

1. (Roland Barthes) In his story *Sarrasine*, Balzac, speaking of a castrato disguised as a woman, writes this sentence: "It was Woman, with her sudden fears, her irrational whims, her instinctive fears, her unprovoked bravado, her daring and her delicious delicacy of feeling" Who is speaking in this way? Is it the story's hero, concerned to ignore the castrato concealed beneath the woman? Is it the man Balzac, endowed by his personal experience with a philosophy of Woman? Is it the author Balzac, professing certain "literary" ideas of femininity? Is it universal wisdom? or romantic psychology? It will always be impossible to know, for the good reason that all writing is itself this special voice, consisting of several indiscernible voices, and that literature is precisely the invention of this voice, to which we cannot assign a specific origin: literature is that neuter, that composite, that oblique into which every subject escapes, the trap where all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes....
2. (Barthes) The absence of the Author (with Brecht, we might speak here of a real "alienation:" the Author diminishing like a tiny figure at the far end of the literary stage) is not only a historical fact or an act of writing: it utterly transforms the modern text (or — what is the same thing — the text is henceforth written and read so that in it, on every level, the Author absents himself). Time, first of all, is no longer the same. The Author, when we believe in him, is always conceived as the past of his own book: the book and the author take their places of their own accord on the same line, cast as a before and an after: the Author is supposed to feed the book — that is, he pre-exists it, thinks, suffers, lives for it; he maintains with his work the same relation of antecedence a father maintains with his child. Quite the contrary, the modern writer (scriptor) is born simultaneously with his text; he is in no way supplied with a being which precedes or transcends his writing, he is in no way the subject of which his book is the predicate; there is no other time than that of the utterance, and every text is eternally written here and now. This is because (or: it follows that) to write can no longer designate an operation of recording, of observing, of representing, of "painting" (as the Classic writers put it), but rather what the linguisticians, following the vocabulary of the Oxford school, call a performative, a rare verbal form (exclusively given to the first person and to the present), in which utterance has no other content than the act by which it is uttered: something like the / Command of kings or the I Sing of the early bards; the modern writer, having buried the Author, can therefore no longer believe, according to the "pathos" of his predecessors, that his hand is too slow for his thought or his passion, and that in consequence, making a law out of necessity, he must accentuate this gap and endlessly "elaborate" his form; for him, on the contrary, his hand, detached from any voice, borne by a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression), traces a field without origin — or which, at least, has no other origin than language itself, that is, the very thing which ceaselessly questions any origin....
3. (Barthes) In this way is revealed the whole being of writing: a text consists of multiple writings, issuing from several cultures and entering into dialogue with each other, into parody, into contestation; but there is one place where this multiplicity is collected, united, and this place is not the author, as we have hitherto said it was, but the reader: the reader is the very space in which are inscribed, without any being lost, all the citations a writing consists of; the unity of a text is not in its origin, it is in its destination; but this destination can no longer be personal: the reader is a man without history, without biography, without psychology; he is only that someone who holds gathered into a single field all the paths of which the text is constituted. This is why it is absurd to hear the new writing condemned in the name of a humanism which

hypocritically appoints itself the champion of the reader's rights. The reader has never been the concern of classical criticism; for it, there is no other man in literature but the one who writes. We are now beginning to be the dupes no longer of such antiphrases, by which our society proudly champions precisely what it dismisses, ignores, smothers or destroys; we know that to restore to writing its future, we must reverse its myth: the birth of the reader must be ransomed by the death of the Author. ("The Death of the Author," Roland Barthes)

4. (Megil on Foucault) While it would be a mistake to attribute to orthodox historiography a paradigmatic unity of the sort that T. S. Kuhn has pointed to in the natural sciences, it is nevertheless true that orthodox historians do adhere to what J. H. Hexter has called the "realityrule," the rule that historians cannot tell just any story about the past but must rather tell "the best and most likely story that can be sustained by the relevant extrinsic evidence." The historian seeks, in short, to render "the best account he can of the past as it really was... In short, orthodox historians adhere to a "discovery" view of the past, holding that the past is there, a field of real entities and forces waiting for the historian to find; and they reject the opposing "construction" view of the past, which holds that, far from discovering and reporting the past, historians must be regarded as constructing or creating it. In accepting an irreducible interpretative element in history, orthodox historians recognize that the historical account is in part an invention of the historian, but they see it as an invention that, solidly grounded in the facts of history, rightly aspires to portray the past "as it actually was." ...
5. (Megil on Foucault) The orthodox historian is strongly committed, furthermore, to the view that there is a clear distinction between getting things right and getting things wrong. In his elementary concern with getting things right, the orthodox historian signals his adherence to a view that has dominated the historical profession since its birth in the nineteenth century—namely, the view that history is at bottom a science, capable of realistically apprehending the world and of discovering a truth that is more than relative. Admittedly, historians are today less confident about the scientific status of history than they were at the end of the nineteenth century, but there still remains a basic commitment to the ideal of scientific history... For the orthodox historian, the evidence that he has so laboriously discovered and assessed has a reality of its own reflecting the reality of the past itself, and he sees his task as the construction of a historical account that will explain and interpret this actual past. Foucault does not conform to the rough consensus on the nature of historical investigation that I have just sketched out. On the contrary, he stands in radical opposition to it.

Allan Megil, "Foucault, Structuralism, and the Ends of History," *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 51, No. 3 (Sep., 1979), pp. 456-58.

6. Charles Mills "Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race") and a commentary on Beyoncé.

The universalizing pretensions of Western philosophy, which by its very abstractness and distance from vulgar reality seemed to be all-inclusive of human experience, are thereby shown to be illusory. White (male) philosophy's confrontation of Man and Universe, or even Person and Universe, is really predicated on taking personhood for granted and thus excludes the differential experience of those who have ceaselessly had to fight to have their personhood recognized in the first place. Without even recognizing that it is doing so, Western philosophy abstracts *away* from what has been the central feature of the lives of Africans transported against their will to the Americas: the denial of black humanity and the reactive, defiant assertion of it. Secure in the uncontested *sum* of the leisurely Cartesian ratiocination, whites find it hard to understand the metaphysical rage and urgency permeating the *non-Cartesian sums* of those invisible native sons and

Non-Cartesian Sums 9

daughters who, since nobody knows their name, have to be the men who cry "I am!" and the women who demand "And ain't I a woman?"¹⁷ From the beginning, therefore, the problems faced by those categorized as persons and those categorized as subpersons will be radically different. One can no longer speak with quite such assurance of *the* problems of philosophy; rather, these are problems for *particular* groups of human beings, and for others there will be different kinds of problems that are far more urgent. A relativizing of the discipline's traditional hierarchies of importance and centrality thus becomes necessary.

world, like an op-ed with drums. Thus can we argue not about what the song says to us, but about what we think the rest of the world needs to be told, and whether Beyoncé is telling it right. What do we make of her dancers' Black Panther styling? Is she "allowed" to work with beloved artists from New Orleans or use references to the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina? How does the song sound through a feminist lens, through a queer lens, through an anticapitalist one? Can we have a conversation about her daughter's hair, and also about police violence? People talked about these things until, three days in, I'd been quoted every last line of a song I still hadn't heard.

We've found a way to collect around the handful of songs we all have in common, yoke them with (mostly)