society, the fetters subordinating artistic labor to tradition and

use were shaken, and art, as modern art, turned inward against itself in negation of its very essence. At a high point of this permanent revolution, Theodor Adorno, writing in the 1960s, determined that the question advanced art poses itself is that of “whether art is still possible”—not in the sense that Hegel claimed art’s end in its supersession by philosophy—but in the sense that with its separation (“emancipation”) from the society that enabled it to come into its own “it did not sever its own preconditions.”^[7] While any wholesale transposition of this mid-twentieth-century assessment of art and its social relations to the present day would be crude, it is apparent that the transition from historical modern art to the contemporary art of today has not resolved the knot that binds the question of art’s once purportedly “irrevocable autonomy” to the uncertainty around whether art can be said to exist as a realm of possible experience qualitatively different from (and antithetical to) heteronomous society.

Although these questions about the reality and effects of embourgeoisement in art and in the world are, of course, discrete, this essay begins with the post-Hegelian assumption that history of art and the history of freedom have something to do with each other. The seemingly narrow “marxological” problem of transition posed in the passage from the *Grundrisse* might be another way of making an inquiry into questions that animate so much of contemporary critical theory, art, and politics: What is the bearing of the transatlantic slave trade on the historical present and how can it be overcome? Put another way: can one live after middle passage? What does it mean to live in, or to be “the afterlife of slavery”? Cultural historian and theorist Saidiya Hartman, a frequent interlocutor of Ralph Lemon and his collaborators, coined the paradigmatic phrasing in the opening chapter of her critical memoir *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*:

I wanted to engage the past, knowing that its perils and dangers still threatened and that even now lives hung in the balance. Slavery had established a measure of man and a ranking of life and worth that has yet to be undone. If slavery persists as an issue in the political life of black America, it is not because of an antiquarian obsession with bygone days or the burden of a too-long memory, but because black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery—skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment. I, too, am the afterlife of slavery.^[8]

This insight is born of her first book *Scenes of Subjection* (1997), in which it was shown how the bestowal of liberal rights and freedoms upon slaves after the Civil War delivered black Americans from the hell of chattel slavery only into the maw of waged and conscripted labor, where techniques of domination shifted in kind but not necessarily in intensity. While born of empirical history, the negative assessment of the state of the world passes over into a qualitatively more political and philosophical judgment of the quality of historical experience. The identification of this impasse was enabled by revolutions in history and political economy that rethought chattel slavery not as a relic of pre-capitalist paternalism but as an originary accumulation that enabled the conditions for self-developing capital to come into its own in Europe and the New World. When the spread of capital across the globe can be said to inaugurate the modern era, modernity itself can be refigured as the time of capitalist slavery and its afterlife: the scope of an abolitionist project assumes new political heights and philosophical depths.

The nexus of questions surrounding the realization of the coterminous relationship of capitalism to slavery, and slavery to the modern world, have come to dominate historiographic inquiry into black life. Vincent Brown’s survey of academic histories says the problem has bifurcated the field. If taken seriously, one is left either to narrate stories of “heroic subalterns” achieving micropolitical victories in the grip of domination, or to outline

“anatomies of doom” that form a “constitutive part of a tragic present.”^[9] In both cases, substantial movement in history appears, for the moment, decisively blocked. In such cases, where slavery is realized as a deeper and more constitutive relation than the matter of formal (legal) inequality labor tends to fall away as a component of this history, or as a motor of history at all.

This essay will investigate the scope of these inquiries into this philosophical-historical thicket in two bodies of work by contemporary artists working in the United States who work through images of labor haunted and structured by the historical experience of slavery. The first section engages with an expansive series of pieces made over the course of a decade at the turn of the millennium through a collaboration between New York-based choreographer-turned-conceptualist, Ralph Lemon, and his muse, a centenarian ex-sharecropper from Mississippi named Walter Carter. The second half looks at a recent exhibition of conceptual sculpture and work on paper by Cameron Rowland that focuses on prison labor and legal history, entitled *91020000*, after the customer number given to the gallery by the New York State Department of Correction, with which the artist had to register to purchase the prison-made commodities transformed by the exhibition into unassisted readymades.

At the level of form, both artists engage the legacy of modern art's self-negation by adapting the strategies of anti-art to the demands of their shared content—an inquiry into the experience of freedom in bourgeois society after the world historical experience of abolition. The compulsion of Lemon toward anti-dance and non-dance forms on stage and the dissolution of his medium into gallery and print-based “paradance” artifacts are demanded formally and conceptually by his objects of inquiry (disappearing black social dances, refused oral histories, counter-memorials to the victims of lynching). Rowland's objects are in themselves predominantly unremarkable commodities manufactured in prisons, but the show's political commitments to these objects and their producers demanded it negate art at a level deeper than familiar strategies of the neo-avant-garde. None of the prison artifacts can be bought, only borrowed, and then only on the rather exploitative terms resembling those in installment plans offered to low-income people buying consumer appliances. In the tradition of historical conceptual art, the aim is to subvert the valorization of art by the market, but it is extended to move against any further profits being derived from the hyper exploitation of prison workers whose depressed wages subsidize the functioning of US government agencies and non-profit organizations of all types. The contracts governing the circulation of the work are wholly external to the sculptures, never shown or reproduced, subterranean presences are registered only on in the gallery checklist by the phrase “rental at cost” instead of a price. Still, they reflected back inside the work at the level of conceptual artistic experience.

The work of both artists is characterized by the intimacy their work attains between the history of art and the history of capitalism as it works through the phenomenon of racial slavery's participation in the present. Each takes its distance from the world, through quiet, not wholly scrutable images that offer a space in which to grasp the unfigurable totality held in the problem of slavery's afterlife, beyond the occasionally deadlocked debates on historical questions in the fields of Marxism in Black Studies, thereby overcoming the “sterile dichotomy” between the recording of history and its interpretation by making both, simultaneously, objects of artistic experience.

Dancing and Dying After the Catastrophe

In an on-stage video projection Ralph Lemon walks across an empty road dressed in a white button-down shirt with a tie, thick black glasses and cuffed jeans toward a yellow streetlight, the purported site of a lynching, the victim strung up on a plumb tree long since cut down and paved over. He falls against, sits next to and finally lies

down beside the pole. Adjacent to the screen, standing in a Nari Ward designed sculpture-cum set piece called *Attic Space*, Lemon stands in a red shirt while packing a retractable ladder into a wooden box mounted on the ceiling. He reads the following narrative:

Elias did get into trouble one summer, visiting his Aunt Tempy up north, Jennie's sister in Duluth, creating rituals. Improvisational memorials throughout the state; places where something bad happened. He was so serious. "This is an act of sympathy." That's what he told the police officer, quoting James Baldwin. It was a really interesting idea, but all fake finally. He would suspend his body from specifically chosen vertical objects: hanging, falling in space not up or down, or, falling up *and* down from bridges, street lights, trees. Once from an open fire hydrant. There wasn't much falling distance but he did get really, really wet. But not here. Here it was a yellow streetlight pole and a few memories. One was of all that water.

It began the day Jenny and Jeff got all dressed up, walked out of their house to the shed and rode their scrawny little horse off a cliff together. They fell, holding onto one another tightly, showing no excitement, the water booming below. Elias, who was a young boy then, was there watching from the top of the hill thinking it was all his fault. It wasn't. The horse was the first to hit the water. Then Jeff, then Jenny. "Damn, they ain't even scared. Oh shit! They weren't scared at all." Elias got older, was much older when he stood next to that yellow pole. He was arrested that summer in Duluth, on his birthday. Spent a few days in the county jail. When he got home he made this dance.^[10]

A jaunty Piedmont Blues song by Rev. Gary David, "I Am the Light" plays as Lemon begins a tortured buck dance that carries the weight of its history in its low center of gravity. The social life of the plantation audible in its heavy stomps, visible in his high steps and serpentine torso. As he gets into the swing of it, two black men in civilian clothing and armed with a fire hose enter stage right, hitting him at close range with a high-pressure jet of water, knocking him over (fig. 1). The good and evil drama of civil disobedience would overtake the scene, except that the dancer seems indifferent to interruption. On the receiving end of a torrent, Lemon enters a cycle of slipping, falling and dancing as water pools around him. The score, designed by Christian Marclay, shifts and the devotional, optimistic Reverend's finger picking gives way to rock drums and distorted guitars. Two dancers appear downstage, thrashing well away from each other. The water jet shuts off and the two crowd controllers join the ensemble before they all collapse on the floor. Several minutes of formless, painful "ecstatic" dance ensue on a stage that's silent but for the grunts and thuds of the dancers punishing their bodies.^[11] The movement slows to a trickle, a dancer half-heartedly splashes in a left-behind puddle and a camera pans to high-mounted screen where a line drawing of James Baldwin ventriloquizes an interview with the author from the 1970s about presence of Africa on the world stage: "Something is beginning to happen in the Western world, and everybody in one way or another is feeling this. What was presumed to be the center of the Earth has shifted and the definition of man has shifted with it. Does that make sense to you?"

These three scenes closing the video documentation of Lemon's *Come home, Charley Patton* (2003), conclude, and circle back to the start of his decade-long research project into global dance cultures, *The Geography Trilogy*, which began by bringing together West African and African-American dancers for the eponymous performance in 1997, then joined the Ivorian performers with dancers from South, Southeast, and East Asia for a study of Buddhist aesthetics, *Tree* (2001), and culminated in *Charley Patton*, the artist's non-Homeric return to the United States.

The trilogy inaugurated what Lemon semi-jokingly refers to as his “black period,” roughly dated from 1997 to the present, after the surprise closure of Ralph Lemon Dance Company in 1995 after ten successful years of touring.^[12] The black period coincides with his step away from choreography for proscenium stage and toward research-intensive expansive contemporary art presentations of works that frequently entail performance in an expanded sense in non-traditional venues. Since then he has mostly given up the title of choreographer and adopted the moniker “conceptualist.” The contemporary works are defined by the distributive unity of the dance itself, and what Lemon calls (in a riff on Genet) the paradance: multimedia performance, video documentation, and accompanying process-books, as well as art-space presentation of its props, sets, and scores and other elements made collaboratively. This shift entered maturity with *Charley Patton*, the piece to which the majority of his major works have since returned, either in theme or through borrowing from its research materials.^[13] Although they are by no means exclusive to it, the black period is defined by two concerns: first, the conservation of black social life sedimented in cultural practices, including those of non-black artists who are treated as black insofar as their work can be appropriated toward these ends; and second, the navigation of a historical present that not only bears traces of the transatlantic slave trade, but the essence of which is this haunting because it *is* slavery’s afterlife.

In November 2001, during the research for *Patton*, Lemon took his first trip to the American South, accompanied by his daughter Chelsea. Their research itinerary included retracing the route of the original freedom rides, and site visits for the two-fold *Dancing/Dying Tour*. The first required visiting the closest living descendants of the most important practitioners of the Delta Blues and improvising dances in their living rooms to the music of their famous relations; the second meant enacting temporary “counter-memorials” at the anonymous sites of historical lynchings. In an ethnographic effort “to discover something authentic about the American South,” Lemon sought out community elders and, in an act of “search and transmission,” asked to see them dance.^[14] The first of these was the Buzzard Lope, taught to his research team by Hicks Walker, a centenarian living remotely, off the coast of Georgia, on an island notable for its Gullah-Geechee population. The relationship was short lived as Walker passed away in 2002, not long after a second research visit. In the same month as Walker’s passing, a visit to a juke joint in Mississippi led him to Walter and Edna Carter, an elderly couple living in the backwoods of Little Yazoo. Walter was an ex-sharecropper in his mid-90s with whom Lemon began a collaboration that lasted the next ten years. According to Lemon’s daughter and videographer, Walter became Ralph’s muse, whose aging body, in Lemon’s words “invokes...the crescendo of dying.”^[15]

Alienation Blues

How Can You Stay in the House All Day and Not Go Anywhere (2010) opens with a video projection of Walter Carter climbing into a rustic spacecraft and rolling on his back. On stage Lemon narrates, referring to Walter as his teacher, explaining how, on that day, he read to Walter on Paul Klee’s *Angelus Novus* (1920) from the famous tenth fragment of Walter Benjamin’s *On the Concept of History* (1940), on account of the old man’s interest in the Bible. On screen, Walter, now in his backyard, smashes a ceramic rabbit with a brick. The video cuts to footage of Civil Rights-era footage of police brutality, then to Bruce Nauman’s *Floor/Wall Positions* (1968), then to Lemon’s reenactment of that work. After, Lemon shows the “Fire Hose” and “Ecstasy” dances from *Patton*, calling the work “a glimpse of liberation.”^[16] The major elements of Lemon’s recent practice are all on display in these opening minutes. Much of the collaboration with Carter consists of enlisting the purportedly ordinary man to do extraordinary things, called “events,” that included enacting post-Fluxus scores, dressing in animal costumes and spacesuits, and reenacting scenes from the films of Andrei Tarkovsky and Jean-Luc Godard.

In a lecture given at UC Berkeley, Lemon describes the opening event of *How Can You Stay Inside*. After

entering, holding a shovel:

Walter then walked down a slight hill from the two leaning sheds and began to dig a hole and found three buried 78 records unjacketed. He retrieved the records, dropped them off one at a time back up the slight hill marking his path to a sitting tin tub. He paused. He reached into the tin tub and retrieved a set in place screwdriver and sardine can filled with Crisco cooking grease. He took the screwdriver and can filled with Crisco to a blue Egyptian vase standing on a worktable with a brick resting in its mouth. He smeared the Crisco onto the vase with the screwdriver, greasing it up and down with a vertical action. He repeated this action quite a few times. Once finished he placed the sardine can filled with Crisco and the screwdriver down onto the table and took up a nearby green glass water pitcher filled with water, carried it to the tin tub, poured the water into the tin tub, and paused. Still holding onto the empty green pitcher he walked over to the vase with the brick and took the brick from the mouth of the vase. Carrying the brick and the pitcher he walked to the tin tub and pulled it a few feet closer to a porcelain rabbit sitting nearby. He moved to a stance directly next to the rabbit, agilely nailing him with the brick: he smashed the porcelain rabbit. He stood and paused. Holding the empty pitcher, dangling the cabled brick in the other hand, he dropped the brick. He picked up the broken porcelain rabbit pieces scattered on the ground and placed them in an empty pitcher. He carried the pitcher full of broken porcelain rabbit pieces up the hill to a freshly dug hole and buried the broken pieces. The event ended with Walter standing over the grave of the broken rabbit holding the shovel using it as a natural rest prop for a very long time. The event did not go as planned.^[17]

Reflecting on it years later, it appears to him that the increasing absurdity of the tasks correlates inversely to comprehensibility and directly to artistic meaning. These scores make “debris of life... sublime and unknown,” and Walter’s body compounds the effect, further distancing them from the familiar nonsense of contemporary performance, liberating the idea because his body takes over, by Walter’s “co-opting” of the event.^[18] Walter becomes the “translator” through which Lemon makes sense of his past practice, inspiring the “complete collapse” of the separation between a dancing body and the space of art and theater.^[19] Carter’s ability to perform the tasks is limited by his bad memory, bodily capacity, and degree of interest. Lemon, as an inspired artist, wants badly to see his scores enacted but knows he must negotiate first with Carter’s wife and caretaker Edna, and then with Walter’s own limits. In a diaristic essay published years after their first encounter Lemon reflects on the artistic process of working with Walter. He dramatizes his concern for the ethics of the relationship (but is a famously unreliable narrator), fascinated by the fact that a non-exploitative relationship might not be possible.^[20]

Walter’s disobedience and forgetting are evidence that the dynamic is not so unequal. He has Ralph and Chelsea take him on his errands, drive him to grab a surreptitious beer and go visit his daughter. Lemon dramatically describes Walter’s bad memory and his failing to remain in character as exerting a real force upon him: he’s “battered” by the non-compliance but thrilled at the results of something beyond his control.^[21] The question of exploitation is further brought up and consciously, unconvincingly paved over:

For Walter there was always, at every moment, an exquisite position to action: digging, greasing, moving, breaking, forgetting... it is the work that is understood biologically, a long time ago, a direct work, not pampered, rehearsed, politicized, intellectualized nor aestheticized—how fucking stunning. Walter was

paid \$100 a day for a few hours of his unquestioning time.^[22]

The exploitation question resolves into its mediation by a fair wage. At the same time it's about Lemon's romance of the South—the agrarian labor of the plantation economy, his dream of the less-alienated semi-feudal, almost natural biological, labor of the sharecropper. In a revealing conversation with Hartman at the Studio Museum in Harlem he describes the racism of Little Yazoo, the set of dirt roads where the Carters live in Mississippi, as being uncontaminated by urban culture, by which he means, less mediated by “capital and lots of other things.”^[23] When Lemon asks Carter if he wants to review the footage to nix or okay it, Walter says he doesn't need to see it. Lemon reports: “I'm having a good time, I like the work.”^[24]

Two competing images of less- or un-alienated labor intersect with Walter: that of the artist—on both the modernist model of art's relative autonomy, and the romantic-aesthetic model of a quasi-natural process (Milton, says Marx, wrote poetry as a spider spins its web)—and that of nineteenth-century African Americans on either side of emancipation. Prior to abolition, the fantasy of black pleasure, slave song and dance (the genesis of the blues) were a cornerstone of planter ideology, evidencing slaves' suitability for, and enjoyment of, labor in bondage;^[25] afterward, the rural peonage of the nominally emancipated ex-slaves, figured, much like slavery itself, as an image of an Old South aristocratic order not yet brought iron laws of capitalist production. In *How Can You Stay in the House*, Walter's appearance calls forth slavery and its immediate aftermath, because he was, in Lemon's narration, “fifty years or so shy of being a full-time slave.”^[26] At the same time, his presence suggests not primarily bondage, but resistance to work—every artistic success in the collaboration is born of Walter's bucking orders.

Carter's homeland, the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta, is the ground zero of working-class political resistance after the war, and, as sociologist Clyde Woods demonstrates in his *Development Arrested: The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta* (1998), the “Blues Epistemology” that took hold around 1800, forged in that struggle, held opposition to work as a key tenant—exemplified in the blues of Memphis Slim and Big Bill Broonzy. Southern Enclosure, the dual process of mass eviction of tenant farmers and the mechanization of their labor, that followed Reconstruction and peaked with the New Deal, represented not a moment of “transition” to capitalist social relations but a “movement from capital-scarce, labor-intensive plantation production to capital-intensive, labor-surplus neo-plantation production.”^[27] The planter oligarchs consolidated power in state legislature and formed a powerful federal lobby to secure a labor force in the face of massive resistance to work by variously canceling or seizing aid money given to sharecroppers by a New Deal government that recognized in their situation nothing short of a national crisis. Without money or land, farm hands were forced back onto plantations. For those who would not return voluntarily, the Planter Bloc enacted new vagrancy laws to bind them legally to the planters, working this time under the view of armed prison guards. As wards of the state rather than part of the planter's constant capital, the free laborers often turned to self-injury to escape fatal over-working.

In Woods's study of ideology in the “Alluvial Empire,” the intellectual class of the southern oligarchs advanced the view that slavery, sharecropping, and mechanization, and prison, waged, and migratory labor, though different, were not only all compatible with capitalist production but each was crucial to it. The relics of the antebellum order were not capital's prehistory, awaiting rationalization; Marx himself described the Deep South regime as one that had “grafted the barbarism of overwork onto the horrors of slavery.”^[28] In Woods's reading of southern political economy, the tenant farmers who struggled and organized from the 1890s through the 1950s were not a semi-feudal holdover, but industrial workers involved in capitalist production on the plantation,

whose means of production had been transformed while relations of production were frozen.

Not far off from Woods's "Blues Epistemology" Lemon hit upon something similar when speaking with the proprietor of a juke joint: "Whenever anyone asked Jack [Owens] where his blues came from, he'd say from working in the cotton fields or behind a mule. 'Where else you'd expect a man would think about workin' like that?' he'd say."^[29] Still, the figure of the sharecropper as outside of a certain phase of historical movement is what animates the compelling images of Walter. Choreographer and performance theorist Andre Lepecki enthuses over the phenomenon that Walter's remoteness allows Lemon to move past the tropes of modern and postmodern dance to which his career had, until that moment, been unhappily indexed.^[30] "What is amazing is that it took an angel of history, a former sharecropper as old as a century, and entirely outside the economies of discourses of art, to precipitate this other form of dance..."^[31] When modern and postmodern ceased to work for him as critical idioms there was a peasant dancer to revitalize the project.

The Bad Side of History

Where Woods, the sociologist, found continuity in the social relations of production, recent historiography of the cusp period has aimed at naming a social ontology. Saidiya Hartman's study of nineteenth-century America demonstrates how the liberal freedom bestowed on Black Americans after the war extended and intensified the forms of domination they experienced. Thus:

Lacking the certitude of a definitive partition between slavery and freedom, and in the absence of a consummate breach through which freedom might unambivalently announce itself, there is at best a transient and fleeting expression of possibility that cannot ensconce itself as a durable temporal marker. If periodization is a barrier imposed from above that obscures the involuntary servitude and legal subjection that followed in the wake of slavery, then attempts to assert absolutist distinctions between slavery and freedom are untenable.^[32]

Frank Wilderson, much inspired by Hartman's formulations, takes the historiographic insight and joins it to Orlando Patterson's concept of "social death," a sociological ideal-type which he treats as an ontological position (or, a mode of existence outside, for which the domain of ontology has no adequate grammar).^[33] Where Patterson sought to integrate the African-American experience of enslavement into a model that explained the condition from antiquity to the present, Wilderson joins Patterson with Frantz Fanon to have social death name the constitutive condition of blackness in irreconcilable antagonism with the rest of the world, the experience of which is utterly incommensurable with that of any other oppression. Slavery is given in a set of parameters that are predominantly psychosocial, rather than material. It is a social relation not in the field of political economy—of which this discourse is a metacritique— but of *libidinal* economy and political *ontology*. The trinity—natal alienation, permanent subjection to general dishonor, and openness to gratuitous and unpredicated violence—set the psychic profiles of the people on either side of bondage such that no real political unity can be forged. At the heart of the discussion of being lies a problem of history. Those who follow the social death model to its horrifying end point uncover something perversely Hegelian in global historical processes. Unifying a negative tradition in Black Studies, Wilderson writes that Hortense Spillers, Fanon and Hartman all find that this gratuitous violence "continually repositions the Black as a void of historical movement" that is "without analog in the suffering dynamics of the ontologically alive."^[34]

It is, at a basic level, born of a reflection on historical evidence, and yet, beyond its evaluation of a collection of

facts it contains a challenge for historical method: to think the persistence of racial slavery after the violent world-historical overturning of its legal principles. It lays claim to an insight into something more essential about freedom and history than can be admitted by the facts of emancipation. When historical narration passes over into philosophy of history, it becomes possible to grasp the trends that persist despite their apparent interruption. In anticipation of his future collaborations with Hartman, Lemon links this view to the critique of historical progress from the German tradition that extends from Marx to the Frankfurt School.

Historically, the naming of meta-historical trends not bound to the “pure facticity” of the discipline went by the name of “universal history” of the sort championed in Hegel’s *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* in the 1820s. Adorno, picking up on Benjamin, argues that this practice must be “construed and denied.”^[35] While Hegel’s was a history of the victors, Benjamin’s call for histories of the oppressed does not abandon the category, instead, his image is akin to that of the young Marx, for whom history advanced “on its bad side.”^[36] In the bit of Benjamin that Lemon reads to Walter Carter, historical progress is imaged as “one single catastrophe.”^[37] Adorno, who along with Max Horkheimer published Benjamin’s essay in 1942, took up the paradigm and elaborated a theory of history around its negative premise, where Hegel’s world spirit is redefined as “permanent catastrophe,”^[38] in which the possibility for political action is blocked by the total administration of the world.^[39] Where praxis wanes, philosophy and art are given new importance as spaces for (intellectual) labor outside instrumental reason’s demand to produce things of immediate use.

The often misunderstood point is that progress does not mean “the most present” or chronologically up-to-date, but most advanced, most ruinous to its contemporaries and its own foundations.^[40] In this negative sense, progress names a historical tendency toward the domination of nature that leads to ever-more complete control of human life: “No universal history leads from savagery to humanitarianism, but there is one leading from the slingshot to the megaton bomb.”^[41] This tendency, as an objective compulsion of capitalist social relations, is accompanied by the emergence of “the new” as a historico-philosophical category defining a particular experience of time dating from the rise of high capitalism in the middle of the nineteenth century. To appear as new is an “irresistible” law of bourgeois societies, that sociologically would be called “non-traditional,” those dominated by the commodity form.^[42] Such societies are bound to negate tradition *as such*, in qualitative difference from familiar generational division where trends fade in the passage from one to the next.

That historical movement is determined on a global level by forces beyond any available political means is something with which Lemon reckons by means of Walter, who is both evidence of the grand still-present evil and of a past form of sociality that has eroded. He marks a certain historical black sociality that would best be called, after Hegel, a popular spirit, the German for which (*Volksgeist*) is redolent of racial-national principle. His is the spirit of a people purportedly “less mediated by capital” than others.^[43] Lemon’s concern for the souls of black folk operates in circumstances markedly different from W.E.B. Du Bois’s turn of the century study. While once regarded as the medium through which history moved—as they were for Du Bois and Hegel—popular spirits have ceased to have explanatory power after World War II where, Adorno argues, the individual was confirmed as “the figure through which the universal, that is, the reproduction of the human world, is mediated.”^[44] This has transformed the social situation of art as well; he argues “there is no longer any ‘folk’ whose songs and games could be taken up and sublimated by art; the opening up of markets and the bourgeois process of rationalization have subordinated all society to bourgeois categories.”^[45] Art, caught up in this processes, is fully implicated in capital’s self-development. Much like the proletariat, which, newly liberated from ancient cultural fetters was “free in the double sense,” as Marx says, in that they were also bereft of any means to survive without selling their labor power, modern art was free from its traditional cultural functions (religious worship and veneration of nobility) while removing it from the sphere of immediate use and practical efficacy. As a part of society cut off

from the larger body, modern art is compelled by its commodity character to progress in ways that mirror the market, but are not subordinate to it.

Accumulation of the American Primitive

In the book *Come Home, Charley Patton* (2013) Lemon details research trip in which he visited the house of Mose Tolliver, a self-taught black artist from Montgomery Alabama, widely celebrated as “one of the leaders of the modern-day Outsider Art movement.”^[46] His progressive disenchantment with the South appears in the fragmented narrative. He departs from the Civil Rights Museum, remarking in a muted blow to both the museum and artist that Tolliver’s art is not on its walls, and that his work was championed by Nancy Reagan. At the house he is treated with suspicion by Mose T’s relatives, who tell him to come back later when the artist returns. Returning to his motel, his white cab driver takes him to see a local eccentric: a young man with dreadlocks wheeling around a shopping cart full of garbage. Lemon imagines the cabbie’s racist fantasy, suspects he sees the young man as art, and fantasizes that he was one in the white mob who beat the freedom riders unconscious when they stopped in Montgomery.^[47] Returning to Tolliver’s house he finds the artist reluctant to discuss his work but happy to talk about his property. When asked why he paints, Tolliver replies: “Cause I can’t do nothin’ else. Used to plant flowers and trees but my body can’t do that work no more. Was really good at it. Anyway, so now I just paint. Did enjoy going to the White House, Mrs. Reagan invited me. Had a fine meal, ate whatever I wanted, a fine meal.”^[48] Lemon says nothing about the “folk artist” treating painting as a day job, adding only “The four hours go by quickly.” He caps the episode with an unsourced italicized fragment, transitioning to the Selma portion of the trip: “*At least we had good music when the Negroes were demonstrating.*”^[49]

Lemon knows there is no real outside or folk to be drawn upon without mediation, but he searches for it. The work with Walter works because the elderly man’s attempts at accessing a blues folk tradition end up resembling the minimalist negations of dance that revolutionized the field in the 1960s, (the same tradition Lemon’s work in the 1980s sought to extend and negate). Thus mediated, Walter’s movement advances beyond both to the present. Lemon knows the social life that fascinates him and is the object of his work is most itself when left alone. When despairing in rehearsal for *Charley Patton*, having sustained an injury rehearsing the dance with the fire hose, he laments that the music is “not (deadly) alive enough,” jeopardizing the whole piece.^[50] If Mississippi Blues legend Othar Turner was having another one of the backyard goat barbeque parties Lemon attended for his research he would just “invite everyone to that and be done with it.”^[51]

Lemon’s diaristic writing about Walter describes him as an inscrutable collaborator, supporter, and friend. As an ex-sharecropper, emphatically in his old age and seemingly removed from changes in the world, Carter appears as both a remnant from the harsher period of American race and labor relations, and, at the same time, as a relic of a dying blues tradition he carries in him and expresses in his body. Something urgently in need of recovery. When he dances the old steps for Lemon, the movements appear less the recollection of social dance steps from the turn of the century than something like the anamnestic embodiment of qualities once fundamental in black life. The image of sociality invoked by appeals to the politics of black social life is offered as a rejoinder to the theory of social death. As such it occasioned an appeal to cultural heritage, a celebration of popular “low” forms and the informal. Lemon knows the direct celebration is inadequate and will not work as art. In “Communism and Private Property” Marx puts forth an anticipatory rejoinder to a curtailed image of sociality:

Social activity and social enjoyment exist by no means only in the form of some directly communal activity and directly communal enjoyment, although communal activity and communal enjoyment—i.e., activity and enjoyment which are manifested and affirmed in actual direct association with other

men—will occur wherever such a direct expression of sociability stems from the true character of the activity's content and is appropriate to the nature of the enjoyment.^[52]

When Lemon has Walter dance steps from his adolescence, he moves “mostly his legs, sliding, without bending any limbs.”^[53] In an exceptional piece of footage from 2005, shot in Yazoo City, shown by Lemon as part of a performative lecture “Ceremonies Out of Air” (though, he maintains, neither a performance nor a lecture) surveying his engagement with the American South, done in conjunction with Hartman, Walter stands in a derelict theater on the city's main street, now open to the air for want of a roof (fig. 2). He shifts his weight metronomically from one foot to the other, fully immersed in the effort, rotted plywood straining underneath. In Lemon's narration Walter danced “not the one-step, two-step or slow drag, but something even more forgotten, minimal. More like a preternatural shuffle from memory, or before,” adding immediately, “if truth be told it was probably a mindful improvisation on the spot of unbroken stage in silence for twenty minutes.”^[54]

Lemon approaches that sociality through art history, or an image of it. The art historical work performed in each piece is governed by its formal concerns. The forms in turn are born of their concern for the work's employment in history, where the history of art is not merely a branch of the humanities, or the empirical ordering of artworks chronologically, but is something deeper, more akin to Adorno's formulation of it in *Aesthetic Theory* (1970); the sedimented history of human misery. The overriding concern for the mediation of history and the history of art by one another is epitomized in his work with Walter, who appears in it as both a relic of historical processes and as that which transcends historical transformation, but it is to be found in Lemon's other endeavors as well, which are deeply informed by this collaboration.

In *On Value* (2016), a book Lemon edited in collaboration with the publication platform *Triple Canopy*, there is a conversation between choreographer Sara Michelson and curator Philip Bither, where Michelson speaks with anxiety about dance being collected by the Museum of Modern Art, wondering whether it will result in a distortion of dance's history. All discussants acknowledge it poses a problem, but are not sure if there are any adequate historicizing mechanisms extant for dance that is not art institutional, “apart from the New York Times.”^[55] Lemon's turn to Walter is in part a response to this moment in dance history. His expanded project shows the continuity of this strategy. As an editor for *On Value*, he published an essay by Yvonne Rainer, “The Value of ‘The Big Snooze’ and Contingent Matters” (2015) detailing a cancelled performance in which she would sleep beneath MoMA's most prized piece of naïve art, Henri Rousseau's *The Sleeping Gypsy* (1897).^[56] As a curator, Lemon commissioned a performance of Jerome Bel's *The Show Must Go On* (2002) to take place in MoMA's atrium for *Some sweet way*, a three-week program on dance in the museum in 2012. As expressions and extensions of Lemon's choreographic practices, in the context of a broader interest, these works too become occasions for reflecting on what is happening in this moment of dance's institutional transformation. All three artists are turning to “non-professionals” and “amateurs,” to “outsiders” in exploring questions of the value of dance to art institutions, the vulnerability of dancers to contemporary art, and the relation of dance to historicity.

This set of problems seems to exactly set out the contemporaneity of these practices in the context of the art world. In the strong sense of the term, characterized by Peter Osborne, contemporary emphasizes the dual sense of the prefix, multiple times moving alongside and against one another: “the coming together of equally ‘present’ temporalities in temporarily totalized but disjunctive unities.”^[57] In Lemon's reflections on Walter's body we might understand it as the co-presencing of that which appears anachronistic (or even untouched by history), such as Walter's dance and labor, and that which is necessarily of the present, given in the eerie

contemporaneity of Walter's dance and labor. Lemon's extended practice (curatorial, editorial, choreographic) gives an occasion to consider his collaborations with Walter as part of an older tradition of artists looking to the outside, engaging the fantasy that something has escaped the administration of life, that there is an outside to history (as the history of capital) and that the products of this outside express and ineradicable but waning freedom that persists beneath damaged life. The curatorial engagement with the outside is in line with the image of outsider art as a historical category that is best viewed, according to the curator of Folk and Self-Taught at the High Museum in Atlanta, Katherine Jentleson, "a set of cracks that reveal major paradigm shifts and institutional reformations in both the art world and society more generally."^[58]

Lemon's meta-artistic writing, read over Walter's performance, is a complement to the docu-fictional video work: it expresses an anxiety surrounding Lemon's source material: his relation with Walter. It dramatizes the dynamic to add a kind of ethical self-critique, institutional insofar as Lemon is the bearer of the institution's traditions. The work is defined by its constant attempt to escape and refresh its own modernism. The work's contemporaneity consists in the playing out of these two, in their disjunctive unity internal to the work that calls forth the historical character of the unreflecting ahistorical outside. Walter carries an ageless tradition in danger of being lost by his old age. The historical character of him, of his dance bearing the memory of a catastrophe even as it is less alienated by the forces of industrial production, raises the question of exactly what *kind* of relationship chattel slavery was and is, and what its relation to experiences of historical time is.

Social Life, Social Death, Social Labor

In the first volume of *Capital*, slavery appears as one in a series of roughly ordered relations of production that comprise Marx's periodization of historical development, commensurable with other social relations that are fundamentally traditional ("Asiatic mode of production," medieval feudalism, etc.), meaning not fundamentally revolutionary in a way comparable to the advent of wage labor.^[59] Against the historical materialist understanding of slavery, the paradigm of social death (even where the term identifies one form of social death among others) names a metaphysical particularity incommensurate with other modes of exploitation, to the point of being absolutely singular, such that it deems the essence of the relationship to be mystified whenever analogized to another experience. As a conflict with no possible sublation, black liberation "function(s) as a negative dialectic" in its refusal to affirm political struggle, to offer consolation, or to be party to any act that could reconcile it into a program.^[60] Here, the absence of a wage has no bearing on the slave status of the subjected. It prepares the ground for an analytic whose chief diagnostic category is enslavement, even after formal political emancipation has been won. Abolition ceases to be a struggle for self-possession via the acquisition of liberal rights, and becomes the concerted effort to abolish modernity, to bring the world to an end because its material and psychic structures have been, and remain, grounded in an unchanged regime of brutality against the enslaved—where history comes to a standstill and freedom transforms human chattel only into prison slaves-in-waiting. Although the role of history in this tradition is by no means a settled question among its progenitors, it remains the case that the second conception is based, at some level, upon the logical priority of the first, which it takes as originary and argues has changed only in appearance. This model, based on the accrual of psychic power, is indexed to transatlantic trade in people that gains world-historical significance by globalizing the bourgeois mode of production that reshapes the subjectivity of those caught in its matrix in accord with commodity fetishism, driving alienation to the extreme, in obedience to the laws that govern exploitation on the world market.

Lemon registers this crisis in historical models and overcomes the antinomic separation by relentlessly reinserting the question of art's social function in relation to theorizing thinking of freedom, slavery and history.

Works such as *How Can You Stay Inside the House All Day and Not Go Anywhere?* reflect at every moment upon their own art status, even as they ask the purportedly larger question of the actuality of black freedom. Lemon's monologues function as artist's talks within the work that are themselves the work. They interrupt the presentation of artistic content with reflection on the question of whether and how it can matter that they succeed as works. Even at its most wishful, in bringing together work and play in the convergence of Walter's tasks with his social dance, it reflects upon the freedom dream of work's end by making it the critical model for its own abolition. The manifest anxiety over the keeping of tradition—loss of folk tradition with the passing of elders and the distortion of dance in the art museum—while at the same time ceaselessly negating his own art historical situation— pushes the work beyond the deadlocked confrontation between the ostensible void of historical movement on the one hand, and the fantasy of vital, haptic sociality on the other. His work with and on Walter holds fast to critical negativity and political pessimism without abandoning history to ontology or the history of art to aesthetic immediacy.

An End to the Afterlife: Cameron Rowland's *91020000*

Only if things might have gone differently; if the totality is recognized as a socially necessary semblance, as the hypostasis of the universal pressed out of individual human beings; if its claim to be absolute is broken— only then will a critical social consciousness retain its freedom to think that things might be different some day. Theory cannot shift the huge weight of historic necessity unless the necessity has been recognized as realized appearance and historic determination is known as a metaphysical accident. Such cognition is frustrated by the metaphysics of history. More in line with the catastrophe that impends is the supposition of an irrational catastrophe in the beginning. Today the thwarted possibility of something other has shrunk to that of averting catastrophe in spite of everything.^[61]

Cameron Rowland's break-out show at New York City's Artist Space in 2016 unleashed a flurry of critical activity using only a handful of readymade objects: Two rows of courthouse benches (fig. 8), a single cheaply made office desk (fig. 9), two firefighter's jackets—one yellow one orange (fig. 4)—two pieces of recently unearthed civil war memorabilia—badges of participation in one of many failed experiments of Reconstruction-era black civil society (fig. 5)—three sets of lashing bars used to secure cargo on container ships stretched across the floor or dramatically arranged in the shape of an X on the wall, a small pile of metal rings used for leveling manhole entries after road work, a collection of books containing datasets published by the National Correctional Industries Association. And lastly, two sets of documents: one a customer registration receipt showing the gallery's partnership with the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, Division of Industries; the other framed stocks in an insurance company that historically issues policies for the slave trade along with a set of documents establishing a trust to "hold such shares until the effective date of any official action by any branch of the United States government to make financial reparations for slavery" at which point the stocks will be liquidated and paid out to beneficiaries (fig. 6).

The rings for leveling manholes connect contemporary prison labor to chain-gang era roadwork. The lashing bars, registered to Lloyds bank, connect global intermodal freight transport to the development of maritime insurance law with the triangular slave trade. The fire suits are work by prisoners who have been conscripted to fight California wildfires as part of the daily "faithful labor" required by them of the California Department of Corrections. All three artworks were produced by incarcerated workers. The exhibit is grounded by the opening work *Partnership* (2016): the registration documents enable the gallery to buy and exhibit these objects in the

first place, as the purchase of prison-made goods is restricted to government agencies and nonprofit organizations.

The show was praised by the *New York Times*'s Roberta Smith for "[offering] a history lesson and an aesthetic experience, intricately fused," and for doing so with a depth of critical insights that "accrues inexorably into an argument in the form of art for reparations."^[62] A review by Alex Kitnick for *Artforum* understood the show's argument to be "that the history of slavery (and the failure to make amends of it through reparations) continues to live on in our relations of property in general."^[63] The historical continuity is said to be given in the unaffected presentation of mundane, ubiquitous objects (desks, benches) with the texts revealing their sites of production (prisons) or historical origins (shipping and insurance practices devised to ensure the profitability of the slave trade). That the long history of slavery's afterlife directly subtends the art world is given in the surprising revelation of *Partnership*—that the gallery could only obtain such objects because of its status as a non-profit. Kitnick further argues that this "reveal is the basis for aesthetic appreciation of the work"; "it's their capturing of the utterly delicate interplay between overarching systems and the specificities of a metal turnbuckle or a plastic laminate that sets Rowland's ensembles apart"—marking its distance from the anti-aesthetic tradition typified by Duchamp.^[64] In such readings as these, Rowland, the aestheticist, becomes an heir of neo-Dadaists who found beauty in in the readymades that were meant to give a critique of beauty.^[65] While it is true that one experiences the work sensorily, it is not clear why the aesthetic dimension is privileged in relation to the work's own history and functioning.

Cameron Rowland's readymades are at one and the same time commodities like other commodities, and simultaneously, by virtue of their institutional setting, as works of post-conceptual art indexed to a moment of protest against, and mimesis of, the transformation of capitalist social relations of the long 1960s.^[66] The full meaning of each piece in *91020000* is accessible only through the distributive unity of the exhibition gathered together in Rowland's critically hefty gallery handout and promotional materials that act as the didactic support for the show and supply its conceptual substance. Of special interest in this regard is the relay between *Disgorgement* (2016) and *National Ex-Slave Mutual Relief, Bounty and Pension Association Badges* (2016), both thematically concerned with the movement toward reparations for slavery, for the links they forge between what Robin D.G. Kelley would call the black radical imagination and art's own aspirations to freedom. Both recall movements in the history of conceptual art—*Disgorgement* to the moment of Contract Art that coalesced around Seth Siegelaub, and the badges to Duchamp's readymades of the 1910s. Here the found objects, both the newly established trust and the recently unearthed badges, are presented without absurdity or intent to provoke, instead raising the question as to what it might mean for these objects, completely unadorned, to be works of contemporary art *only* insofar as they are straightforwardly useful objects or historical artifacts.

Prison-made Readymade

The art status of any work in the show cannot be taken for granted: like all advanced work it raises the question not only of its meaning but of what it means for it to be a work at all. The works in *91020000* broach this problem through the question of provenance. In a roundtable discussion on "Collective Consciousness," art historian David Joselit attributed the show's success to demonstrating the continuity of nineteenth-century slavery with the twentieth-century's prison industrial complex in order to do something new with the readymade. Characterized as detaching labor and objects "from their immediate context in an almost violent way," this new relation between the readymade object and its characteristics "allowed for an even more complete extraction or separation... from history."^[67] In a curious reading, for Joselit, as a result of this extraction from history "the objects are both evidence and not evidence of the objectification of human labor."^[68] What he terms a

separation might be thought of rather as a connection that is intensified by alienation and mediation. The shock of the distance binds the work rather closer to the question of its genesis.

From a different vantage point, critical race theorist Cheryl Harris, who, in a public program commissioned to provide legal history background to Rowland's work, described his process as that of taking viewers into the "racial genealogy of objects" through the "seemingly fungible yet highly specific terms of their production, use, and circulation."^[69] In an opposite formulation, the artistic act is said to consist not in separating the work from history but in "laying bare the origins of these objects to trace both the financial networks in which art commodities travel and the racially specific patterns of their production."^[70] But the artistic gesture in a work like *Attica Series Desk* (2016) (fig.9) or *New York State Unified Court System* (2016) (fig.8) resides neither in an *aesthetic* experience of the work, as though we might admire the eloquence or banality of the laminated particle board now that we know it was exploited *prisoners* who operated the machines that assembled the furniture, rather than exploited factory workers. The racial genealogy of objects opens back out as the work calls forth an image from "the hidden abode of production."^[71] Before delving into the kinds of labor that went into the work it is worth considering how they work as art objects. Although some have more of a stamp of the artist in them than others, they are all quintessentially variations on the readymade. At the level of production they are all objects of others' labor, and at the level of art history they all call back to the primal scene of conceptual art, Duchamp's positing of the readymade.

Recent scholarship has biographically linked the creation of the readymade to Duchamp's aspirationally aristocratic desire to steer clear of anything laborious. In *Marcel Duchamp and the Refusal of Work* (2014), Maurizio Lazzarato reads Duchamp's life as a steadfast refusal of both artistic and waged labor. As such he identifies the readymade with "lazy action" because it requires no artistic virtuosity or manual labor to transform the commodity into an artwork. Similarly, art historian and curator Helen Molesworth had identified Duchamp's early readymades with work avoidance and maintenance labor, after Mierle Laderman Ukeles, because of the way in which they put work and leisure into "extreme proximity," foiling productive labor by adding a dimension of play to objects otherwise wholly beholden to their "use."^[72] In this reading Duchamp attempts to free works from their "use" as art, against even art's purported uselessness. Both read him in the tradition of Paul Lafargue, Marx's black son-in-law, who, in 1883, published a satirical pamphlet called "The Right to Be Lazy" that became a touchstone for anti-work polemics. As much as Rowland's works "reveal" an open secret about the conditions of their production, they equally bear within their form the memory of the rejection of work and the negation of art.

Kitnick and Joselit are enchanted by the sensuous particularity of the object, which, when combined with the conceptual substance of the didactic label/artist statement, allows them to perceive the labor behind-the-scenes, as it were. This type of thinking is ubiquitous in the interpretation of Rowland's work. The most substantial essay on Rowland to date, by Eric Stones, takes the argument even further, reading Rowland's work as demonstrating that the "art field" is based upon and "actively reproduces" a regime of property "rooted in the legacy of slavery."^[73] This is evidenced by a national legal history^[74] that traces the passing of the Thirteenth Amendment through to re-enslavement by the convict leasing system in the South. Focusing primarily on Rowland's work, but specifically on the contracts drawn up by the artist to regulate its purchase, he argues:

Rather than render the groupings of objects disembodied from their laboring subjects, the artist's legal agreements (the Aetna trust and Artists Space and Wattis registration and..., a rental agreement) obligate the artist, and art-world relations, to recognize and disclose the continued histories of enslaved labor from which these objects derive.^[74]

While correct, it generalizes “expectations of commodity logic and economic subjectivity” on the basis of legal protocols bounded to one nation—a vantage not well suited to grasping either of the constitutively global phenomena of commodity production and contemporary art. While the situation of the works suggests we think the continuity from racial slavery to prison, their overwhelming presence as commodities suggests they can only ever be understood partially by imagining either emanation from a solely national context, projecting into objects an image of the concrete labor of a black inmate. That the work calls forth this image is a function of its complex mediations of the challenges the history of slavery poses to the thinking of history and the concept of labor.

Labor in the Abstract in Black Skin

Often conceived as a precursor to properly capitalist exploitation of the nominally free worker, the question of slavery has bedeviled most efforts at schematic periodization. It appears at once as the prerequisite original accumulation necessary for the development of the world market, and on the other as a doggedly feudal remnant refusing to fade out with the rationalization of social relations promised by *embourgeoisement*. Free labor is foundational to Marx’s theory of capitalist development. In order for the system to come into its own (for money to become capital in the simple act of circulation):

The owner of money must find the free worker available on the commodity-market; and this worker must be free in the double-sense that as a free individual he can dispose of this labour power as his own commodity and that, on the other hand, he has no other commodity for sale, i.e., he is rid of them, he is free of all the objects needed for the realization of his labour-power.^[76]

In capitalist society—crucially, not one where only labor time is exchanged for a wage, but where that social relation predominates—unfree labor that appears to exist outside capital’s self-positing (as its prehistory) is brought into relation with nominally free labor via the concept of abstract labor. A heuristic “human labor in the abstract” is essential for the measurement of value, because it is principally indifferent to the concrete conditions under which any work is performed.

Insofar as commodities are not use values, they are nothing but congealed, socially validated, homogenous human labor in the abstract, reducible to simple quantitative measurement. Marx’s discovery of this existence enables analytic comparisons of equivalent of different kinds of labor—simple and complex operations, for instance weaving and tailoring, but also nominally free and unfree—on the basis of their fundamental commensurability as abstract labor. It functions logically as the denominator between otherwise incommensurable types of labor and their products on a more ideal basis than money, which cannot escape its own materiality and commodity status, and is thereby incapable of expressing value as such—it does so merely via price. Abstract labor is, crucially, the social dimension of all the private independent labors that are otherwise incommensurable. Although the labors relate to each other equally, formal legal equality is not a requisite. The equality of labors has little bearing on equality between persons or the nature of social relations. The “discovery” of abstract labor “appears to those caught up in the relations of commodity production... to be just as ultimately valid as the fact that the scientific dissection of air into its component parts left the atmosphere unaltered in its physical configuration.”^[76]

It brings different qualities of labor into relation, and indeed labor from different periods, but it does not name a transhistorical or anthropological human capacity. Rather, it identifies the predominance of capitalist social

relations in an epoch. Thus, while different relations of production at the level of individual capital might participate in the same society, they can only be brought into relation as abstract labor from the higher perspective of total social capital. Rowland's work thrives in murky differentiations. In a traditional historical materialist model the slave labor in the present would appear anachronistic. The readymades presented by Rowland speak as contemporary art to the contemporaneity of slavery—they testify to the participation of unfree labor in nominally free labor without reifying themselves into *artisanal* art objects, through which one might have aesthetic access to the concrete labor that produced the object. At every moment they insist on their commodity status. In tying the methods and uses of prison labor to convict leasing and slavery Rowland presents us with ostensibly long-surpassed epochs of production and demonstrates their life in the present. Consideration of these objects and persons means calling to mind the living labor, “freely” given and involuntarily extracted, that went into the lifeless commodities—the experience of them as works consists in grasping the rapid oscillation between their concrete and abstract determinations. The admixture of different kind of labor (and different periods of production) in each of the readymades suggests not only that the brutal interdiction of abolition democracy left emancipation incomplete—it has far-reaching consequences for our thinking on “free” work of all kind.

Reparation Under Duress

Justin Leroy, in a talk given as part of the public programming for Cameron Rowland's contribution to the 2017 Whitney Biennial, makes a similar argument. Existing scholarship on nineteenth-century African-American intellectual history and political thought overemphasizes the question of rights, citizenship and formal equality, and buys wholeheartedly into the rhetoric of emancipation, becoming insensate to the continuities between formal abolition and ideology. The impertinently strong claim, that conditions today are an amplification of chattel slavery, rather than its echo, is grounded in an opening testimony by James McCune Smith, a black abolitionist from New York City, who, in 1865 wrote:

There is no political, religious, or philanthropic agency at work that can encompass the entire abolition of slavery. In slave society, labor lies prostrate and capital dictates its own terms, which are perpetual subjugation, in other words, perpetual slavery. Far from this war diminishing the wish or power of capital to own labor, it will increase both.^[77]

This same conviction is held in Rowland's work. Like Smith's prophetic anticipation of what has been called the “nonevent of emancipation,”^[78] the mute objects gathered in *91020000* bear witness to abolition as the emancipation of capital and testify to the purported freedom on the other side of Jubilee as the dominion of what Du Bois would call the “dictatorship of property.”^[79]

The political goal of taking or receiving reparations for slavery has long had a utopian dimension. It imagines a kind of reconciliation in which history can be set right, start anew, or be done away with entirely. Denise Ferreira Da Silva has made reparations central to it in her ethical, epistemological and poetic critique of historical materialism. Here, the ethical demand to end the world and our way of knowing it (through history and science) would be “to reclaim, to demand the restoration of the total value the colonial architectures have enabled capital to expropriate from native lands and enslaved black (and African) labor.”^[80] On a similar but seemingly pragmatic note, Wilderson, also hoping to bring the world to an end states:

Reparations suggests a conceptually coherent loss. The loss of land, the loss of labor power, etc. In other words, there has to be some form of articulation between the party that has lost and the party that has gained for

reparations to make sense. No such articulation exists between Blacks and the world. This is, ironically, precisely why I support the Reparations Movement; but my emphasis, my energies, my points of attention are on the word “Movement” and not on the word “Reparation.” I support the movement because I know it is a movement toward the end of the world; a movement toward a catastrophe in epistemological coherence and institutional integrity—I support the movement aspect of it because I know that repair is impossible; and any struggle that can act as a stick up artist to the world, demanding all that it cannot give (which is everything), is a movement toward something so blindingly new that it cannot be imagined. This is the only thing that will save us.^[81]

Both thinkers figure black politics in opposition to history. Rowland’s show takes a negative relation to historical movement and uses it to figure the history of reparations. The two works said to embody the movement of Rowland’s show (art for reparations) mark the very first and the most recent attempts to make such a claim upon the federal government of the United States. *National Ex-Slave Mutual Relief, Bounty and Pension Association Badges* (fig. 5) consists of two humble pot brass badges in the shape of a moon and star, used after the civil war to show membership of a black mutual aid society that became the first concerted attempt to self-organize toward reparations. In response to the apparently fraudulent efforts of a white Congressman from Alabama, William R. Vaughn, to introduce a bill to authorize pensions for freedmen in the wake of Reconstruction, Rev. Isaiah H. Dickerson and Mrs. Callie D. House founded the work’s titular organization to fundraise in support of the passage of North Carolina Congressman E.S. Blackburn’s “Ex-Slave Bounty and Pension Bill” in the late 1890s.

Disgorgement (figs 6 and 7) picks up on a new wave of efforts to secure reparations by lawsuit, suing insurance companies which have demonstrably profited from their investment in slave insurance policies. As legal document, it is connected to Congressional Bill H.R. 40, first introduced by Michigan Congressman John Conyers in 1989, but subsequently brought before Congress every year to the present—the bill would establish a “Commission to Study Reparations Proposals for African-Americans.” The piece consists of shares of stock in Aetna, Inc., one such insurance company the wealth of which was grown in large part by the slave policies it issued in the nineteenth century. Upon the passage of H.R. 40, or any other such governmental initiative to make financial reparations for slavery, the ninety shares will be sold and the money given to the federal agency to oversee its redistribution. Between the two stands the whole multifaceted history of the movement.

During the American Civil War, following General Sherman’s executive order, it stood for the dream of something like unalienated labor, decommodified agricultural production to meet the needs of a community itself rapidly being decommodified. Following the war it expressed the demand for pensions for the elderly and infirmed, who presented a biopolitical crisis for the Union once they ceased to be the individual dependents of slavers and all offers of land to the newly manumitted were retracted. House and Dickerson’s organization sought to support black workers after retirement on the basis that, as a new and aggrieved section of the citizenry, elderly black workers were owed for a life-time’s work that went uncompensated. In the twentieth century reparations were taken up by Black Communists such as Harry Haywood, whose work in the Third International made the right to black self-determination, and entitlement to most of the land in the South East of the US, official Soviet foreign policy under Stalin. In the wake of decolonization in Africa and the Caribbean, the demand for reparations was taken up by various Black Nationalisms under the logic of national partition. The Detroit-based Republic of New Afrika envisioned payments in land and seed money for a new country modeled on the Tanzanian socialism of Julius Nyerere. Jesse Jackson envisioned a “Freedom Budget” to fund community programs, “Queen Mother” Audley Moore envisioned the development of black industry and the financing of repatriation for all who wanted it.^[82] In the scheme of all this, the moments gestured to in Rowland’s two works are quite modest: bills that never cleared the floor—one providing pensions for aging former slaves no longer able to work and, now free, deprived of even the meager subsistence of “retirement” on the plantation; the other establishing only a committee to

even inquire as to how reparations might be made. Still, the vast difference in approach is worth commenting on.

National Ex-Slave... represents a social movement—the member badges are mute fragments of a past hope for a future in which things might have been different had Black Reconstruction won out. Unlike the convict-labor pieces, no conceptual device turns the memorabilia into artworks. They are activated by their proximity, as unvarnished historical relics, to the ruins of the present. *Disgorgement* works by its silent criticism and supersession of much in the art world that goes by the name Institutional Critique. Unlike, for instance, Hans Haacke's critical expose of Manhattan slumlords in relation to the Guggenheim in *Shapolsky, et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971*, Rowland's framed documents suppressed the cathartic release of the journalistic, scandalizing *gotcha*. The work not only reveals institutional complicity with evil, he forces its hand in the most banal and unspectacular ways, redirecting their own resources into the horrible structures that subtend them quotidianly. The contract is not only about art, but the artwork realizes itself only in contractual form. As a work it reflects on the institutional conditions of contract art, and on the historical form of contracts themselves. For Da Silva, the contract is the crucial point on which historical materialism falters, because it neglects slavery, the category of labor governed not by contract (workers) but title.^[83] Slave insurance emerged at the inception of life insurance, worker insurance, maritime shipping insurance, and is the point at which contract and title converge, to the calculation of the value of the of the slave's labor-power.^[84] At the level of art history it both rigorously adheres to the protocols set forth by contractual art in the first generations of conceptual art properly speaking, as well as becoming one of the most advanced iterations of the form. As a legally binding document it not only incites response from its worldly viewers, but also has the capacity to enforce its contents. In this, it has an advantage over other social practice works, where engagement with a public is limited to the voluntary participation of the audience solicits. As a contract, it realizes itself in the world according to its own formal, legal mechanisms; it 'goes into effect' when history presents the conditions for its realization.

Along with the resurgent popularity of the movement given it by Ta Nehisi Coates's "The Case for Reparations" (2014) article in *The Atlantic* and its central position in the (post-Black Lives Matter) national coalition platform advanced by the Movement for Black Lives, the idea of reparations has come under fire from the left. Adolph Reed, for one, deemed the new discussion to be nothing more than the "psychobabble" of the elite cultural (nationalist) black bourgeoisie, and the media class whose ear it has, over and against the actual on the ground movements to unify the working class in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis.^[85] In this line of thinking, reparations movements are neoliberalism in radical garb—they capitulate to the given order and image an idea of justice that consists in "restoring to people what they would have had if the labor market or the housing market or the loan market hadn't taken it away from them."^[86] It shrinks the scope of political struggle and testifies only to the "absolute submission to the primacy of the market" that passes for left critique today.^[87] For all their radical upending of the world's conventions, both Wilderson and Da Silva's images of the end can hold on to the form of value, retaining it in order to calculate an unpayable debt.

Rowland's staid refusal brings us somewhere other than eschatology and "punk negativity."^[88] While iterations of the reparations movement referred to by Rowland are well within the tradition of national reform, the works are concerned neither with the task of polemicizing for revolution, nor adjudicating the pragmatics of this or that political campaign. His turn to the figure of the slave as a means of working through history circumvents the movement of engaged thought to the terrain of political ontology, and the displacement of politics onto the idealist domains of metaphysics and ethics. Because his art is of the world, but constantly displaces itself even in relation to its own historical concept, it works through these problems with the level of negativity and abstraction that avoids both the re-reification of readymades and the subsumption of politics under a universal

history of anti-blackness. The brass pendants do emanate the warmth of a freedom whose warmth they withhold.

And there is wry humor in *Disgorgement's* image of reparation, as though a congressional bill might be enough to clear the charnel house. The trust, the congressional bill, and the inkjet on paper evidence plainly framed and hung: the freedom granted by the administered world given in the "aesthetics of administration," as Benjamin Buchloh once characterized the first generation of New York conceptual artists.^[89] If the movement for reparations represents black politics' "absolute submission to the primacy of the market," *Disgorgement* might respond with Adorno's Delphic warning that "only by immersing its autonomy in society's *imagerie* can art surmount the heteronomous market."^[90] There is no heroism in this art of the black liberation movement, nor any cheap dismissal of political action. It stoically participates from the relatively self-contained position of contemporary art, dramatizing that uselessness and pushing its boundaries to the extreme without the delusional claim to being political action itself, or giving up the crucial dream of an outside to the heteronomous world. No soteriology of violence can rush to its aid, and no existing community of revolutionary (subject-)object consoles us.



Figure 1. Ralph Lemon in *Come home*, Charley Patton, performed at Krannert Art Center, Champaign-Urbana, IL, 2010. Photo: Eric Stone

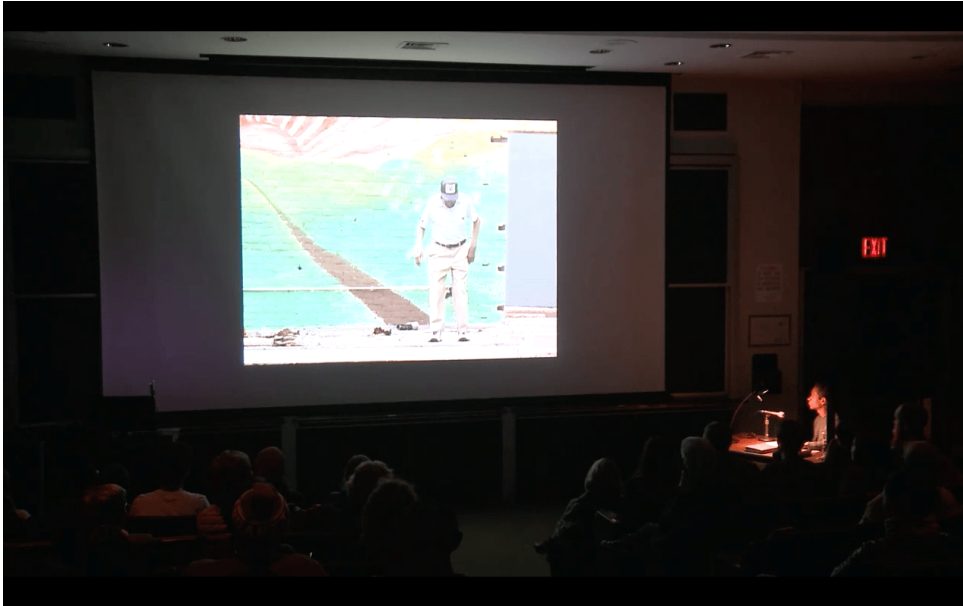


Figure 2. Ralph Lemon commenting on a collaboration with Walter Carter, at "Ralph Lemon: Ceremonies Out of the Air," Columbia University School of the Arts, February 27, 2016, screenshot from Youtube, April 22, 2015, available online at <https://youtu.be/5Q6OPBCAI3Q> (accessed 2018-23-10.)



Figure 3. Still from Lemon's *(The efflorescence of) Walter*, in which Carter repairs a broken record with duct tape. Source: La Rocco, Claudia. "Art Review: A Choreographer Goes Video, Featuring 99-Year-Old Star." *New York Times*. May 16, 2007. Courtesy the artist



Figure 4. Cameron Rowland 91020000, Artists Space, New York, 2016 Installation view Courtesy the Artist and ESSEX STREET, New York



Figure 5. Cameron Rowland National Ex-Slave Mutual Relief, Bounty and Pension Association Badges, 2016 1 ¼ × 1 ¼ inches (3.18 × 3.18 cm) 1 ¼ × 1 ¼ inches (3.18 × 3.18 cm) Pot metal The National Ex-Slave Mutual Relief, Bounty and Pension Association was founded in 1898 by ex-slaves I.H. Dickerson and Callie House. It was one of the first organizations to advocate for ex-slave compensation. Members were provided with badges and certificates of membership. The certificate of membership read: "Having paid the membership fee of 50 cents to aid the movement in securing the passage of the Ex-Slave Bounty and Pension Bill, as introduced February 17th, to the 57th House of Representative of The United States by the Hon. E.S. Blackburn of N. C. The holder of this Certificate agrees to pay ten cents per month to the local association to Aid the Sick and Bury the Dead. I hereby testify that I was born a slave in and am entitled to all the benefits included in said Bill." The badge on left was dug in Faison, North Carolina. The badge on the right was dug in Vicksburg, Virginia. Both were sold in 2015 by Civil War memorabilia dealers. Courtesy the Artist and ESSEX STREET, New York

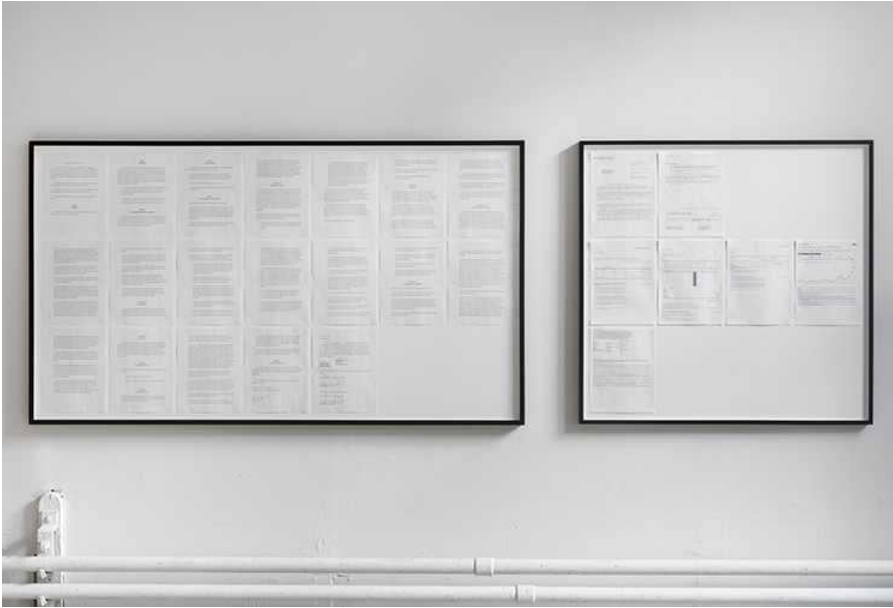


Figure 6. Cameron Rowland Disgorgement, 2016 Reparations Purpose Trust, Aetna Shares Aetna, amongst other insurance companies, issued slave insurance policies, which combined property and life insurance. These policies were taken out by slave masters on the lives of slaves, and provided partial payments for damage to the slave and full payment for the death of the slave. Death or damage inflicted by the master could not be claimed. The profits incurred by these policies are still intact within Aetna. In 1989 Congressman John Conyers of Michigan first introduced Congressional Bill H.R. 40, which would “Establish the Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African Americans to examine slavery and discrimination in the colonies and the United States from 1619 to the present and recommend appropriate remedies.” The bill would convene a research commission, that would, among other responsibilities, make a recommendation as to whether a formal apology for slavery is owed, whether reparations are owed, what form reparations would then take and who would receive them. Conyers has reintroduced the bill to every session of congress since then. This bill acquired 48 cosponsors in 1999–2000. Currently it has no cosponsors. In 2000 the state of California passed the bill SB 2199, which required all insurance companies conducting business in the state of California to publish documentation of slave insurance policies that they or their parent companies had issued previously. In 2002 a lawyer named Deadria Farmer–Paellmann filed the first corporate reparations class-action lawsuit seeking disgorgement from 17 contemporary financial institutions including Aetna, Inc., which had profited from slavery. Farmer–Paellmann pursued property law claims on the basis that these institutions had been enriched unjustly by slaves who were neither compensated nor agreed to be uncompensated. Farmer–Paellman called for these profits and gains to be disgorged from these institutions to descendants of slaves. The Reparations Purpose Trust forms a conditionality between the time of deferral and continued corporate growth. The general purpose of this trust is “to acquire and administer shares in Aetna, Inc. and to hold such shares until the effective date of any official action by any branch of the United States government to make financial reparations for slavery, including but not limited to the enactment and subsequent adoption of any recommendations pursuant to H.R. 40 – Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act.” As a purpose trust registered in the state of Delaware this trust can last indefinitely and has no named beneficiaries. The initial holdings of Reparations Purpose Trust consists of 90 Aetna shares. In the event that federal financial reparations are paid, the trust will terminate and its shares will be liquidated and granted to the federal agency charged with distributions as a corporate addendum to these payments. The grantor of the Reparations Purpose Trust is Artists Space, its trustee is Michael M. Gordon, and its enforcer is Cameron Rowland. The Reparations Purpose Trust gains tax-exemption from its grantor’s nonprofit status. MoMA has agreed to continue the trust if Artists Space is no longer able to serve as the grantor. Courtesy the Artist and ESSEX STREET, New York

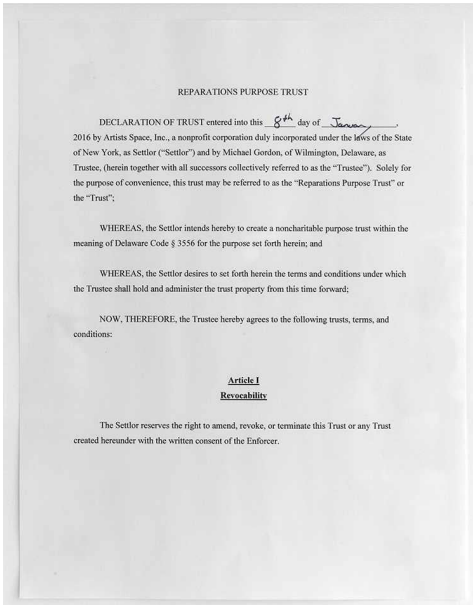


Figure 7. Cameron Rowland Disgorgement, 2016 Reparations Purpose Trust, Aetna Shares Courtesy the Artist and ESSEX STREET, New York (detail)



Figure 8. Cameron Rowland New York State Unified Court System, 2016 Oak wood, distributed by Corcraft 165 × 57 ½ × 36 inches (419.10 × 146.05 × 91.44 cm) Rental at cost Courtrooms throughout New York State use benches built by prisoners in Green Haven Correctional Facility. The court reproduces itself materially through the labor of those it sentences. Rental at cost: Artworks indicated as "Rental at cost" are not sold. Each of these artworks may be rented for 5 years for the total price realized at police auction. Courtesy the Artist and ESSEX STREET, New York



Figure 9 . Cameron Rowland Attica Series Desk, 2016 Steel, powder coating, laminated particleboard, distributed by Corcraft 60 × 71 ½ × 28 ¾ inches (152.40 × 181.61 × 73.03 cm) Rental at cost The Attica Series Desk is manufactured by prisoners in Attica Correctional Facility. Prisoners seized control of the D-Yard in Attica from September 9th to 13th 1971. Following the inmates' immediate demands for amnesty, the first in their list of practical proposals was to extend the enforcement of "the New York State minimum wage law to prison industries." Inmates working in New York State prisons are currently paid \$0.10 to \$1.14 an hour. Inmates in Attica produce furniture for government offices throughout the state. This component of government administration depends on inmate labor. Rental at cost: Artworks indicated as "Rental at cost" are not sold. Each of these artworks may be rented for 5 years for the total cost of the Corcraft products that constitute it. Courtesy the Artist and ESSEX STREET, New York

Footnotes

1. Marx, Karl. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. Trans. Ben Fowkes. Vol. 1. London: Penguin, in association with *New Left Review*. 1990 [1867]. pp. 932-933.
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6. Wilderson, Frank. "Gramsci's Black Marx: Whither the Slave in Civil Society" *Social Identities*. Vol. 9. No 2. 2003. p. 230.
7. Adorno, Theodor. *Aesthetic Theory*. London: Continuum. 2012 [1970]. p. 2.
8. Hartman, Saidiya V. *Lose Your Mother: a Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008. p. 10.
9. Brown, Vincent. "Social death and political life in the study of slavery." *The American Historical Review*. Vol. 114. No. 5. 2009. p. 1236.
10. Lemon, Ralph. "Come Home, Charley Patton." *Geography Trilogy* [DVD]. New York, NY: Cross

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11. A performer in the piece, Darrell Jones, attests: "Patton contained a section called 'Ecstasy.' It was three minutes long and highly rigorous. At first I felt that there wasn't a logic to what he was doing; he was just trying to see how far we could push our bodies. I felt angry, and I would direct that anger, not necessarily toward Ralph, but toward what he was pushing us to do. The pain got me through it. I stopped caring about Ralph's logic because performing the sequence felt like a personal goal. Going through that with somebody breeds a certain type of love and admiration but also resentment." Quoted in Edwards, Adrienne and Lax, Thomas J. "Easter Eggs: A Narrative Chronology" In *Ralph Lemon*. Thomas J. Lax (ed.) New York, NY: The Museum of Modern Art. 2016. p. 79
12. Hannaham, James. "Ralph Lemon." *BOMB Magazine*. No. 120. July 1, 2012. Available online at <http://bombmagazine.org/articles/ralph-lemon/> (accessed 2018-10-23.)
13. See, for instance, *Walter Repairing Records* (Nasher Museum of Art, 2006), (*The efflorescence of Walter* (Walker Art Center, 2006), *Untitled* (Danspace, 2008), *How Can You Stay In The House All Day And Not Go Anywhere?* (Krannert, 2010), *1856 Cessna Road* (Studio Museum in Harlem, 2012), and *Scaffold Room* (Walker Art Center, 2014).
14. Lemon, Ralph. *Come home Charley Patton*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press. 2013. p. 137-137.
15. Lemon, Ralph. "Four Years Later." In *Planes of Composition: Dance, Theory, and the Global*. André Lepecki and Jenn Joy (eds.) New York, NY: Seagull. 2009. p. 276.
16. Lemon, Ralph. *How Can You Stay in the House All Day and Not Go Anywhere?* [Video] Seattle: On the Boards. 2010. See <https://www.ontheboards.tv/performance/dance/theater/how-can-you-stay> (accessed 2018-10-23.)
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18. Lemon, "Four Years Later," p. 272
19. Lemon, "Keynote."
20. Lemon's interest in trickster figures such as Br'er Rabbit is apparent everywhere in his work. For Lemon himself as a trickster see Claudia La Rocco's review of *Scaffold Room*, "When Life Hands you Lemon." *Artforum*. October 3, 2014. Available online at <https://www.artforum.com/performance/claudia-la-rocco-on-ralph-lemon-s-scaffold-room-48472> (accessed 2018-11-08.)
21. Lemon, *Come Home*, p. 272.
22. Lemon, "Four Years Later," p. 272.
23. "When the Stars Begin to Fall. Studio Lab: Saidiya Hartman, Ralph Lemon and Geo Wyeth." Discussion. New York: Studio Museum Harlem. May 16, 2014. Available online at https://youtu.be/l_4bhRkwj_E (accessed 2018-23-10.)
24. Lemon, Ralph. "Ralph Lemon: 'Ceremonies Out of the Air'." Lecture at Columbia University School of the Arts, New York, February 27, 2017. Available online at <https://youtu.be/5O6OPBCAI3Q> (accessed 2018-10-23.)
25. On this see the "Formations of Terror and Enjoyment," the first half of Hartman, Saidiya V. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
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29. Lemon, *Come Home*, p. 117.
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41. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 320.
42. Adorno, Theodor W. *Aesthetic Theory*. London: Continuum. 2004 [1970]. p. 26.
43. "When the Stars Begin to Fall. Studio Lab: Saidiya Hartman, Ralph Lemon and Geo Wyeth." Discussion. New York: Studio Museum Harlem. May 16, 2014. Available online at https://youtu.be/l_4bhRkwj_E (accessed 2018-23-10.)
44. Adorno, *History and Freedom*, p. 86
45. Adorno, Theodor W. "On the Social Situation of Music." In *Essays on Music*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 2002 [1978]. pp. 427-28.
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51. *Ibid.*
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note, from the right wing of the labor movement, here is the perverse anti-abolitionist Marxist of Hermann Kriege, writing eleven years earlier: "That we see in the slavery question a property question which cannot be settled by itself alone. That we should declare ourselves in favor of the abolitionist movement if it were our intention to throw the Republic into a state of anarchy, to extend the competition of 'free working men' beyond all measure, and to depress labor itself to the last extremity. That we could not improve the lot of our 'black brothers' by abolition under the conditions prevailing in modern society, but make infinitely worse the lot of our 'white brothers' That we believe in the peaceable development of society in the United States and do not therefore here at least see our only hope in conditions of the extremist degradation that we feel constrained therefore to oppose Abolition with all our might, despite all the importunities of sentimental philistines and despite all the poetical effusions of liberty-intoxicated ladies." Du Bois, W.E.B. *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860-1880*. New York, NY: The Free Press. 1998 [1935]. p. 23.

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