

*The issue of escape must not stop at negation "pure and simple" but become one of construction and the affirmation of life.*

# *Lines Of Escape*

*GILLES DELEUZE'S  
ENCOUNTER WITH  
GEORGE JACKSON*

MICHELLE KOERNER

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2011

“Line of Escape: Gilles Deleuze’s Encounter with George Jackson” first published in *Genre* Vol. 44, no. 2, Summer 2011, 157–180.

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This edition published by Ill Will Editions.

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In his preface to the 2000 edition of *Black Marxism*, Cedric Robinson (2000: xxxii) proposes that to gain a sense of the diversity of the black radical tradition “one might examine how [it] has insinuated itself quite unexpectedly” into multiple trajectories of political and aesthetic invention and how in doing so an errant line of black radical thought repeatedly escapes “the familiar bounds of social and historical narrative.” George Jackson’s *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson* ([1970] 1994) bears witness to the force of such an insinuation. Each letter expresses the persistence of a capacity to reject—and reject absolutely—intolerable historical conditions of enslavement, imprisonment, and social death. In pursuing this rejection and its own immanent intelligibility, Jackson’s letters become an affirmation of blackness as a condition of emancipated life. “When I revolt slavery dies with me. I refuse to pass it down. The terms of my existence are founded on that” (*ibid.*: 250).

Jackson’s letters move from his personal experience of capture at the age of eighteen, when he was sentenced by the state of California to “one year to life” for allegedly stealing \$70 from a gas station, to a collective experience of resistance. “I have something really deep running through me,” Jackson (*ibid.*: 71, 4) writes, “the indivisible thing.” Beginning with this knowledge of the necessity to revolt against a social order that codes blackness as criminality, Jackson (*ibid.*: 16) is led to a course of study that opens that experience to multiple encounters within the history of radical thought: “I met Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Engels, and Mao when I entered prison and they redeemed me.” Jackson also speaks of encountering the work of Frantz Fanon and Che Guevara, and the list of books taken from his cell following his death at the hands of San Quentin prison guards shows that during his final years he was also deep into a study that included W. E. B. Du Bois, C. L. R. James, Aimé Césaire, and Ralph Ellison (to name only a few).<sup>1</sup> All of this is to say that Jackson’s letters both attest to an encounter with the black radical tradition and make a singular contribution to that tradition. Affirming the ethics,

intelligence, and beauty of a refusal to “adjust” (keep in mind here that the prison refers to itself euphemistically as an “adjustment center”), Jackson’s (ibid.: 4) letters unleash a furious philosophy at war with the conditions of what he aptly terms “captive society.” But what is most striking about this philosophy is that, in addition to producing a powerful critique of captive society—the contemporary racist, capitalist social order—he also finds a thought that “knows the way out” (ibid.: 69). And from the confines of a prison cell, where the state attempts to stop all movement, he asserts the force of the runaway slave as a figure of black radical thought: “I do my best thinking on my feet” (ibid.: 72).

But in what follows I will pursue a second encounter with the force of black radical thought. I am interested in showing how Jackson’s fugitive thought—and all the historical and social force it carries—insinuates itself further and within a rather different tradition. Specifically, I wish to map a series of encounters occasioned by the translation and publication of Jackson’s letters in France in the early 1970s and to demonstrate how Jackson’s writing enables an unexpected convergence between the rethinking of Western Marxism necessitated by the black radical tradition and a rethinking of the terms of revolutionary struggle in the work of Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Claire Parnet during the same period. What both share, I will argue, is an insistence that the analysis of capitalism must be concerned with the critique of contradictions that emerge within captive society but also must go further in considering what escapes these contradictions. Such a consideration, as we will see in both Jackson and Deleuze, necessitates the construction of an alliance between revolutionary concepts and that life the existing dominant order codes as minor, criminal, or outside thought.

The circulation of *Soledad Brother* in the context of prison struggle in France in the early 1970s has recently begun to gain the attention of historians and prison critics focusing on Jean Genet’s support for the Black Panthers (which included writing an introduction to *Soledad Brother*) and the subsequent interest taken in Jackson’s case by the Groupe d’Information sur les Prisons (Prison Information Group; GIP) founded by Michel Foucault and Daniel Defert.<sup>2</sup> Yet surprisingly, the recurrence of Jackson’s name in nearly all of Deleuze’s books written during the same period as the founding of the GIP has thus far only been noted in passing.<sup>3</sup> That Deleuze and his coauthors repeatedly cite Jackson in relation to one of their most original concepts (the “line of flight”) already announces an unprecedented event in the history of philosophy. But there is a deeper affinity between these two writers regarding the necessity to rethink the terms of revolutionary struggle outside the model of philosophical systems that have dominated Western thought (or, the “state-form developed in thought” [Deleuze and Guattari 1987

- 22 The notion of “racism without race” comes from Étienne Balibar (quoted in Hardt and Negri 2000: 192). Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of a nonexclusionary racism that operates by differential inclusion—“degrees of deviance in relation to the White-Man face”—is extended and elaborated in Hardt and Negri’s (ibid.: 191–95) discussion of imperial racism.

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of a motor, *applying it to himself*" (Deleuze and Guattari [1980] 1987: 396).

- 16 While some critics have downplayed the efficacy of the GIP's initial approach, pointing to inconsistencies in the group's methodology (Brich 2008), the crucial role the GIP gives to Jackson would remain inconceivable were it not for the group's radical reconfiguration of the role of the intellectual in political struggles. Gayatri Spivak (1988: 272) famously argues that, in their attempts to rethink the role of the intellectual, Foucault and Deleuze "systematically avoid the issue of ideology" yet both explicitly define the place of "the intellectual" today not in a struggle on the terrain of representation (ideology) but rather in a "struggle against those forms of power that transform him into its object and instrument in the sphere of knowledge, truth, consciousness and discourse" (Deleuze 2003: 207). See Deleuze and Foucault's "Intellectuals and Power" (*ibid.*, 206–14) for their discussion of this shift and its connection to prison struggle.
- 17 Jackson's ([1970] 1994: 118) process of making the rejection of dominant morality into a militant ethics can be seen, for instance, in his statement that "I am deeply sorry that I ever told a lie, stole anything, robbed and cheated at anything—mainly because it is so much like conforming to Western ways" and in his ongoing battle with his own misogyny. In his last letters he comes to repudiate his earlier views about women, writing: "I understand exactly what the woman's role should be. The very same as the man's.... The differences we see in bourgeois society are all conditioned and artificial" (*ibid.*: 298). Jackson's ethics can be said to be driven by an ongoing process of rejecting the moral values of a dominant racist, sexist, exploitative, and brutal system.
- 18 The philosopher Éric Alliez underscores this crucial dimension of Guattari's thought in his recent talk "Rhizome."
- 19 Deleuze and Guattari ([1980] 1987: 395–400) make a distinction between "weapons and tools on the bases of their usage" and define that difference according to the relations of force that animate them. A tool refers to a "motor cause that meets resistances" and is therefore *relative*, but a weapon "meets no resistance," because it is propelled by an *intrinsic* force. Weapons, as opposed to tools, name projectile forces that "appear only when a force is considered in itself."
- 20 Deleuze and Guattari's emphasis on the dependency of capitalism on racism provides another link between their work and that of thinkers in the black radical tradition. It also bears a striking affinity with Foucault's (2003) analysis of the function of *racism* as legitimizing the "right to kill" (sovereignty) by a power that legitimates itself as a "power to make live" (biopower). In a global situation where capitalism continually exceeds the limits of state, the rights of sovereignty (the rights over life and death) are, according to Foucault (*ibid.*), rearticulated, producing a racism "modeled on war" and further producing a racialized concept of "criminality" that supports the maintenance of the "death function in the economy of biopower."
- 21 Translation modified.

(1980): 374 – 76]). Both reconfigure several major conceptions that guide our understanding of history, race, politics, and war, and both come to an affirmation of the profound alliance between the production of concepts that break with the history of domination and the experience of a "minor race" that resists. While an exhaustive account of these affinities exceeds the scope of this essay, it is my hope that what follows will open up a space for further investigations of the unexpected connections between Deleuzian philosophy and black radical thought.<sup>4</sup>

Jackson's name—always accompanied by the refrain "I may run, but all the while that I am, I'll be looking for a stick"—appears in both volumes of Deleuze's *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Deleuze and Guattari [1972] 1985, [1980] 1987), written with Guattari, and in a short text written in 1977 with Parnet, "On the Superiority of Anglo-American Literature" (Deleuze and Parnet [1977] 2006).<sup>5</sup> In each instance, Jackson's line announces the idea that "escape is revolutionary":

Good people say that we must not flee, that to escape is not good, that it isn't effective, and that one must work for reforms. But the revolutionary knows that *escape is revolutionary*.... What matters is to break through the wall, even if one has to become-black like John Brown. George Jackson. "I may take flight, but all the while I am fleeing, I will be looking for a weapon." (Deleuze and Guattari 1985 [1972]: 185, 277; my emphasis)<sup>6</sup>

Affirming the force of fugitivity to "break through the wall" (a wall that throughout the book is defined as the limits of capital), this passage maps two important connections. First, invoking the nineteenth-century American abolitionist John Brown, the text aligns antiracist militancy with becoming black, a notion that, along with becoming woman, becoming animal, and becoming imperceptible, emerges in *A Thousand Plateaus* as a "universal figure of minoritarian consciousness" (Deleuze and Guattari [1980] 1987: 106). In connecting a political concept of escape with a white abolitionist "becoming black," Deleuze and Guattari imply a thinking of blackness that resonates with what Fred Moten (2008a: 1745) has called "blackness's distinction from a specific set of things called black." Brown's absolute commitment to end slavery in the raid at Harper's Ferry emerges as an event that affirms, to quote Moten (*ibid.*: 1746) again, that "everyone whom blackness claims, which is to say everyone, can claim blackness."

A second connection directly quotes *Soledad Brother* and introduces a crucial element into thinking of escape as a revolutionary idea. Jackson's line "I may run..." announces that fugitivity, rather than simply being a renunciation of action, already carries with it an active construction: a line of flight composes it-

self as a search for a weapon.<sup>7</sup> Disrupting the opposition of “flight or fight” that has often troubled the political understanding of fugitivity, Jackson’s line affirms a politics where escape is always already a counterattack. What we encounter here, quite rare in the work of a European philosopher, is a political concept produced in connection with both nineteenth-century abolitionism and the resistance to what Jackson termed the “neo-slavery” of the American prison system—a concept of resistance that affirms a force of “becoming black” or, more precisely, a blackness of becoming.

## METHOD

The force of Jackson’s line in Deleuze’s books—considered as an insinuation of blackness in the sense discussed above—is intensified when we consider the historical circumstances that drew *Soledad Brother* into Deleuze and his collaborators’ orbit (the links between prison struggle in France and in the United States, the GIP’s interest in Jackson, Genet’s involvement in the publication and translation of *Soledad Brother*). And this force becomes even stronger when we consider the deeper trajectories of black resistance it carries. It is here, however, with respect to the question of history and of blackness’s relation to history, that a serious problem asserts itself. Each time Jackson’s name appears in Deleuze’s work it is without introduction, explanation, or elaboration, as though the line were ripped entirely from historical considerations. There is a temptation to dismiss this use of *Soledad Brother* as an ahistorical appropriation of Jackson’s thought by a European theorist or, worse, a decontextualization that effectively obscures the intolerable social conditions out of which Jackson’s letters were produced. But to do so would perhaps miss the way blackness claims an unruly place in philosophy and philosophies of history.

In “The Case of Blackness” Moten (2008b: 187) perceptively remarks, “What is inadequate to blackness is already given ontologies.” What if we were to think of blackness as a name for an ontology of becoming? How might such a thinking transform our understanding of the relation of blackness to history and its specific capacity to “think [its] way out of the exclusionary constructions” of history and the thinking of history (Moten 2008a: 1744)? Existing ontologies tend to reduce blackness to a historical condition, a “lived experience,” and in doing so effectively eradicate its unruly character as a transformative force. Deleuze and Guattari, I think, offer a compelling way to think of this unruliness when they write, “What History grasps of the event is its effectuation in states of affairs or in lived experience, but the event in its becoming, in its specific consistency, in its

(binary systems of man/ woman, human/animal, white/black), those of a “supple” segmentarity, and, finally, a type of line (the “line of flight”), “which is even more strange: as if something carried us away, across our segment, but also across our thresholds, toward a destination which is unknown, not foreseeable, not pre-existent.” Deleuze and Guattari ([1980] 1987: 22) repeat this formulation in *A Thousand Plateaus*.

- 9 For an extensive discussion of “diagrammatism,” see Watson 2009.
- 10 A similar point is made in *A Thousand Plateaus* when Deleuze and Guattari ([1980] 1987: 4) assert that “literature is an assemblage, it has nothing to do with ideology.” In every case, what is at stake is thinking of literature as the production and arrangement of collective statements and social desire considered to be *directly* revolutionary.
- 11 Deleuze and Parnet ([1977] 2006: 44) make a similar point, connecting the concept of the “line of flight” directly to the experience of black resistance: “If slaves need to have some knowledge of standard English, it is only in order to flee, and to put language itself to flight.”
- 12 For an elaborate discussion of how “affects” can be understood as “weapons,” see Deleuze and Guattari [1980] 1987: 395 – 400.
- 13 To refer to *Soledad Brother* as a weapon is not a metaphor. In his introduction, Genet also underscored this idea: “To understand the significance of this book as a weapon, a means of combat, the reader must not forget that George Jackson is in danger of death” (Jackson [1970] 1994: 333).
- 14 For a recent analysis of Jackson’s description of the US prison regime as an instrument of a “fascist state,” see “Radical Lineages: George Jackson, Angela Davis, and the Fascism Problematic” in Rodriguez 2006: 113–44. The analysis of “neo-slavery” in *Soledad Brother* resonates with what Robinson calls “racial capitalism” and places Jackson in line with such thinkers as Du Bois, C. L. R. James, and Walter Rodney, all of whom emphasized capitalism’s dependency on racism. Jackson also extends this line by foregrounding the relationship between his thinking and the comrades he made in prison. “I met black guerrillas, George “Big Jake” Lewis, and James Carr, W. L. Nolen, Bill Christmas, Torry Gibson and *many, many others*. We attempted to transform the black criminal mentality into a black revolutionary mentality” (Jackson [1970] 1994: 16; my emphasis).
- 15 The figurations of running in Jackson’s letters always entail a strategic reversal, beginning with a reversal of the relationship between the “hunter and the hunted” (an image that Jackson takes from his reading of Jack London’s *The Lion’s Skin*). These reversals echo an important passage in *A Thousand Plateaus*, where Deleuze and Guattari, drawing on Paul Virilio, describe a quality of speed that relates only to a “moving body itself” (i.e., an absolute, as opposed to relative speed). Such speed is primarily associated with the autonomous force of a hunted animal from which “the warrior borrows ... more the idea of the motor than the model of the prey. He does not generalize the idea of the prey by applying it to the enemy; he abstracts the idea



## NOTES

- 1 A list of books taken from Jackson's cell has been made available online by the Kasama project.
- 2 *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson* was first published in the United States by Coward-McCann in 1970. The following year a translation appeared in France in the Gallimard series *Témoins* (see Jackson 1971). In 1971 the GIP devoted an entire volume of its series *Intolérable* to Jackson. See Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons 1971. Background and a large portion of this pamphlet have been republished in Artières et al. 2003. This material has also been translated and published in James 2007. For the transnational publication history of *Soledad Brother*, see Genet 2004. For a historical account of the GIP in the context of post-1968 politics in France, see Bourq 2007.
- 3 For example, Joy James (2007: 157) notes that "some also attribute authorship of this pamphlet to Gilles Deleuze, but research has not been able to support this claim." To my knowledge, Nicholas Thoburn's *Deleuze, Marx, and Politics* (2003) is one of the few instances where the connection between Jackson and the concept of the "line of flight" is discussed from a Deleuzian perspective.
- 4 Along similar lines, Brady Thomas Heiner (2007) has recently explored the influence of black radical thought in the work of Foucault.
- 5 The French text reads "Il se peut que je fuie, mais tout au long de ma fuite, je cherche une arme!" This translation no doubt contributed to the connection Deleuze and Guattari make between Jackson and their analysis of the weapon (*une arme*), yet in every case, in the process of being translated back into English, the line from Jackson's letters (as can be seen) is mistranslated.
- 6 Other citations include "Nothing is more active than an escape. It is *the opposite of the imaginary*.... George Jackson wrote from prison" (Deleuze and Parnet [1977] 2006: 27); "It is on lines of flight that new weapons are invented to be turned against the heavy arms of the state. 'I may be running, but I'm looking for a gun as I go' (George Jackson)" (Deleuze and Guattari [1980] 1987: 204). Jackson and Angela Y. Davis are also mentioned in an interview from the time: "What if, on the contrary, Angela Davis's libido was a social revolutionary libido? What if she were in love because she was a revolutionary?" (Deleuze and Guattari 1995: 72). In "Foucault and Prison" Deleuze (2006: 276) makes explicit reference to the "Jackson affair" in an interview discussing his involvement in the GIP and the work of Foucault.
- 7 *Ligne de fuite* is usually translated as "line of flight." However, as Brian Massumi points out in his "Notes on the Translation" in *A Thousand Plateaus*, "line of flight" is slightly misleading, "flight" suggesting "flying," a connotation that does not really exist in the original French (Deleuze and Guattari [1980] 1987: xvi).
- 8 In "Micropolitics," Deleuze and Parnet ([1977] 2006: 112) clarify this method as the consideration of at least three kinds of lines, those of a "rigid segmentarity"

self-positing as concept, escapes History" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 110). To bring this relation between blackness and becoming further into the open—toward an affirmation of the unexpected insinuation of blackness signaled by the use of Jackson's line as an "event in its becoming"—a few more words need be said about Deleuze's method.

The use of Jackson's writing is just one instance of a procedure that we find repeated throughout *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, where we constantly encounter unexpected injections of quotations, names, and ideas lifted from other texts, lines that appear all of sudden as though propelled by their own force. One might say they are *deployed* rather than explained or interpreted; as such, they produce textual events that readers may choose to ignore or pick up and run with. Many names are proposed for this method—"schizoanalysis, micropolitics, pragmatics, diagrammatism, rhizomatics, cartography" (Deleuze and Parnet [1977] 2006: 94)—but the crucial issue is to affirm an experimental practice that opposes itself to the interpretation of texts, proposing instead that we think of a book as "a little machine" and ask "what it functions with, in connection with what other things does it or does it not transmit intensities?" (Deleuze and Guattari [1980] 1987: 4).<sup>8</sup> Studying how *Soledad Brother* functions in Deleuze's books, connecting Jackson's line to questions and historical issues that are not always explicitly addressed in those books, involves one in this action. And further, it opens new lines where the intensities transmitted in Jackson's book make a claim on our own practice.

This method can be seen as an effort to disrupt the hierarchical opposition between theory and practice and to challenge some of the major assumptions of Western Marxism. In an interview with Antonio Negri in the 1990s, Deleuze (1997: 171) clarifies that he and Guattari have "remained Marxists" in their concern to analyze the ways capitalism has developed but that their political philosophy makes three crucial distinctions with respect to more traditional theoretical approaches: first, a thinking of "war machines" as opposed to state theory; second, a "consideration of minorities rather than classes"; and finally, the study of social "lines of flight" rather than the interpretation and critique of social contradictions. Each of these distinctions, as we will see, resonates with Jackson's political philosophy, but as the passage from *Anti-Oedipus* demonstrates, the concept of the "line of flight" emerges directly in connection to Deleuze and Guattari's encounter with *Soledad Brother*.

The concept affirms those social constructions that would neither be determined by preexisting structures nor caught in a dialectical contradiction. It names a force that is radically *autonomous* from existing ontologies, structures, and historical accounts. It is above all for this reason that Deleuze and Guattari

insist that society be thought of not as a “structure” but as a “machine,” because such a concept enables the thinking of the movements, energies, and intensities (i.e., the lines of flight) that such machines transmit. The thinking of machines forces us not only to consider the social and historical labor involved in producing society but also the ongoing potentials of constructing new types of assemblages (*agencement*).

One of the key adversaries of this machinic approach is “interpretation” and more specifically structuralist interpretations of society in terms of contradictions. According to Deleuze and Guattari ([1980] 1987: 293), structuralism persisted in the “submission of the line to the point” and as a result produced a theory of subjectivity, and also an account of language and the unconscious, that could not think in terms of *movement* and *construction*. Defining lines only in relation to finite points (the subject, the signifier) produces a calculable grid, a structure that then appears as the hidden intelligibility of the system and of society generally. Louis Althusser’s account of the “ideological State apparatus” as the determining structure of subjectivity is perhaps the extreme expression of this gridlocked position (an example we will come back to in a later section). Opposed to this theoretical approach, diagrammatism (to invoke one of the terms given for this method) maps vectors that generate an open space and the potentials for giving consistency to the latter.<sup>9</sup> In other words, rather than tracing the hidden structures of an intolerable system, Deleuze and Guattari’s method aims to map the ways out of it.

## WRITING

On the first page of the provocatively titled essay “On the Superiority of Anglo-American Literature,” Jackson’s line is once again deployed, but here it is in reference to the idea that the “highest aim of literature” is to escape (Deleuze and Parnet [1977] 2006: 26). An interesting convergence occurs here between political and aesthetic practices, suggesting an indiscernibility between the two insofar as both effectuate becomings. Genet had already made a similar point in describing *Soledad Brother* as a “poem of love and combat,” but deploying Jackson with respect to the question of literature as such, this essay invites us to rethink a more profound relation between blackness and writing.

At some distance from traditional Marxist theory, Deleuze and Parnet insist we reject any account of literature as an “imaginary representation” of real conditions (literature as ideology) in order to consider *writing as a production at the level of real conditions*.<sup>10</sup> Writing, which is to say the unleashing of the creative

is no race but inferior, minoritarian; there is no dominant race; a race is defined not by its purity but rather by the impurity conferred upon it by a system of domination. (Ibid.: 379)

Fugitive thought invokes a people that, by nature of the “oppression it suffers,” is exterior to the state apparatus: a minor race understood as the “unthought” of Western philosophy; a people who, from the perspective of the state model of thought and its existing ontologies, does not exist. The encounter between Jackson and Deleuze—specifically their common refusal to adjust thought to a state model—contributes to our composition of such a people.

detention centers that seek to “adjust” deviants and “protect” society.

But Jackson’s name, as it first appears in *Anti-Oedipus*, announces a deviating line that “follows lines of escape of desire,” a second type of social investment that explicitly rejects the discourse of purity and affirms “I am not your kind, I belong eternally to the inferior race, I am a beast, a black.” On this line the productive capacities of dis-identification and difference are asserted not by doing away with the concept of race but by affirming an antiracist concept of race that refuses entirely “fascisizing” notions of purity. As noted earlier, this analysis enables a thinking of blackness that would not be reducible to existing ontologies, as the use of the phrase “becoming black” with respect to Brown indicates, but instead names a process that disinvests from the “formation of a central sovereignty” and actively engages in “changing the conditions that destroy life.” Becoming black, understood in these terms, involves an escape from the norms of the “majority standard” and a disinvestment from social arrangements that privilege whiteness: “Non-white: we all have to become that, whether we are white, yellow, or black” (ibid.: 470).

Jackson’s ([1970] 1994: 38) own becoming black can be perceived in a persistent commitment to align his thought with “the lowest class, the black stratum of slave mentality.” As we have seen, such a commitment does not imply an acceptance of slave status but names a “rejection in process” that moves from “slave mentality” to “black revolutionary mentality” in a single leap—a leap that does not consist in abandoning the black stratum but instead expresses its immanent movement. It is above all Jackson’s belief in the life of that black stratum, beneath the laws and values of the state and much of what is coded by dominant white society as crime (and specifically the crime of blackness as such), that gives his writing its force and precision as a weapon of fugitive thought.

As emphasized throughout, Jackson’s commitment to think from the black stratum (to refuse to adjust his thought to “Western ways,” as he puts it at one point) resonates with Deleuze and Guattari’s ([1980] 1987: 377) commitment to extract thought from the “state model” of Western philosophy by placing it “in an immediate relation with the outside, with the forces of the outside, in short *to make thought a war machine*.” Such thought

does not ally itself with a universal thinking subject but, on the contrary, with a singular race; and it does not ground itself in an all-encompassing totality but is on the contrary deployed in a horizonless milieu that is a smooth space, steppe, desert, or sea . . . . The race-tribe exists only at the level of an oppressed race, and in the name of the oppression it suffers: there

force of becoming in language (a line of flight), is not finally reducible to already existing historical conditions, because such an act involves the production of new conditions. Literature, as they underscore, is driven by a desire to liberate what existing conditions seek to govern, block, capture; as such, it asserts a force in the world that existing conditions would otherwise reduce to nonexistence.

Such formulations enable a radical assertion: *Soledad Brother*, insofar as Jackson’s letters defy the prison system and the arrangement of a social order defined by the criminalization and capture of blackness, escapes what would otherwise be thought of as the historical conditions of its production. Jackson’s writing gains its real force by a total refusal to adjust to existing conditions of capture, enslavement, and incarceration. And it does so concretely by rejecting the subjectivity produced by the structures of what Genet, in his introduction to the letters, called the “enemy’s language” (Jackson [1970] 1994: 336). Jackson (ibid.: 190, 305) himself underscores this dimension of the letters several times, remarking, “I work on words,” and more precisely describing an operation by which the intensities of black resistance come to be expressed in writing: “We can connect the two, feeling and writing, just drop the syntax” (ibid.: 331). The specific feeling invoked here is linked first to Jackson’s total rejection of the terms of captive society—“the feeling of capture . . . this slave can never adjust to it” (ibid.: 40)—but it further affirms a connection to the “uncounted generations” of enslaved black labor: “I feel all they ever felt, but double” (ibid.: 233). In dropping the syntax, Jackson describes a method for rearticulating the relationship between the historical experience of capture (and the multiplicity of feeling carried across the passage) and the *feeling of that experience*.

In his introduction to *Soledad Brother*, Genet focuses almost entirely on how Jackson’s use of language could be understood as a “weapon” precisely because Jackson’s lines were shot through with such violent hatred of the “words and syntax of his enemy” that he “has only one recourse: to accept this language but to corrupt it so skillfully the whites will be caught in his trap” (ibid.: 336).<sup>11</sup> In corrupting the “words and syntax” of domination, one directly attacks the “conditions that destroy life,” because language is here considered a mechanism by which one’s thought, agency, relations, and subjectivity are “caught” by Power. As can be seen, this idea is not one that Genet imports into *Soledad Brother*. Rather, these are ideas that Jackson himself has already emphasized. Jackson’s “minor use” of a standard, major language thus contributes to Deleuze and Guattari’s understanding of literature. This is to say that, while commonly associated with Franz Kafka, the very notion of “minor literature” is also linked to the encounter between black radicalism and French philosophy in the early 1970s.

The connection forged between writing and feeling in Jackson's letters suggests that the production of resistant subjectivities always involves a dismantling of the dominant order of language. To "drop the syntax" names a strategy for forcibly rearranging existing relations. But such a strategy also implies that one releases something else, specifically the *affective force of what resists those relations*. Writing here becomes the "active discharge of emotion, the counterattack" (Deleuze and Guattari [1980] 1987: 400). Or put differently, writing becomes a *weapon*.<sup>12</sup>

When Deleuze (1997: 143) states that "in the act of writing there's an attempt to make life something more than personal, of freeing life wherever it's imprisoned," he seems to refer to something exceedingly abstract, but Jackson's letters concretely assert writing as a freeing of life—of blackness—from *the terms of racist imprisonment*. As we will see, Jackson twists and pulls on the joints of language itself, quite literally seizing on the standard syntax until it breaks. In doing so, what Jackson describes as his "completely informal" style makes language an open field shot-through with fugitive uses (Jackson [1970] 1994: 208). Writing becomes an expression of thought on the run, a way of mapping escape routes and counterattacks that cannot be adequately understood in terms of structure or an understanding of language as an invariable system.

But escaping the existing dominant social order on "lines of flight"—given the volatile intensities they assert in the world—carries a real danger. In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari ([1980] 1987: 229) note the risk of "the line of flight crossing the wall, getting out of the black holes, but *instead of connecting with other lines* and each time augmenting its valence, turns to destruction, abolition pure and simple, the passion of abolition." Here, a restricted concept of abolition, understood simply as the destruction of the existing social order, runs the risk of transforming the "line of flight" into a line of death. For this reason the issue of escape must not stop at negation "pure and simple" but become one of construction and the affirmation of life. And it is for this reason that the effort to connect "lines of flight" and to compose consistencies across these lines becomes a matter of politics: an affirmation of a politics of reconstruction as the immanent condition of abolition. Jackson ([1970] 1994: 328) wrote from prison: "Don't mistake this as a message from George to Fay. It's a message from the hunted running blacks to those people of this society who profess to want to change the conditions that destroy life." A collective imperative determines the reading of these letters—namely, the necessity to put them in connection with other lines. The circulation of these letters in France during the 1970s offers a compelling example of how Jackson's message insinuated itself into what would seem an unlikely arrangement of French philosophy in the 1970s. Yet it is precisely in understanding

er social forms of history; counterinvests the enclaves or the periphery; and disinvests every free "figure" of desire—yes, I am your kind, and I belong to the superior race and class. *And second, a schizorevolutionary type or pole that follows the lines of escape of desire*; breaches the wall and causes flows to move; assembles its machines and its groups-in-fusion in the enclaves or at the periphery—proceeding in inverse fashion from that of the other pole: I am not your kind, I belong eternally to the inferior race, I am a beast, a black. (Deleuze and Guattari [1972] 1985: 275; my emphasis)<sup>21</sup>

There are several insights to be gained from this passage, but the first is the relationship between racism and the investment in a logic of historical development that consists in making a "superior race and class" the "final eternal cause for all the other social forms of history." According to this analysis, it is in invoking a racist discourse of this type that the rights of sovereignty are first constituted. What Deleuze and Guattari call the "fascisizing type" of social investment turns not only on guarding against external differences that potentially threaten a social formation but also on an internal, racist, and paranoid investment that cannot tolerate difference at any level. When statements of identity ("I am your kind") assert the purity of a class or race, what they demand is conformity to a standard notion of rational, moral subjectivity defined as sovereign and superior. This analysis of racism is further elaborated in *A Thousand Plateaus*, where contemporary racism is discussed precisely in terms of a reaction against what deviates from a norm-defining majority. Deviations from the ideal average, healthy, sane, white, good-citizen model defined as "normal" are coded as that which must be remedied, corrected, and in many instances destroyed. Importantly, Deleuze and Guattari ([1980] 1987: 178) describe this operation precisely in terms of criminalization: "Racism operates by the determination of degrees of deviance in relation to the White-Man face.... From the viewpoint of racism, there is no exterior, there are no people on the outside, there are only people who should be like us and whose *crime* it is not to be."

This passage suggests that modern racism functions by *submerging the question of race*. Such would be a "racism without race," which operates not by exclusion (at least not explicitly) but rather by a differential *inclusion* determined by a "majority standard" defined as normal—the "White-Man face" as an ideal.<sup>22</sup> One of the basic mechanisms for maintaining this type of social investment is the tracking of "degrees of deviance" (the statistical, numerical division of a population into *segments* defined in terms of race, class, sex, and psychological "normality"), a mechanism that is nowhere more visible than in the prisons, asylums, and

might here be understood as a *war machine* insofar as Jackson's description of the "thing in the street" composes smooth space.

The relation between making thought a war machine and the composition of a people also enables us to see both how Deleuze and Guattari's political philosophy contributes to the critical project of isolating racism as a key element in the functioning of the capitalist global war machine and, more compellingly, how this analysis compels them to extend the critique of racism by affirming a profound link between a revolutionary war machine and what they call a "minor race."<sup>20</sup>

In *What Is Philosophy?* the refrain of a "minor race" is linked directly to the question of the relationship between a people and creation. Intervening in the long history of linking philosophy and art (and "culture" more generally) with the organic constitution of a race considered to be superior, Deleuze and Guattari (1994: 109) counter, "The race summoned forth by art or philosophy is not the one that claims to be pure but rather an oppressed, bastard, lower, anarchical, nomadic, irremediably minor race—the very ones Kant excluded from the paths of the new Critique."

Rejecting romanticist notions that conceive the relation between works of art and philosophy and a people's historical emergence in terms of racial purity (whether expressed in terms of nationalism or in terms of a universal human ideal), Deleuze and Guattari affirm a relation between creative acts and a people whose becoming can only be thought of in terms of multiplicity and their struggle against the imposition of power, identity, and social norms. The emphasis in this passage on an "oppressed, bastard, lower, anarchical, nomadic, irremediably minor race" is crucial insofar as it affirms a life that refuses to adjust to existing conditions and an absolute rejection of the logic of what is ordered, pure, right, and so forth.

The suggestion that the force of Jackson's writing emerges precisely out of this irremediable condition—a refusal to accept the criminalization and pathologization of that condition or what Moten might call a "case of blackness"—should not be mistaken as an imposition of Deleuzian philosophy onto the reading of *Soledad Brother*. To return to where we began (the passage from *Anti-Oedipus* where Jackson's line first appears), one sees clearly that the refrain of a minor race as it appears above (and throughout *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*) emerges in Deleuze and Guattari's own encounter with Jackson's thought. Just before citing Jackson, the authors describe "two major types of social investment":

*first a paranoid fascisizing type or pole that invests the formation of a central sovereignty; overinvests it by making it the final eternal cause for all the oth-*

that moment in French thought as an effort to "change conditions that destroy life" that we gain a sense of how Jackson's book arrives at its expressly stated destination. In making the connection between Jackson's line and the lines of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and his coauthors can be said to have gotten the message.

## POLITICS

To think of *Soledad Brother* as a weapon of political struggle, however, requires a further step that isolates the prison itself as a "key weapon in the state's fight to preserve the existing conditions of class domination, racism and poverty" (Davis 1971).<sup>13</sup> According to the analysis of *Soledad Brother*, the institutionalized racism of the prison system functions as part of a broader strategy of confining insurgent bodies and voices that, in breaking the laws that underwrite the social order (everything from property rights to the dominant codes that define language, rationality, and subjectivity), directly contest what are in fact conditions of *warfare*. Jackson ([1970] 1994: 18) provides several names for this arrangement of racialized, state-sanctioned domestic and foreign warfare: "captive society," "neo-slavery," and at one point "fascism," which he defines as "a *police state* wherein the political ascendancy is tied into and protects the interests of the upper class—characterized by militarism, racism, and imperialism."<sup>14</sup> In designating the mechanisms of Power in terms of a police state, Jackson asserts that, despite the theatrics of representational democracy, the function of the state in "captive society" is not exactly a political function but a *policing* one. The state here emerges not as the site of political power but as a *weapon* in the arsenal of an "upper class," which may very well exceed the limits of a particular state. Such an insight not only leads to a critique of the unequal distribution of punishments brought to bear against different kinds of "crimes" (most clearly indicated by disproportionate criminalization of people of color, the poor, and working-class populations), it also enables the distinction between *those who resist the laws of the state from below*, whose combat must be understood as defense strategies, and *the brutality of a Power that conceives of itself as above the law* by quite literally taking the form of war on its own citizens.

Power, in the terms of Jackson's analysis, is *essentially predatory*. And it is for this reason that Jackson conceptualizes the forces of resistance in "captive society" in terms of escape and, above all, running. Jackson (*ibid.*: 13) writes, "Being captured was the first of my fears.... It is the thing I've been running from all my life." But running, as we will see, is not finally reducible to an escape *from* capture; instead, it names an autonomous force that *precedes* capture.<sup>15</sup>

Jackson's (ibid.: 18) analysis enables him to reject moralizing political discourses that separate "criminal mentality" from "revolutionary mentality," underscoring the basic insight that "criminals and crime arise from material, economic, sociopolitical causes." He analyzes "criminal mentality" as an expression of a real antagonism and further affirms that aspect of criminality that expresses a desire to escape *intolerable* social conditions of captivity. Jackson repeatedly situates the "lumpen-proletariat"—from the kid on the street to the convict doing life in prison—on the front line of the class and race war that defines the conditions of an American experience for many people and especially for those populations who bear the brunt of racist, capitalist brutality. The force of Jackson's analysis emerges precisely from the fact that he begins with the experiences of those, including himself, for whom the necessity of escape is a dimension of everyday life. And such an assertion—as, for instance, the GIP was quick to perceive—enables a rethinking of where revolutionary thought occurs and challenges the distinction between the "intellectual" and the "masses."<sup>16</sup>

Rather than thinking of revolutionary consciousness from the perspective of a totalizing theory or "scientific" standpoint, what is affirmed here is the intelligibility of revolutionary desire as it is first expressed in the multiplicity of acts of resistance to capture. Jackson ([1970] 1994: 3; my emphasis) asserts: "I could play the criminal aspects of my life down some but then it wouldn't be me. That was the pertinent part, the thing at school and home I was constantly rejecting *in process*." Jackson's connection to the black radical tradition, to the slave that flees, to those who refuse to continue living or working in intolerable conditions is given form in his notion of *the criminal aspect in process*—an apt expression for fugitive thought. "In process" implies both a rejection of the existing moral order and an affirmation of a militant *ethics*—an ethics that refuses to give up on the desire for revolutionary transformation. An initial process of rejection (the "criminal aspect") becomes, in this formulation, an ongoing process of invention (the "pertinent part"). In moving from "criminal mentality" to "revolutionary mentality" (ibid.: 16) one moves from negation to creation, affirming *the consistency and intelligibility of rejection as always already the expression of an immanent creative force*. Which is to say that the refusal to adjust to existing conditions always implies an active force that has its own values, makes its own conditions, and affirms its capacities for invention and transformation.<sup>17</sup>

In the passage from *Soledad Brother* cited in Deleuze's books, Jackson makes explicit the connection between a process of rejection (escape) and the necessity to simultaneously construct a counterforce (the search for a weapon). In a letter to his attorney, Fay Stender, dated July 28, 1970, Jackson (ibid.: 328) writes: "In the

We have seen how the concept of the ideological state apparatus is inadequate to account for those acts of resistance that escape the terms of this model. Resonating with Jackson's concept of "captive society," *A Thousand Plateaus* emphasizes that "state societies are defined by apparatuses of capture" (Deleuze and Guattari [1980] 1987: 335). This claim leads Deleuze and Guattari (ibid.: 351) to conceptualize a "war machine exterior to the State apparatus." Against "capture," the concept of the war machine names those collective arrangements of force that *militate against the formation of a state*. The analysis of contemporary capitalism in *A Thousand Plateaus* proposes that one think in terms of two kinds of war machine: a "global war machine" that functions according to the axioms of capital and a "revolutionary war machine" which expresses the collective capacities of living labor, forms of minoritarian social life, and artistic and political movements insofar as these express the immanent and necessary condition of the war machine of capital and as such assert a primary and autonomous force at odds with capital, namely, "a war machine capable of countering the world war machine by other means" (ibid.: 472).

The concept of a revolutionary war machine, however, is not simply a negation of the state. Like the line of flight, it is not a concept of negativity or of destruction; it rather seeks to give consistency to social compositions that are not accounted for by state theory. More specifically, it aims to produce a concept adequate to the productions of a people who have no state. This relationship is made explicit in an important passage from *A Thousand Plateaus*:

The war machine is in its essence the constitutive element of smooth space, the occupation of this space, displacement within this space, and the corresponding *composition of a people*: this is its sole and veritable positive object (nomos) . . . . If war necessarily results, it is because the war machine collides with States and cities, as forces of striation opposing its positive object: from then on, the war machine has as its enemy the state, the city, the urban phenomenon, and adopts as its object their annihilation. (Ibid.: 417; my emphasis)

Deleuze and Guattari counter the dominant tendency of political theory by proposing that the composition of a people, rather than being *founded* along with the state, corresponds instead to the invention and occupation of what they call "smooth space." *Soledad Brother*, which has often been described as a weapon,

these relations—detached in fact from “the subject” whose escape these clauses express—each prepositional phrase functions to intensify and make perceptible how the “thing in the street” *escapes capture*. At the very moment that we read “through a gate that only a few can operate with speed,” a rush of autonomous clauses becomes a vector in and through blackness (“it’s dark even in the day”), making perceptible a movement that opens a gate. In “dropping the syntax,” specifically the subject of the sentence, Jackson’s “thing in the street” finds expression as absolute speed (“there just wasn’t any possibility of a policeman beating me in a footrace”).

We might say that the cop who chases someone moves with *relative* speed. Like the speed of a hunter, which is dependent on the movement of his or her prey, the movement of the policeman is animated and determined by external factors (in this case, working for money and the resistance he encounters in his pursuit). But the speed invented by the one who is chased (or, more precisely, the one who escapes) is not, as we might imagine, determined by the body that chases it. There is a moment when a body that runs crosses a threshold and, propelled by an intrinsic velocity, becomes an active force released from external determinations. When speed “operates only upon the mobile body itself,” it becomes *absolute* (Deleuze and Guattari [1980] 1987: 376).

With these distinctions in mind, we can note what is perhaps the most extraordinary element of the passage quoted above. A “target” would usually be defined by the one who aims at it (in this case, a cop with a “short-barreled revolver”). But what happens in Jackson’s street? We see a complete reversal of relations: the *target becomes a weapon*.<sup>19</sup> When Jackson writes “I may run, but all the time that I am, I’ll be looking for a stick,” he describes a tactical maneuver (the counter-attack) whereby the superiority of a “defensible position” asserts itself as autonomy. What from the perspective of a certain mode of thought would be considered impossible and from the perspective of the law would be considered a target to be captured or shot down becomes a figure in this passage for an inventive speed that, following its own deviating line and intrinsic capacities (the “criminal aspect in process”), transforms itself into a revolutionary vision that outruns the law. Jackson affirms the real force of the “thing on the street” as a life that will always already have escaped capture by the State apparatus. There are perhaps as many names for this thing as there are instances of its expression.

inclusive sense, *my politics*, you’ll find all of the atypical features of my character. I may run, but all the time that I am, I’ll be looking for a stick!” At once invoking the figure of a runaway slave and, as will be shown, a kid on the street running from a cop, Jackson’s statement suggests a specific act of creation in which looking for a stick—an object sought in a very specific event of running—becomes a weapon. To know running, to *have had* to run, and above all to *want to run* all express a politics of fugitivity mobilizing Jackson’s line of escape.

The consistency of Jackson’s refusal to adjust to the “feeling of being captured” forces him—through writing—to produce new conditions from which to analyze and challenge not only the prison system but the social order it serves. Jackson (*ibid.*: 7) writes, “As a slave, the social phenomenon that engages my whole consciousness is, of course, revolution.” Here, as elsewhere, in aligning himself with the position of the slave, Jackson does not hesitate to identify the continuity between chattel slavery and what he defined as “neo-slavery” (the contemporary regime of wage labor in modern capitalist societies). This alliance suggests a continuity between the consciousness of the slave (a consciousness that is wholly engaged in resistance to existing conditions) and that of the revolutionary. The vexed relation to the slave within traditional Marxist theory, specifically the issue of “political consciousness,” here receives a strong rejoinder. Jackson’s formulation asks us to consider revolutionary consciousness in the figure of a revolting, fugitive slave. A political consciousness emerges that does not assume that such consciousness is a matter of arrival but rather affirms the intelligibility of “the ones who take their political consciousness with them on whatever fugitive, aleatory journey they are making. They will have already arrived; they will have already been there” (Moten 2008b: 211). Put differently, Jackson’s letters repeatedly confront us with an image of thought on the run.

## THE STREET

On the first page of *Soledad Brother* we encounter a decisive statement. Jackson (*ibid.*: 3) writes, “All my life I pretended with my folks, it was *the thing in the street that was real*.” To get at the political implications of Jackson’s affirmation of the thing in the street, however, we must first make a detour. In what is probably the best-known theoretical account of the underlying structures of society that are said to enable the ruling class to reproduce existing conditions of production—Althusser’s “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” (see Althusser [1971] 2001: 85–127)—we find a description of an encounter in the street understood not as real but as a theoretical representation. At a critical point in that text Althus-

er presents the reader with the scene of interpellation: a subject being “hailed” by a police officer in the street. This scene is said to illustrate the function of ideology in “interpellating individuals as subjects” (116). The reader is instructed that the example should be understood as a “little theoretical theater,” because “in reality” interpellation, according to this interpretation, operates “always already”—that is, one cannot think a thing not captured by the structure (119). For a general theory of ideology, what is important about the scene of hailing is not so much what actually happens in the street but rather the function it can serve in the analysis of the *structure* of interpellation, a structure that is, like the structures of the unconscious, said to be “without history” or “eternal” (ibid.). All of this leads Althusser to state, “There is no ideology except by the subject and for subjects” (115). Ideology, which is understood on the model of language and is said to operate primarily through it, becomes both the condition for the production of subjectivity and the very mechanism by which access to the “real” is barred. We will call Althusser’s *mise-en-scène* of interpellation a “structural scene” insofar as it operates to produce a theoretical interpretation of the underlying structure of subjectivity, an account of ideology defined as “a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (109).

Althusser (ibid.: 118) introduces this structural scene “along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: ‘hey you there!’ ” and then asserts: “Assuming that the theoretical scene I have imagined takes place in the street, the hailed individual will turn around. By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty degree physical conversion, he becomes a subject.” He goes on to note (curiously) that, “with the exception of ‘bad subjects’ who on occasion provoke the intervention of one of the detachments of the (repressive) State Apparatus,” ideology “in the vast majority of cases” functions to produce subjects who will “work by themselves” to reproduce the conditions of production, beginning with the production of themselves as subjects. That is, on this structuralist street, *the subject quite literally captures himself or herself*. Althusser says nothing more about those “bad subjects” or the political potentials expressed by those who provoke the state.

Now picture a black teenager running in the street, not being hailed but being *chased down* by a cop at gunpoint:

There just wasn’t any possibility of a policeman beating me in a footrace. A target that’s really moving with evasive tactics is almost impossible to hit with a short-barreled revolver. Through a gangway with a gate that only a few can operate with speed (it’s dark even in the day) up a stairway through

a door. Across roofs with seven to ten foot jumps in between (the pig is mainly working for money, bear in mind, I am running for my life). (Jackson [1970] 1994: 11)

We might call this passage from *Soledad Brother* a “machinic scene” as opposed to Althusser’s “structuralist scene.” Here we encounter an event in the street that is not “theoretical theater” but, as Jackson underscores, a thing that is *real*.

The limitation of structuralist interpretations of society (as well as desire and the unconscious), insofar as they were influenced by psychoanalysis, according to Guattari, were that they could not think movement or construction. Structuralism, with its “little theoretical theater,” set up a transhistorical structure as the key to interpretation, leaving the task of the analysis of ideology to a theory. Such an approach always defers the question of transforming real conditions and as a result defers the event of revolution. The entire move away from structuralism toward a thinking society and desire in terms of machines (a “machinic unconscious” in fact) turns on an effort to produce not a theory but a practice of thought that conceives *the real as a category of construction*.<sup>18</sup> Opposed to a general theory of ideology illustrated by a structural scene, Jackson’s “footrace” gives us a blueprint for how resistance works.

We can analyze the components that make up Jackson’s street assemblage quite precisely. Two characters are put in relation: “a policeman” and “a target that’s really moving.” No subject obediently turns around in response to a hail. In this machinic scene all of the relations are arranged to make perceptible a life that outruns the law. Rather than being caught by interpellation in the structures of language, Jackson’s thing in the street sends “the major *language racing*” (Deleuze and Guattari [1980] 1987: 105).

First, there’s a policeman “working for money.” He’s motivated primarily by a wage, an external incentive that alienates this body from its forces. Here, movement, sweat, breath, *and labor* are all already “captured” by the money he receives in exchange for his time spent policing other people. On Jackson’s street we see clearly that “a pig is a pig is a pig,” but we also see the mechanism that makes him a pig or, as Jackson ([1970] 1994: 252) would say, a neoslave: “if you don’t make any more in wages than you need to live, then you are a neoslave.”

But the other character we encounter on this street—“running for my life,” as Jackson says—introduces a wholly different dimension, and the street emerges from the standpoint of Althusser’s “exception” (the “bad subject”). A series of fugitive clauses takes flight from what would otherwise be a relation of subordination (“*through a gangway up a stairway through a door. across roofs*”). Detached from