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DOI

[10.1353/tae.2024.a932016](https://doi.org/10.1353/tae.2024.a932016)

Publication date

2024

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

Theory & Event

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Citation for published version (APA):

Loick, D. (2024). Towards an Abolitionist Concept of Beauty: The Aesthetics of Counter-Communities. *Theory & Event*, 27(3), 411-432. <https://doi.org/10.1353/tae.2024.a932016>

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Towards an Abolitionist Concept of Beauty: The Aesthetics of Counter-Communities

Daniel Loick

Abstract Many oppressed groups describe their forms of life in aesthetic categories. This article explores the implicit conception of beauty and the shared characteristics of counter-communal aesthetic practices. It reconstructs the hegemonic conception of beauty via a reading of Schiller and explores two exemplary discourses on the beauty of counter-communities: Peter Weiss' reflections on the aesthetics of resistance and Saidiya Hartman's description of Black fugitive aesthetics. What both examples share is that they locate beauty not in harmony, but in conflict and struggle. They lay the foundation for an aesthetic standpoint theory: counter-communities are economically, politically and culturally marginalized, but they are more beautiful than dominant forms of life.

Keywords Aesthetics of Existence, Forms of Life, Friedrich Schiller, Peter Weiss, Saidiya Hartman

Three Examples

"In all jazz, and especially in the blues," James Baldwin writes in his autobiographical essay *The Fire Next Time* (1962), "there is something tart and ironic, authoritative and double-edged. White Americans seem to feel that happy songs are happy and sad songs are sad, and that, God help us, is exactly the way most white Americans sing them—sounding, in both cases, so helplessly, defenselessly fatuous that one dare not speculate on the temperature of the deep freeze from which issue their brave and sexless little voices."¹ The reason why, for Baldwin, Black people are better at singing jazz than white people is not because of greater "sensuality" or "naturalness" that a racist discourse attributes to them, but because of a specific experience of oppression that has shaped their form of life. Out of the experience of oppression, forms of community and feelings of belonging have formed, institutionalized especially in Black churches, but also in jazz parties or clubs. This music is the aesthetic expression of such Black forms of life, encompassing cultural semiotics, culinary tastes, and artistic skills as

well as an implicit underlying sense of political solidarity: “We had the liquor, we had the chicken, the music, and each other.”²

“Looking back,” bell hooks writes in her book *Feminism Is For Everybody*, “after years of feeling comfortable choosing whether or not to wear a bra, I can remember what a momentous decision this was 30 years ago. Women stripping their bodies of unhealthy and uncomfortable, restrictive clothing – bras, girdles, corsets, garter belts, etc. – was a ritualistic, radical reclaiming of the health and glory of the female body.”³ The question of what undergarments a woman wears might, in retrospect, be dismissed as trivial or apolitical. But hooks reminds us that the feminist movement had, for the first time, created opportunities for many women to wear comfortable shoes, forgo cosmetics, or dress in less standardized ways. Challenging the pervasive power of the beauty industry, and thus changing body image and self-esteem, is a prerequisite for living beyond an obsession with appearance, eating disorders, toxic images of sexuality, and expectations and manners that undermine women’s equal status. hooks emphasizes that this struggle must not be waged solely in the name of political ideals. Rather, feminism is also a struggle for a different beauty – to establish cultural milieus in which it is once again possible to find oneself and one’s own body beautiful: “and how thrilling to be free to appreciate our differences without judgment or competition.”⁴

“But when we decide to be gay,” writes Jeremy Atherton Lin in his autobiographical cultural history of the gay bar, “we want to dance to ‘Starships’ by Nicki Minaj, and go downhill from there. On nights when we crave not dick but ridiculousness – the bad taste and nostalgia – we head to a venue less sleazy, more cheesy, where every queen appears to believe her own hype. [...] When a gay person remarks they’re being a *bad gay*, it doesn’t mean unethical, but that they haven’t been conforming to type. It means they’ve been a bad gay culturally. Hence: *I really should go out; I’ve been such a bad gay.*”⁵ What Lin self-deprecatingly describes here as “bad taste” is actually assumed as “good taste,” and the obligation to go out in order to be a “good gay” is actually not an obligation but a form of empowerment. The gay bar is a shelter from homophobic violence and heteronormative prejudice – but at the same time a space of possibility for cultural self-realization and exploration. The central message of Lin’s scintillating book is that *straight people are missing out*. The final section describes a feeling that many partygoers, but especially members of queer subcultures, often experience: a feeling of irritation, perhaps even pity, for those who live so-called “normal lives”: “We’d pass hundreds of illuminated windows, in tall apartment buildings and Victorian terrace houses. I always find myself imagining the residents at home, cooking or watching TV or what have you – people who didn’t go out.”⁶

The Aesthetics of Forms of Life

Each of these three examples juxtaposes two forms of life standing in antagonistic relationship to each other. In doing so, all of these depictions rely on a specific category of evaluation. The respective milieus or cultures differ in terms of their political stance, their ethical practice and their affective structures, but also in terms of their *aesthetic quality*. In evaluating these forms of life *aesthetically*, an inversion of the material relations of domination occurs: marginalized forms of life can be economically, politically, and socially disadvantaged, but aesthetically superior, that is, they can be *more beautiful* than dominant forms of life. In this paper, I want to explore two questions. First, I will try to determine in more detail what is specific about the aesthetic (self-) evaluation of forms of life, as opposed to other (for example normative or epistemological) evaluations. In other words, I want to ask what it means when social practices are implicitly or explicitly characterized as beautiful (or as ugly). Second, I want to find out whether there are connecting moments between different forms of oppression and marginalization where the shared experience of aesthetic superiority is grounded. Such a connection not only allows for a translation of situated beauties into the aesthetic vocabulary of another, but could provide the fragments of the description of an abolitionist aesthetics — that is, fragments of a sensuous practice from which the dominant distribution of the sensible can be interrupted and blown up from within.

Thus, I am not primarily concerned with art, but with beauty as a specific evaluation criterion for forms of life (although the production of art is also part of forms of life). Forms of life have an “expressive” (Dewey), “performative” (Hartman), or “staged” (Moten) quality that can be judged aesthetically. Michel Foucault, in his late work, coined the useful term “aesthetics of existence”: from Ancient Greek technologies of the self, he reconstructs forms of self-stylization that transform one’s life into a work of art.⁷ In doing so, Foucault already emphasizes the connection between aesthetics, ethics, and politics; a form of life is aesthetically successful (for the Greeks) when it enables the individual to govern himself and thus others well. Although Foucault has given a social twist to his reading of the ancient techniques of the self by placing them in the context of the invention of a homosexual culture of transgression, he still describes the aesthetics of existence primarily as an intentionally executed plan for the conduct of life by individuals or a few. In doing so, he misses the inescapable aesthetic dimension of *every* form of *collective* life practice. My aim, in contrast, is to reconstruct evaluations of forms of life in a way that preserves their specific character as aesthetic judgments of taste, while embedding them in objective antagonistic social milieus.⁸

A fundamental difficulty with this argument is that the aestheticization of marginalized or oppressed groups is itself part of the repertoire of affective exploitation and cultural domination of racialized, gendered, and class-based difference. These groups have traditionally not only been *excluded* from hegemonic ideals of beauty and their aesthetic discourses and practices *invisibilized*, but have also always been *included* and *visibilized* in specific ways, that is, they have been subjected to a white, male, and bourgeois or aristocratic gaze. The white enjoyment of Black virtuosity in gospel, hip-hop or tennis, the male enjoyment of the female body in ballet, toothpaste advertising or pornography, the middle-class enjoyment of poverty in representations of the “simple life” in painting or afternoon trash TV are examples of these racialized, patriarchal, and commodified aestheticizations. With his notion of “double consciousness,” W.E.B. Du Bois points out that such attributions do not remain external to the oppressed groups themselves, but that the perception of the other always shapes and dispossesses the self-perception as well.⁹ On the other hand, however, the history of culture production and reflections of counter-communities is testament that there can also be, as bell hooks puts it, an oppositional gaze¹⁰, or as Fred Moten reminds us, that objects “can and do resist”¹¹. With this text, I hope to identify some of the forms and conditions of such resistance.

What is beauty? I approach this question by means of a reading of a hegemonic concept of beauty, namely that developed by Friedrich Schiller in his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*. Schiller develops a utopia of an enlightened aesthetics of existence based on a notion of beauty as the organic interplay between reason and sensibility. In doing so, I follow a clue given by Herbert Marcuse in his 1955 book *Eros and Civilization*. In his Freud-Marxist reading of Schiller, Marcuse here proposes to understand the aesthetic as a mediation between what Freud calls the reality principle and the pleasure principle. The thus aesthetic expresses the utopian idea of a “non-repressive civilization,”¹² that is, a society in which the reality principle neither suppresses nor channels sensibility and desire, but rather allows both sides to come together freely. Marcuse spells this out as a post-capitalist society in which work has become play and the imagination has thus become directly a force of production. In the existing, capitalist society, however, the aesthetic is suspended from the possibility of becoming a real social force by being relegated to the realm of art, at the same time serving as the ideological concealment of real domination. The release of the “original meaning” of aesthetics, Marcuse continues, could help liberate the power of imagination from its confinement in art and become a force of transformation.

I start by reconstructing Schiller’s original idea of beauty of an enlightened form of life, arguing that his concept can still be under-

stood as an expression of the hegemonic ideology of beauty. I then explore two different forms of counter-aesthetic to find out how the question of the beauty of forms of life can be reformulated from the perspective of alienated communities: first, the aesthetics of the proletarian form of life as described in Marxist theory, mostly by drawing on Peter Weiss's monumental novel *Aesthetics of Resistance*, and then the aesthetics of the *Black Radical Tradition*, primarily consulting Saidiya Hartman's study *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*. Both of these approaches raise the question of the possibility of beauty under intensified conditions: not only an alienation from the aesthetic installments of the dominant society, but even – if quite different – forms of continued dispossession, criminalization, exile, and genocidal dehumanization. Finally, returning to Herbert Marcuse's "marginalized groups theory" (*Randgruppentheorie*), I try to formulate some ideas for a general theory of the aesthetics of counter-communities.¹³

An Aesthetics of Enlightened Existence (Schiller)

For European modernity, the question of aesthetics first presents itself as a problem of transition: the transition from an irrational to a rational state of society. As such, Friedrich Schiller introduces it in his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, published in 1795.¹⁴ With the Enlightenment, our reason has identified the old order as wrong, but at the same time, our sensuous desires are still attached to it. Facing this dilemma, Schiller formulates his theory as an advancement and correction of Kant's moral philosophy: if reason is conceived as opposed to sensual impulses, this can only lead to a tyrannical rigorism. For Schiller, therefore, freedom must not only be realized in the realm of reason, but must take place in life itself. To prepare life, i.e., the sensual-material practices of human beings, for freedom is the task of aesthetic education, or more precisely of art. Art serves the practical training of the faculty of sensation to an enabling of freedom, with which the opposition between sensuality and reason is to be overcome.

In order to be able to distinguish between freedom-enabling and corrupting art, a specifically aesthetic criterion of evaluation is required, namely beauty; a criterion that Schiller does not want to model from already existing works of art, but, following Kant, believes he can only gain on a "transcendental road."¹⁵ By transcendental, however, Schiller does not mean exactly the same as Kant, namely not a deduction from a priori concepts of reason, but a kind of anthropology of potentiality: principles of beauty must not be derived from empirically random examples, but from the "possibilities of a nature that is both sensuous and rational."¹⁶ By way of an anthropological determination of beauty, Schiller claims, on the one hand, a universality and objectivity of

aesthetic categories — beauty arises directly from the “necessary condition of humanity” as such —, but on the other hand, this universality is not postulated against sensuous nature, but should correspond to it.

Schiller first describes the basic structure of human nature as determined by two conflicting “drives” that he calls “sense drive” and “form drive.” The realm of the sense drive is that of “life,” that of the form drive that of “shape.” The sense drive is the generic term for the sum of the finite biological-physical dimensions of human existence, it includes hedonistic pleasure as well as fundamental survival instincts. The form drive describes the human’s eternal spiritual-moral ambitions through which we ourselves intervene in sensual life: the form drive is what “gives laws.”¹⁷ As is readily apparent, these two drives correspond to Kant’s incriminated opposition of sensibility and reason. Both sides complement each other: without form, life is only chaotic anarchy; without life, form is only an abstract principle. But how can these two seemingly conflicting drives be brought together without one coming under the domination of the other? For such a reconciliation to be possible, there must be a third impulse that mediates between the two drives, which Schiller identifies as the “play drive.” In play, the opposites of life and form unite, as being formed and forming, as “living shape.” Play thus assumes a central role in this philosophical system; it not only enables an organic interplay of the physical and intellectual capacities of human life, but also becomes the guarantor of the possibility of historical progress: only because a playful mediation of sensibility and reason is possible can there be genuine liberation — rather than a mere subordination of life to an alienated moral dictate.

With play as a specific category of human practice, beauty is also established as a specific criterion for judging this practice. Schiller has a particular conception of how play synthesizes necessity and freedom. This is expressed succinctly in his definition of beauty as the “freedom in appearance.”¹⁸ Every game, every art, every politics has material conditions. According to Schiller, to be called “beautiful” is to engage in these practices in such a way that they render their own enabling conditions invisible and appear to be, as it were, spontaneous or uncoerced happenings. The fact that dancers do not step on each other’s feet or that the pianist hits every note is the result of practice and discipline, but it *appears* as a direct expression of their organic life emotions. The same is true of the beauty of ethical life: beautiful is a form of life in which the good appears as a spontaneous life-impulse itself. Something is beautiful when in it — as in the ancient marble statue Juno Ludovisi, of which Schiller says that it triggers in us both the highest calm and the highest movement — inclination and respect come together as if by chance.

Schiller’s understanding, schematically, can be understood as paradigmatic for an aesthetics of Enlightened existence. The politi-

cal-legal level of liberation in the form of human rights and democracy must be accompanied by a subjective liberation in the form of education, that is, the humanistic socialization of formerly servile subjects into autonomous citizens. Aesthetic education is the description of the paradoxical process in which individuals affirm the law they recognize as right also in their sensible lives, in which it becomes, as Hegel will later say, second nature to them.

A final decisive step now consists in the fact that Schiller socially situates play and thus also the disposition to beauty. Not everyone is equally destined to perfect their form of life aesthetically; the receptivity of social groups to artistic education depends on their social status. In the social body of the late eighteenth century, the duality of sensibility and reason for Schiller also corresponds to the opposition of social classes: there are classes in which “the feelings rule over the principles” and those in which “the principles destroy the feelings.”¹⁹ On the one hand, “crude, lawless impulses” are to be observed in “the lower and more numerous classes,” “hastening with ungovernable fury to their brutal satisfaction.”²⁰ Against this danger of a relapse into the animal “original elements” of society pursued by these classes, the state has every right to defend the rule of law by force. On the other hand, Schiller considers the situation of the “civilized classes” to be “still more repugnant.”²¹ In order to be able to maintain his analogy of the social classes to the two human “basic drives,” however, Schiller cannot likewise identify for these classes a decadence of sensible enjoyment as the reason for their “indolence” and “depravity of character.” Rather, this depravity stems from a one-sided orientation to maxims. Even more “abominable” is the pathology of the civilized in comparison to that of the lower classes, because it not only absolutizes the side of reason, but additionally is likewise a slave of its senses, without, however, reflecting this.²² If the Enlightenment fails to exert an “ennobling” influence on the inclination itself, the moral doctrine degenerates into merely legitimizing one’s own egotism. Schiller is pessimistic about the real possibility of overcoming this class division, but it is clear what form of subject he has in mind as the reconciliation of the opposites of animal gratification and spiritual refinement; in the ideal of Enlightened existence’s aesthetics, the energy of the lower classes and the nobility of the upper classes come together. Subjects educated in this sense are members of the “aesthetic state” Schiller announces at the very end of his letters, but which, he admits, is currently found only “in a few select circles.”²³ At this point, then, the concept of the bourgeois aesthetic of existence collides with the reality of bourgeois society—a constitutive contradiction that cannot be resolved within bourgeois aesthetic theory.

For those exploring the aesthetics of counter-communities, Schiller has blazed the trail in several respects. First, he developed a vocabu-

lary for describing and assessing the aesthetic dimension of forms of life. Second, Schiller admits the social situatedness of beauty; forms of life are part of a social structure that determines their aesthetic competencies and also positions them in conflict and opposition to other forms of life and their aesthetic practices. Third, Schiller's conciliatory remark that the denial of nature among the "civilized classes" is even more "repugnant" than the licentiousness of nature among the "lower" already indicates the inversion of social and aesthetic valence claimed by many counter-communities. Although Schiller's justification for this judgment turns out to be very terse and cryptic, he at least assumes that social privilege is not necessarily accompanied by aesthetic privilege; the conditions for success at the "difficult art of living"²⁴ are obviously different from those for the exercise of social power.

The central starting point for reformulating the question of the beauty of forms of life from the perspective of counter-communities lies in experiencing the unavailability of both the sensible and the rational sides of human existence, and thus also of the play mediating both. Schiller's utopia of bourgeois subjectivity assumes the natural positivity of the senses and the historically achieved possibility of reason, so that the task is only to place the two sides in a proper relationship to each other. This fiction of the simple givenness of life on the one hand, and shape on the other, is revoked when both are presented from the perspective of the "lower and more numerous classes": rather than having simple access to life and shape, they are excluded—Marx would say, alienated—from both. Under conditions of this double alienation, how can counter-communities represent beauty at all, let alone a superior one?

Schiller does not make explicit which classes exactly he identifies as the "lower and more numerous" ones. However, the rhetoric he uses provides indications: on the one hand, they are the propertyless and uneducated plebs, whose lack of ties was also seen as a threat to political stability in the French Revolution. On the other hand, talk of the "uncivilized" and the "savage" who despise art and reason also points to the colonial-racist impregnation of the Enlightenment imaginary. Both traditions, that of the proletariat as well as of people of color racialized by European modernity, have produced their own aesthetic discourses, each centered in a specific way on the experience of their ongoing dispossession.

An Aesthetics of Proletarian Existence (Weiss)

One attempt at explaining the aesthetic superiority of counter-communities under conditions of alienation—and even genocidal extermination—was made in the 1970s by the Marxist writer Peter Weiss in his

monumental “novel essay” *Aesthetics of Resistance* (published first in German in three volumes between 1971 and 1980). The book, which runs to over a thousand pages, describes the political and aesthetic conflicts within the European workers’ movement during the period of resistance to National Socialism; that is, under conditions of a world-historical catastrophe in which the prospect of overall social liberation was completely obscured. The nameless first-person narrator and a group of friends belong to the proletarian anti-fascist resistance, struggling to clarify their relationship on the one hand to bourgeois civilization and education, and on the other hand to Stalinism, first in Germany, then in exile in France, Spain and Sweden. At the center of this is a collective reflection, over and over, about how workers can gain access to the privileges and achievements of high culture. Weiss stages the struggle over culture alienated from the worker in the form of discussions between the first-person narrator and his friends about classical works of fine art.

For the protagonists, art is part of *culture* (*Bildung*). Culture is a good created by the ruling class for the ruling class; the bourgeoisie both limits access to this good and defines its content. For the workers, therefore, there is both the question of the possibility of *reception* of art (i.e., access), and of *representation* (i.e., content) under these alienated conditions (only rudimentarily does Weiss also discuss the problems of *production* of art, i.e., independent writing or painting). Weiss emphasizes the active character of art reception: the first-person narrator describes study from the outset as a rebellious practice that goes hand in hand with a fundamental transformation of one’s own subjectivity. Efforts to still go to the museum or read poetry after a day of factory work, especially under conditions of fascism, contribute to a development of imaginative power, a loss of reverence for domination, and an overcoming of muteness and speechlessness. “It would have been presumptuous,” Weiss writes, “to try and talk about art without hearing the shuffling as we shoved one foot in front of the other. Every meter toward the painting, the book, was a battle, we crawled, pushed ourselves forward, our eyelids blinked, sometimes this squinting made us burst out laughing, which helped us forget where we were going.”²⁵ The reception of artworks is not passive, but is a laborious, collective, and active practice, a form of activity that is not categorically different than painting or writing. Accordingly, the recipients’ relationship to the artifacts is also an active one; the friends “discover” themselves and their histories in the artworks or “read them into”²⁶ them (as in the novel’s famous opening scene, in which they interpret the Pergamon Altar in Berlin as a representation of class struggle).

In emphasizing the productive-active part of reception, Weiss’s first, though still inadequate, criterion for artistic quality is also already indicated here, unintentionally expressed in bourgeois art itself. Weiss

seems to follow Hegel's famous insight that it is the servant, not the master, who presents "the truth of self-consciousness." In painting, the workers eventually cease to serve only a "decorative function" and push themselves more and more into the picture, until at some point they no longer need the masters and are depicted alone. The paintings of Vermeer, Chardin, Millet, or Courbet, for example, show stone tappers, harvesters, washerwomen, or maids as experienced, mature, serious, meek, or beautiful: "And now we also saw that the works dedicated to the chosen and privileged brought out the faces of the soldiers and squires, accentuating them as more convincing, more powerful, more experienced than the faces of their masters."²⁷

The reason for this aesthetic superiority, however, does not lie in the activity of the servants and the inactivity of the masters. For the first-person narrator, the depicted faces of the workers express not only their personalities as creative, but also as eminent *political* subjects. Thus, the artists do not simply depict a labor relationship, but also prepare for the liberated social conditions of the future — many artistic works, though made for princes or patrons, nevertheless contain, according to Weiss, an "element of classlessness."²⁸ The aesthetic superiority of the proletariat over the bourgeois form of life depicted in these paintings thus owes itself not to an economic but a political relationship; there is a decisive contrast between both the active and the passive as well as between the liberating and the oppressive.

The difference between the aesthetics of work and the aesthetics of resistance becomes clear towards the end of the first volume as the narrator discusses two juxtaposed images with his father and friends. The depiction of the iron-rolling mill by Prussian painter Adolphe von Wenzel shows the atmosphere in a factory, thus elevating industrial work (and with it the expertise of the workers necessary to it) to a rank worthy of representation, on a par with the portraits of important statesmen and politicians. The painting depicts the workers as self-confident and powerful. But this depiction, the narrator's father explains, is ideology; it obscures the fact that the labor shown profits exploiters invisible in the picture: "The praise of labor was a praise of subordination."²⁹ The narrator contrasts Menzel's "apotheosis of labor" with a picture titled "The Strike" taken from the American magazine *Harper's Weekly*. It shows workers not at work but during class struggle; thus, the artist depicts them not as social but as political figures. The strikers confront a factory owner standing on the top step of the stairs to his house. Although he towers over the others, he appears, we are told, "pale white-haired, and grim."³⁰ The workers are stronger not because they outnumber the capitalists, but because, unlike them, they are able to generate a form of openness out of their collectivity; the deliberating and discussing group of workers "contain all the possible ways

in which the conflict could develop."³¹ The contrast of the two images underlines that the decisive factor in describing the proletarian form of life as beautiful is not simply activity, but a *certain kind* of activity – precisely not work, but struggle.

These are first considerations of the aesthetics of art works, but not yet explicitly of an aesthetics of existence. For Weiss, however, the protagonists' discussions of overcoming the alienation from artistic culture are only medium and metonymy of a discussion about overcoming alienation from forms of life. Already the novel's rhetoric presentation of these discussions constantly deconstructs the opposition between art and life – everyday factory life, domestic life, and political agitation are described in similar and similarly iridescent terms as the artworks discussed by the friends. Accordingly, not only does work push itself into the realm of aesthetics, but aesthetics pushes itself into the realm of work. On the one hand, art is described as work: "all libraries and museums, all sciences and scholarship" are inseparable from "tools, machines, and time clocks"³²; on the other hand, work as art: to cultivating the fields and building the houses belong "songs, fables, and fairy tales"³³ that no one has ever signed with their name. The fusion of art and life, which Marxist art theory has announced as a program, is demonstrated in the *Aesthetics of Resistance* in its already-given – that is, alienated – form. "Our culture," says the protagonist's father, "is lugging, pulling, and lifting, tying together and fastening. This culture comes toward me, he said, whenever I see someone piling the chopped wood, sharpening the scythe, mending the net, joining the beams into the roof frame, polishing the pistons of the machine."³⁴ By deconstructing the opposition between art and life, Weiss allows aesthetic criteria to be applied to forms of life – what is beautiful about the representations of workers in paintings is also beautiful about the proletarian form of life itself.

Schiller defined beauty as the criterion of excellence of a specific interplay of sensibility and reason – that is, of life and form. Weiss' protagonists transpose the different elements of this definition into a perspective determined by the experience of alienation. Alienation marks both relation to life – workers experience the man-made environment, nature, even their own body and its power only in a way preformed and deformed by relations of exploitation and oppression – and to shape: work is work for others and under the conditions defined by others. Under these conditions, an authentic "freedom in appearance" as Schiller defined beauty, cannot come about through a simple mediation of life and shape, but only through the virtuality of freedom being expressed in both realms. The protagonist's father formulates the efficacy of this "as-if-ness," crucial to Schiller's definition, for his everyday life practice when he justifies to his colleagues

why he cares for machines and even admires their technical progress, even though they are instruments of exploitation: "Just as we would be lost if we did not appropriate the contents of books and pictures, so too we would perish if we did not already regard every piece of equipment in the plant, every object we produced as our possession."³⁵ By staying in an existential relation with this potentiality, the proletariat exhibits an openness to the possibility of development, which the capitalists lack and which circulate in Weiss as beauty's quality criteria. Freedom in appearance resulting from play's reconciliation of sensibility and reason is replaced by the sense of struggle as the result of acting out and expressing the tension of reality and virtuality of free sensibility and free reason. The beauty of the proletarian form of life is thus not a the harmonious appearance but the conflictual anticipation of freedom in the irreducible backlight of unfreedom.

An Aesthetics of Black Existence (Hartman)

Before addressing the practical implications of this determination, I will show that—despite the obvious differences in the mechanisms of oppression as well as the practices of resistance—exploring the aesthetics of Black forms of life leads by other means to a similar point. Aesthetic issues have always been an important topic in the Black Radical tradition's self-understanding discourse and have often been placed in a political context: from emphasizing the importance of subcultures of color in Stuart Hall,³⁶ Black subculture as a prerequisite of self-love in the struggle against internalized racism in bell hooks,³⁷ keeping alive alternative imaginations in the radical dreams of liberation movements in Robin D. G. Kelley,³⁸ poetry as a condition of survival in Audre Lorde,³⁹ remembering the history of the Black Atlantic as the formation of a plural counterculture,⁴⁰ and extensive research on Black cultural production, from Black culture under slavery,⁴¹ to gospel and blues⁴² and hip-hop.⁴³ In his article "Black Aesthetics, Black Value," Lewis Gordon diagnoses that many contributions to Black cultural philosophy since the 1920s, however, have not fully elaborated an actual theory of aesthetics—understood as a theory of the relationship between sense and form. Gordon relates this to a hegemonic devaluation of Black life that has prevented Black everyday practices from being reflected as aesthetically expressive. In contrast, he posits an aesthetics of Black everyday life: "the phenomenological insight that everyday existence is an extraordinary achievement."⁴⁴ Such an exploration of a Black aesthetics of existence must once again begin from the experience of dispossession from both the realm of sensibility and the realm of shape; that is, with the experience of what Fred Moten calls "stolen life."⁴⁵

In her book *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, Saidiya Hartman portrays young Black women in early-twentieth-century New York who lived rebellious lifestyles. Hartman's premise is that it is precisely those who have been the most marginalized from history to whom the question of freedom presents itself with the greatest urgency. For Hartman, precisely those practices that socialist sociologists and anarchist agitators disqualify as apolitical or individualistic express an "open rebellion against the world"⁴⁶: sexual promiscuity, roaming the city, idleness, partying, or gambling. Standing in the tradition of the practices of fugitivity performed by slaves, such as stealing away, errant paths, the refusal to work, theft, and building maroon communities, these young women, according to Hartman, were driven by exorbitant dreams of utopian possibilities and an intense longing to escape.

The focus on such seemingly ephemeral self-stylizations has a political point related to Hartman's earlier analysis of the "afterlives of slavery" in bourgeois practices of subjectivation. Rather than fostering genuine liberation, the juridico-pedagogical subjectification regimes of bourgeois capitalist society to which former slaves were subjected after their formal emancipation have produced differential subjugation bearing an "uncanny resemblance" to the dehumanizing practices of slavery.⁴⁷ Instead of sheer *integration* into the pre-established subject formations of enslavement society, which only ever relegates them to the "burdened" status of responsabilized semi-subjects, liberation begins with an exploratory working out of one's own subjectification through an "infrapolitics of the dominated."⁴⁸ The self-stylizations of the young women in Harlem are examples of such infrapolitics, which Hartman describes as bodily manifestations of fugitivity; that is, of subject transformations making the fugitives "unavailable for servitude."⁴⁹

Hartman describes these practices (already in the title of her book) mostly in aesthetic terms; to be more precise, in terms of an aesthetics of existence, as "beautiful experiment(s) in how-to-live."⁵⁰ Qualifying these lives as "beautiful" avoids judging them according to other normative criteria—such as ethical goodness or political success—which would recuperate them back into a juridico-ethical-political scale. At the same time, the aesthetic perspective also offers a richer vocabulary for describing these forms of life; Hartman speaks of sensual experiences, rhythms, languages, dance, music, passions that in a traditional political vocabulary could only be described in a reductionist manner. Finally, describing these practices as beautiful also implies a specific judgment of taste about forms of life. Part of the justification for this qualification lies in the importance of the imaginary and imagination to any perspective of liberation: the young women open up spaces

of possibility through “dreams” and “desires” that escape a juridico-pedagogical gaze. These exploratory movements thus resemble what Schiller figured as play: a preparation for freedom cannot lie in the implementation of a moral or political program (for that would subject sensibility to a dictate of reason), but only in an uncoerced coincidence of life and form. The engine of beautiful experimentation, also in Hartman, is a “promise” (“Something better than this”⁵¹) and a “preparation” (“get ready for freedom”⁵²). However, Hartman places this playful experimentation with physical and psychological modes of existence ready for freedom under conditions of ongoing necropolitical precarity. Hartman describes this in reference to Esther Brown, one of the women she portrays in the book:

She was hungry for more, for otherwise, for better. She was hungry for beauty. In her case, the aesthetic wasn't a realm separate and distinct from the daily challenges of survival; rather, the aim was to make an art of subsistence. She did not try to create a poem or song or painting. What she created was Esther Brown. That was the offering, the bit of art, that could not come from any other. She would polish and hone that. She would celebrate that every day something had tried to kill her and failed. She would make a beautiful life. What is beauty, if not 'the intense sensation of being pulled toward the animating force of life?' Or the yearning 'to bring things into relation [...] with a kind of urgency as though one's life depended upon it.' Or the love of the Black ordinary? Or the capacity to make what we do and how we do it into sustenance and shield?⁵³

The characterization of beauty as an *urgent bringing things into relation*—the closest Hartman comes to a definition of beauty—is a quotation from Elaine Scarry, who refers directly to Schiller in the quoted passage.⁵⁴ Aesthetic play, however, is not simply a *mediation* of two opposite poles, but the *withdrawal* of those poles from necropolitical spell. But how then can it be that these women, whose lives are constantly subject to carceral intervention and economic deprivation, embody not only forms of residual beauty, but of exorbitant, anticipatory, and avant-garde beauty? How can the criminalized jazz clubs and cabarets of Harlem produce a more beautiful beauty than the financially and symbolically well-endowed Metropolitan Opera and Carnegie Hall?

Hartman's portrait of the “terrible beauty of the slum” contradicts the large crowd of urban planners and social reformers who only ever see the lives of counter-communities through the lens of deficit, and whose efforts are therefore always concerned with bringing marginalized groups up to the standard of mainstream society. The point is not to romanticize or deny misery and suffering, but to ask how subaltern

milieus simultaneously provide conditions to reject bourgeois scripts and thus transform forms of life. The slum is a milieu of heterogeneity, both of languages and expressions, and of cultures and impressions in general; Hartman speaks of a permanent “too much” of sounds, smells, and tastes that connect with each other to form a “multitude of strangers.”⁵⁵ This life is politically overdetermined: the carceral regime to which they are subjected explicitly criminalizes precisely those lifestyles characterized by sexual permissiveness or refusal to work, for example. Attending a party can thus have just as explosive a character as distributing leaflets. This creativity of fugitive practices is the result not of an individual escapism but of a network of relations: “The air is alive with the possibilities of assembling, gathering, congregating.”⁵⁶ In this way, Hartman attempts to explain how an aesthetically superior form of life can emerge from circumstances of radical scarcity: a situation marked by linguistic distance, political overdeterminacy, and collectivity dispositions subjects to a particular aesthetic innovativeness and creativity.

In his extensive contributions to the aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition, Fred Moten directly addresses the question of the possibility of “terrible beauty,” that is, beauty not only in spite of but in and because of terribleness. The linkage of beauty with morality drawn from classical German philosophy, Moten argues, allows for the development of a fugitive concept of beauty—critically revisiting the link between beauty and morality simultaneously conditions a different beauty “in the interest of a different reality.”⁵⁷ If beauty, contrary to Kant’s view, does not represent only contemplation of the moral good that is to be determined transcendently, but, as in Schiller, is anchored in the senses, then it is always susceptible to disruption by the rebellious sensibility and imagination of that which and those who disrupt the aesthetic and political harmony of the prevailing logic. The “rabble of the senses,” according to Moten, is embodied in Blackness, in a life that Kant and most of the Enlightenment tradition located outside any possibility of morality and truth, and thus of beauty. Consequently, Moten refers to the specific form of Black cultural production as a being “in the break,” that is, an aesthetic expression of inhabiting and traversing this rift between an empirical history of violence and the simultaneous privileged relationship to a possible otherwise. In Moten’s work, the aesthetic terms for this “break” are ubiquitous: “surplus,” “invagination,” “rupture,” “collision,” “augmentation,” “cut,” “blurred, dying life,” “freedom drive.”⁵⁸ One umbrella term for this ontological ex-centricity of Black life is that of improvisation, that is, unplanned, unpredictable performance. Improvisation can be seen as the epitome of what Schiller calls play: not a subordination of skills to composition, but a spontaneous collapse of sensibility and form.

Hartman, too, speaks several times of the lives of young women in Harlem at the beginning of the twentieth century as “improvisations” that decompose the prevailing scripts of life. It is the minoritarian, not the majoritarian, life that developed a particular virtuosity in such improvisations. This explains why not only art, but also the forms of life of counter-communities are more beautiful than the bourgeois ones.

The Beauty of Counter-Communities

Let me rehearse my argument so far. At the dawn of modernity, Schiller acknowledged the aporia of liberation from self-inflicted immaturity: authentic freedom is possible only if human sensibility is not coercively subordinated to reason and morality, but if morality is quasi-spontaneously anchored in organic life itself. In doing so, he not only understood aesthetics as a question not just of art, but of forms of life, but also identified beauty as a specific criterion for judging forms of life. At the same time, Schiller already had to admit that realizing an enlightened aesthetics of existence is impossible within bourgeois-capitalist society. In a class society, the two basic human drives occur separately from each other and are represented by antagonistic groups: the “lower classes” devote themselves to raw sensuous striving; the “cultured classes” to a terror of maxims. By this admission, the concept of bourgeois existence’s aesthetics collides with its own enabling conditions. Marx described the proletariat’s relationship to the two sides of a liberated form of life with the concept of alienation; it is dispossessed of both life – its inner and outer sensibility, and form – its shape or labor. This diagnosis of alienation can be further sharpened and specified. Today, the sense drive and the form drive are not only split off from each other, but also manifest themselves both in a reversed meaning as well as in a differential distribution in the social field. The sense drive appears either as the nihilistic hedonism of commercial consumerism or in the reduction of disposable populations to bare life; the form drive appears as either unmitigated domination of nature and resource extractivism, or as democratized juridicism and normalized punitive desires. Both sides, in their social differentiation, stand with each other in a complicated relationship of both enabling and tension.

Readings of Weiss and Hartman (and their respective intellectual-historical contexts) have shown that the history of counter-communities is the history of counter-aesthetics: of heterogeneous forms of life that wrestle from domination a different sensibility, a different reason, and a different mediation. If one follows Peter Weiss, this counter-aesthetic for the proletarian counter-community in the exile forced by National Socialism in Europe of the 1930s and ‘40s can be rubricated under the concept of *struggle*. Struggle, however, is not to

be understood in an instrumental sense, as a tool for overcoming the old state into a new one, but as a mode of existence: as a form of life whose sensibility and reason are at every moment stretched toward a possible otherwise. For Saidiya Hartman, the rebellious lifestyles of young Black women in early twentieth-century Harlem are informed by practices of *fugitivity*. These practices can also be described as forms of struggle: they not only expand the realm of imagination for “exorbitant dreams,” but also already practically embody a virtuosic improvisation in which political liberation and sensible pleasure organically coincide. These two quite different contexts—and at first glance, rhetorically quite differently expressed and framed theories—are thus grounded in a common point. The idea of counter-communities’ beauty is in both cases covered by an interconnection of weak philosophy of history—not a certainty of the coming revolution, but still of counterfactual preparation, experimentation, anticipation, and a weak anthropology—not an appeal to the essence of an eternal human “being,” but still a protest against dehumanization in the form of reference to humanity, tenderness, or love. This connection of beauty and freedom helps to explain the aesthetic superiority of counter-communities: they are more experienced, skilled, and more motivated to grasp and express this form of negativity or distance. In a world marked by domination and alienation, it is tension, not reconciliation or harmony, that creates beauty.

Fourteen years after his first engagement with Schiller, Herbert Marcuse takes up again the question of the significance of the aesthetics of forms of life, but gives it another decisive twist. In his *Essay on Liberation* (1969), Marcuse holds on to Schiller’s idea of play as reconciling sensibility and reason (or life and form) as the figure of a liberated utopia, but he now also identifies already existing forms of life as bearers of the play instinct. As with Schiller, the question of aesthetic “education” emerges in Marcuse as a revolution-theoretical problem; a non-authoritarian revolution is only possible if the need for liberation is already anchored in the libidinal structure of human beings. But instead of looking for the agents of these avant-garde forms of life in “select circles,” as Schiller did, Marcuse, deeply impressed by the global revolts of 1968, sees manifestations of what he calls a “New Sensibility” primarily in “marginalized groups” and “outsiders,” such as prisoners, people of color, residents of ghettos, or the unemployed “lumpenproletariat.” It is no longer a goal, but an already actual practice. Rebellious forms of life invent a new language, new literature, new music, new body practices, new thinking; new sensibility, for Marcuse, is expressed in the appropriation of the idea of “soul” by Black culture and its “orgiastic” music and flavorful food, by “the erotic belligerency in the songs of protest; the sensuousness of long hair, of the body unsoiled by plastic cleanliness” or in “psyche-

delic search."⁵⁹ However, in order to resist being integrated into the existing society themselves, according to Marcuse, these forms of life have to enter into an open political confrontation with capitalism, with the ultimate goal of universalizing themselves.

It is not just a half-century of violent history and political defeats that separate us from Marcuse's euphoria in the late 1960s. While Marcuse's celebration of counterculture inverts bourgeois aesthetic valences, he remains caught up in an exoticizing gaze that misses the actual logic of the aesthetics of counter-communities, because he cannot identify the actual material social conditions for marginalized groups to appear beautiful. This becomes clear, for example, when he alleges that Black music protests against the bourgeois prescription of harmony through an expression of unmediated "frustration": "In the subversive, dissonant, crying and shouting rhythm," he says, "born in the 'dark continent' and in the 'deep South' of slavery and deprivation, the oppressed revoke the Ninth Symphony and give art a desublimated, sensuous form of frightening immediacy, moving, electrifying the body, and the soul materialized in the body."⁶⁰ This portrayal is as absurd as a depiction of jazz as it is for marginalized forms of life.⁶¹ In reality, counter-communal aesthetics of existence are characterized not by what Marcuse, in bad racist tradition, calls "frightening immediacy," but precisely by a lingering with mediation and mediatedness. This is what the concept of *struggle* stands for: it describes forms of life that maintain a constant counterfactual relation to a possible otherwise. Dissonance is not a formal aesthetic feature of a counter-community's artistic expression, but denotes the social relation of marginalized forms of life to the dominant society itself.

The aesthetic superiority of counter-communities thus depends on keeping up this distance or discordance. The openness and possibilities for development, innovation and creativity that Peter Weiss reconstructed in the proletarian and Saidiya Hartman in fugitive forms of life as characteristics of beauty are tied to remaining in this relation of negativity. Their political stance therefore is decidedly anti-assimilationist: they deny narratives of integration and inclusion because they invert the aesthetic valences of bourgeois society. Counter-communities see themselves as avant-garde instead of deficient: they don't want to be absorbed into society, but to escape it—that is, to explode it from below.

Beauty and Abolition

At the end of his book *In the Break*, Fred Moten describes the situation in which, as he says, he fell in love with a certain politics of sound, more specifically the sound of communism or revolution. As a ten-year-old

boy, his mother took him to a lecture by Angela Davis, which was a central biographical event for him: “When I first heard Angela Davis’s voice I got the news.”⁶² What was formative for him was not the content, but Davis’s intonation. Davis’s manner of speaking is marked by a characteristic melody or rhythm: “a hanging or lingering or dying fall of or at the end of consonants, open to but outside of a certain kind of chant and for a certain kind of affirmation, [...] an affirmation of the sound of resistance in a narrative of defeat.”⁶³ Moten acknowledges the danger of reproducing himself the fetishization resulting from the dominant representation of Davis’s corporeality in the media, which works both in the service of commodification and criminalization. He nevertheless insists – pace Davis – that despite and against this media capture, there remains a form of agency that can help rejuvenate a form of liberatory politics. In Davis’s voice, Moten argues, a revolutionary content and a revolutionary sensibility come together in a free and organic way. This coincidence, however, does not express harmony, balance, or self-containedness, but rather a discordance, virtuality, and self-excess. A form of life is beautiful not when it mediates or appropriates life and form, but when life and form become the performance and expression of their own transgression. Privileged to initiate such a transgression are those groups whose life is anyway forced to be a life of struggle and improvisation. The name of this beauty is abolition.

Acknowledgments

This article was written during my Feodor Lynen Fellowship at Barnard College New York in 2022. I thank the Humboldt Foundation for the generous funding and Frederick Neuhouser for hosting me as well as for his thoughtful comments on this paper. I would also like to thank Penelope Deutscher, Axel Honneth, Katharina Hoppe, Juliane Rebentisch, Francesca Raimondi, Vanessa Thompson, and Franziska Wildt as well as the critical questioners at my talk at Northwestern University for further important challenges and suggestions. Finally, I thank the anonymous reviewers of *Theory & Event* for their constructive feedback.

Notes

1. James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 41.
2. Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 42. Baldwin’s essay was first published in the *New Yorker* and received a polemical response by Hannah Arendt, on this exchange see ch. 2 in Fred Moten’s *The Universal Machine, (consent to be a single being, vol. 3)* (Durham, NC: Duke, 2018) as well as ch. 5 in Juliane Rebentisch, *Der Streit um Pluralität. Auseinandersetzungen mit Hannah Arendt* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2022).

3. bell hooks, *Feminism Is For Everybody. Passionate Politics* (London: Pluto, 2000), 31.
4. hooks, *Feminism*, 32.
5. hooks, *Feminism*, 37 f.
6. Jeremy Lin, *Gay Bar. Why We Went Out* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2021), 278.
7. See Michel Foucault, "An Aesthetics of Existence," in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings 1977–1984*, ed. L.D. Kritzman (New York: Routledge, 1988).
8. This idea of a "standpoint aesthetics" has been developed in Feminist Aesthetics in a similar way, although limited to the question of art. See A.W. Eaton, "Feminist Standpoint Aesthetics," in *A Companion to Aesthetics*, edited by Stephen Davies et al. (Chichester: Blackwell Wiley, 2009).
9. See W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Gramercy, 1994).
10. See bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End, 1992).
11. Fred Moten, *In the Break, The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 1.
12. Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilisation. A Philosophical Inquiry Into Freud* (New York: Beacon, 1966), 175.
13. This paper is part of a larger project on the superiority of the ethical life of counter-communities. See also Daniel Loick, "The Ethical Life of Counter-Communities", in *Critical Times* (2021, 4 (1), 1–28); Daniel Loick, "Fugitive Freedom and Radical Care: Toward a Standpoint Theory of Normativity", in *Philosophy and Social Criticism* (onlinefirst, June 29, 2023); and Daniel Loick, *Die Überlegenheit der Unterlegenen. Eine Theorie der Gegengemeinschaften* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2024).
14. For a recent collection of essays on Schiller and his relevance for contemporary critical theory, see María des Rosario Acosta López, Jeffrey Powell (eds.), *Aesthetic Reason and Imaginative Freedom: Friedrich Schiller and Philosophy* (New York: SUNY Press, 2019).
15. Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (Garden City, NJ: Dover, 2021), 60 [10th Letter].
16. Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, 60.
17. Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, 66 [12th Letter].
18. Friedrich Schiller, "Kallias or Concerning Beauty: Letters to Gottfried Körner," in *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, ed. Jay M. Bernstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 151.
19. Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, 34 [4th Letter].
20. Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, 35 [5th Letter].
21. Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, 35 [5th Letter].
22. Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, 36.
23. Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, 140 [27th Letter].
24. Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, 80 [15th Letter].

25. Peter Weiss, *Aesthetics of Resistance*, vol. 1. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 50.
26. Weiss, *Aesthetics*, 46.
27. Weiss, *Aesthetics*, 73.
28. Weiss, *Aesthetics*, 73.
29. Weiss, *Aesthetics*, 311.
30. Weiss, *Aesthetics*, 314.
31. Weiss, *Aesthetics*, 314.
32. Weiss, *Aesthetics*, 159.
33. Weiss, *Aesthetics*, 310.
34. Weiss, *Aesthetics*, 310.
35. Weiss, *Aesthetics*, 308 (translation modified).
36. See Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson, eds., *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* (London: HarperCollins, 2006).
37. See bell hooks, *Black Looks*.
38. See Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams. The Black Radical Imagination* (New York: Beacon, 2002).
39. See Audre Lorde, "Poetry is Not a Luxury," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing, 1984).
40. See Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).
41. See Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
42. See Angela Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism. Gertrude 'Ma' Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (New York: Penguin, 1999).
43. See Gwendolyn Pough, "Love Feminism, But Where's My Hiphop? Shaping a Black Feminist Identity," in *COLONIZE THIS!: Young Women of Color on Today's Feminism*, eds. Daisy Hernández, Bushra Rehman (Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2002), 85-98.
44. Lewis Gordon, "Black Aesthetics, Black Value," *Public Culture* 30.1: 19. For an extensive study on the aesthetic dimension of Black life and black culture, see Paul C. Taylor, *Black Is Beautiful. A Philosophy of Black Aesthetic* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2016). A classic investigation of Black everyday culture as "strange and oppositional" is bell hooks, "An Aesthetic of Blackness: Strange and Oppositional" in *Yearning. Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2015). For a recent meditation on the ordinary as a crucial category for a Black aesthetics, see Christina Sharpe, *Ordinary Notes* (London: Daunt, 2023).
45. Fred Moten, *Stolen Life*.
46. Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments, Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (New York: Norton, 2020), 228.

47. Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 126.
48. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 14.
49. Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, 299; also see Avery Gordon, *The Hawthorn Archive: Letters from the Utopian Margins* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017).
50. Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, 228.
51. Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, 10.
52. Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, 24.
53. Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, 235 f.
54. See Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 30.
55. Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, 7.
56. Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, 8.
57. Fred Moten, *Stolen Life*, 30.
58. Fred Moten, *In the Break*, 26.
59. Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (New York: Beacon, 1971), 36 f.
60. Marcuse, *An Essay*, 47.
61. For an extensive reading of jazz, and black life more broadly, as being the negativistic expression of a permanent rupture, see Fumi Okij, *Jazz as Critique: Adorno and Black Expression Revisited* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018). For a similar description with respect to the bodily practices of the Christian Black Pentecostal communes, see Ashon T. Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017).
62. Moten, *In the Break*, 230.
63. Moten, *In the Break*, 230.