CHAPTER ONE. WHAT IS DOLOROLOGY?

1. According to medical historian Donald Caton, Simpson’s interest in the painful experiences of marginalized bodies reflects the sensibilities of a broad social movement in the nineteenth century, which he calls “the humanitarian movement . . . it included labor laws, women’s suffrage, child protection laws, welfare programs for the poor, reform of prisons and schools, the antivivisection movement, and the abolition of slavery. . . . Common to these social programs . . . was a preoccupation with pain” (1985, 498).

2. I will use this phrase, taken from Scarry’s 1985 classic The Body in Pain, to denote those bodies deployed in discourses of dolorology.


4. See Gresson’s inspiring study on “white pain” in multicultural society, in which he has recently traced the contemporary hegemonic backlashes that, e.g., appropriate and resignify “racial pain” from minority critiques (2005).

5. This view informed the classic androcentric canons of American Studies such as F. O. Matthiessen’s The American Renaissance (1941) or Lewis’s American Adam (1955), which privileged the frontier-sharpened “man in the open air” against the “d—d mob of scribbling women,” as they were famously condemned by Hawthorne. Or, Ann Douglas’s fierce attack on The Feminization of American Culture (1988), where she accused sentimental women writers of “vanquishing masculinity” (quoted in Chapman and Hendler 1999, 5). Women’s studies and feminism have fundamentally criticized the reason/emotion dichotomy underlying these arguments, traced them back to the Cartesian mind/body split as one of the foundations of Western thought and the gendered hierarchies these dualisms simultaneously articulate and hide.

6. A good overview of the manifold works on sentimentality and the ideology of separate spheres can be found in Kaplan (2002). Kaplan herself complicates the domestic ideology of sentimentalism by juxtaposing the domestic as a national project (as in “domestic politics”) against the foreign or the national other, and thus positions sentimentalism in the framework of imperialist expansion. For her, “the cultural work of domesticity might be to unite men and women in a national domain and to generate notions of the foreign against which the nation can be imagined as home” (112).
7. My project is chiefly interested in the racial and gender dimensions of pain, and their various intersectional synergies (Collins 1999; Crenshaw et al. 1995; Taylor et al. 2011). While I do not think that other axes of difference such as sexuality, ability, age, or creed/religion are less important, my focus on the negotiation of racialized and gendered bodies derives from the discursive examples my project scrutinizes: the medicalization of women in the nineteenth century, and the emancipation of black American slaves.


9. Most of the mentioned authors make no explicit connections between the Foucauldian paradigm and sentimentalism. Two notable exceptions are Robyn Wiegman’s classic American Anatomies (1995), which reads sentimental negotiations of racial and gender dynamics within Foucauldian methodologies, and Sarah Knott’s recent work on sensibility in the American Revolution, which acknowledges the scientific discourses of the late eighteenth century, e.g., the study of nerves and nervousness (2009).

10. The biopolitical function of pain in enslaved bodies is not as obvious in Simpson’s argument. The pain of slave torture, as I argue in chapter 4, however, is a central relay in hegemonic formulations of “freed slaves” as a black American population during and after emancipation.

11. Foucault’s almost notorious ignorance of the racial and gendered dimensions of the modern subject’s genealogy has been pointed out by many scholars, most prominently in feminist theory. Some of the canonical critiques can be found in Bartky (1988), Bordo (1999), and Butler (1989); newer approaches are Deutscher, (2008), Inda (2005), Oksala (2004), and Feder (2007). Most agree that his later work, especially the lectures, incorporates at least broad conceptualizations of race.

12. I will use the term figuration throughout the text to denote particular discursive constellations of knowledge, bodies, subjectivity, and power. While the term is used generally without a critical definition in the English language, I find Sarah Kember’s definition of figuration within feminist contexts helpful: “A figuration is a performative image of the future; performative in so far as it embodies an epistemological and ontological shift which acts . . . in the present” (1996, 257). Kember calls, e.g., Haraway’s concept of the cyborg a figuration. I’d like to note that the term has an extensive critical life in sociology, stemming from Norbert Elias’s work. By figuration, different from Kember’s and my usage, Elias denotes specific collectivities of individuals—“a structure of mutually orientated and dependent people” (2000, 482). Figuration for Elias is thus situated between the social and the individual.

13. Within the “History of Science” genealogies my project works with, the beginnings of what is concisely called the “life sciences” are variously dated. Among others, my frames of reference are: Philipp Sarasin’s history of biopolitical discourses on “health” and “hygiene” (2001), which begins with Georg Ernst Stahl’s theory of nerves of 1708; Londa Schiebinger commences her investigation of scientific racism and sexism with Petrus Camper’s measurement of skulls in the 1750s (2004); Foucault has identified different medical, scientific, legal, and political discourses that constitute the shift to biopolitics—i.e., the governance of life—in the middle of the eighteenth century, e.g., in his lecture of March 17, 1976, in the series Society Must Be Defended (1997).
14. Achille Mbembe, who critically aligns Foucault’s concept with the innovative work on slavery by Orlando Patterson (1982) argues that “slavery . . . could be considered one of the first instances of biopolitical experimentation” (2003, 21). In this view, biopolitics is a vital component of slaveholding societies in general, since enslavement functions not only through the biological differentiation of master and slave, but further is characterized by biopolitical practices that allow differentiation between legitimate (“breeding”) and illegitimate (“miscegenation”) forms of racial amalgamation. However, building on Patterson’s description of slave-status as a form of “social death,” or “death in life,” Mbembe argues that Foucault’s notion of the governance of “life” (enabled by racism) must be extended and corrected to register the particular form of “necropolitics” through which enslavement works: it maintains the slave’s life only in a destructive, death-dealing relationship, outside of “social life.” This nexus of biopolitics, necropolitics, and slavery is further discussed by Plonowska Ziarek (2008).

15. Wiegman (1995) argues convincingly that nineteenth-century scientific regimes construct the meaning of race and gender generally within a paradigm of bodily comparability: comparative anatomy, comparative phrenology, etc. I will in this sense also argue for a “comparative dolorology” in my historical chapters.

16. The term is Londa Schiebinger’s (2004), and I use it here to comprise the plethora of scientific discourses constructing the female body as separate and inferior from the male (as human) body. These constructions of femininity, while also always racially inflected, work differently from scientific racism, but in many ways are associated with them. Some of these intersections are discussed in my project; other scholars have also mapped and problematized the relations and strategic displacements between scientific racism and sexism: see Stepan (1982), Wiegman (1995), Jordanova (1993, 1999), and Gilroy (2000).

17. The figuration of pain as the “nondiscursive” can be found in many contemporary theoretical positions.


19. See, e.g., Stringer (2000) for a concise introduction into the debate on feminist “victimology,” which she tries to interpret as an “art of hunger” for political redress.

20. This dialectic of pain resonates closely with Judith Butler’s earlier quoted observation that “vulnerability is fundamentally dependent on existing norms of recognition” (2004b, 43).

21. The fixating effects of this “victimology,” e.g., crucially structure the abolitionist use of African American perspectives and experiences in the genre of the slave narrative (Carby 1987; Castronovo 1999; DeLombard 2007).

22. I’d like to note that the political questions posed by the ontological effects of “pain” are radically different for hegemonic and marginal positions.
lifestyle pages of nineteenth-century American magazines. Burke’s section on “The physical cause of love” (Part 4, Section xix of the Enquiry), she writes, was reproduced, anonymously but under the same title, in an issue of Columbia Magazine. For her, it proves the point of transatlantic connections by theories of sensibility and sentimentality, but the reproduction also indicates that British high romanticism frequently translated as American popular culture.

2. The gendered logistics of the Enquiry have been elaborately discussed by several scholars (see Furniss 1993; Armstrong 1996; Fulford 1999; Mattick 1990). While of these authors only Fulford points explicitly to the implications of Burke’s gender-aesthetics for the discourse of sympathy and thus social participation, Meg Armstrong is the only to trace the connections between gendering and racializing the Enquiry makes.

3. Wollstonecraft was to extend these accusations against femininity indeed toward the “biological” women of England in the concluding chapters of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792). Her diagnosis of women’s oppressive state at times appears an outright dismissal of sentiment per se: “In short, women, in general, as well as the rich of both sexes, have acquired all the follies and vices of civilization. . . . Their senses are inflamed, and their understandings neglected; consequently they become the prey of their senses, delicately termed sensibility, and are blown about by every momentary gust of feeling. . . . Ever restless and anxious, their over exercised sensibility not only renders them uncomfortable themselves, but troublesome, to use a soft phrase, to others. All their thoughts turn on things calculated to excite emotion; and, feeling, when they should reason, their conduct is unstable, and their opinions are wavering, not the wavering produced by deliberation or progressive views, but by contradictory emotions.”

4. Edinburgh after Whytt saw prominent physiologists such as William Cullen, John Gregory, and Alexander Monro develop these ideas, while scientists like Glisson, Bordeu, and Barthez in France, and von Haller, Stahl, and eventually Alexander von Humboldt in Germany extended physiology and the study of nerves on the continent (see Forget 2003; Sarasin 2001; Sarasin and Jakob 1998). Edmund Burke was probably familiar at least with Whytt’s theories.

5. Halpern’s (2002) work on the connections of politics and the question of suffering, pain in other bodies, analyzes perception and recognition as the crucial discursive issue in the eighteenth century, because it confronted the principal problem of how a “community of free men” could to be constituted. As she argues in a crucial historization of Boltanski’s work (1999), the formulation of the autonomous agency characteristic to the democratic involved and very much depended on a reconfiguration of what suffering meant. Whereas within the political theories of, e.g., Hobbes suffering is a natural precondition of existence, thinkers of the bourgeois society such as, e.g., Rousseau regarded suffering as a condition brought about by society itself. The diagnosis and alleviation of pain thus was formulated as the principle aim of liberal society (see especially her chapters 3–5).


8. In some formulations, the feminine seems to be understood as mere “trigger” for the procreative male instincts: “Beauty is . . . some quality in bodies, acting mechanically upon the human mind by the intervention of the senses” (146).

9. Balfour (2006) indeed remarks that the aesthetic treatises of Burke, Kant, and others—which reached an increasingly female readership—effectively worked as instruction manuals for gender performance: “Despite the extraordinary proliferation of women’s writing at the end of the eighteenth century . . . the domain of aesthetic philosophy was still one of the most resolutely masculine . . . so it was still most exclusively to men that women turned to learn about the differences between the beautiful and the sublime, which was bound up with learning about the differences between men and women” (325). Armstrong has forcefully called for a deciphering of Burke’s theory in Butlerian terms of gender performance (1996).

10. The phrase is from F. O. Matthiessen’s description of Whitman. This associative field of Burke’s sublime has widely influenced American and American Studies’ considerations of the sublime, and facilitated its recruitment as a “national aesthetic” (Nye 1993; Wilson 1991). The saturation of the sublime with gender prescriptions, as well as its biopolitical repercussions however, are almost always overlooked in its American employment, and I will discuss this connection in the last portion of this chapter.

11. This catalogue of gender clichés was criticized by early feminists such as Wollstonecraft. As Taylor analyzes in early feminist discourses, these conventions could be powerfully criticized by inverting their polarities. Wollstonecraft’s rhetorical maneuvers against Burke’s Reflections are one indication for this strategy, another is her short story The Cave of Fancy written in 1787 and published posthumously, which casts a female spirit engaged in sublime thoughts against a rather helpless male hermit in a reversal of sublime and beautiful (2003, 63). In other words, since the corporeal basis of sensibility, the sensual organs, were deemed “the same in all men,” as Burke writes, the potential reversal of which sphere a subject inhabited was possible. The access to true feeling and sensibility, anchored in the stronger emotion of the sublime, in this view grounded on a democratic body, and was open to rhetorical inversion and negotiation. This “equal access” to the symbolic, however, is counteracted by Burke’s physiology.

12. Burke is not too interested in a distinction between nerve and muscle—and the attendant difference between irritability and contractility—which contemporaneous physiologists such as Albrecht von Haller had begun to establish (Sarafianos 2005). The important aspect for him is “violent contraction”: “I do not here enter into the question debated among physiologists, whether pain be the effect of a contraction [of muscle], or a tension of the nerves. Either will serve my purpose; for by tension, I mean no more than a violent pulling of the fibres, which compose any muscle or membrane, in whatever way it is done” (162). On the “nerve-muscle” debate in the eighteenth century, see also Steinke (2005).

13. The gymnastic aspect marks a characteristic difference to another contemporary image of the body in pain in relation to the sublime, namely Johann J. Winckelmann’s description of the Laocoön-group in 1755. Winckelmann invested the sublime display of terrifying agonies with the authority to stand as aesthetic principle
of neoclassicism per se: “noble simplicity and calm grandeur.” Winckelmann took artistic delight in Laocoön’s simultaneous expression of maximal pain and maximal composure. Burke, who probably knew the German’s famous depiction, fills his Enquiry with graphical descriptions of the sublime as following from veritable fits of pain, which seem antithetical to the overall calmness and grandeur of Winckelmann’s heroic, “Greek” suffering: “I say a man in great pain has his teeth set, his eye-brows are violently contracted, his forehead wrinkled, his eyes are dragged inwards, and rolled with great vehemence, his hair stands an end, the voice is forced out in short shrieks and groans, and the whole fabric totters” (161). Where Winckelmann’s Laocoön bears his painful fate with quiet greatness, and thus rests firmly within the aesthetic of politeness, Burke lets his subject struggle and shake from being in pain, thus privileging pain within an economy of fitness and health that shaketh to life, rather than inspiring “nobility in death.”

14. The “self-perfecting machine” is one of the organizing tropes of modern positivist notions of the human body—especially in eighteenth-century ideas of vitalism (see Sarasin 2001; and Sarasin and Jakob 1998).

15. A similar argument on the imbrications of eighteenth-century discourses on morals and politics with physiologist knowledges is also advanced by Catherine Packham’s article on Adam Smith (2002).

16. Burke’s biological separation of male and female can be historically aligned to Lacqueur’s famous, but equally controversial thesis of the “one-sex model” dominating discourse on the sexes since the Middle Ages, which saw femininity and masculinity united on a continuous scale of differentiation (the female constituting the “lesser man”) and not fundamentally different. According to Lacqueur (1990), this model was succeeded in the eighteenth century by the construction of the sexes as discreet and discontinuous. Burke’s articulation of two very distinct “natures” resonates with this context, in that the male and female—sublime and beautiful—are not only irreconcilable with each other, but indeed mutually exclusive and potentially harmful if mixed: “[I]f the qualities of the sublime and beautiful are sometimes found united, does this prove, that they are the same, does it prove, that they are any way allied, does it even prove that they are not opposite and contradictory? Black and white may soften, may blend, but they are therefore not the same. Nor when they are so softened and blended with each other, or with different colours, is the power of black as black, or of white as white, so strong as when each stands uniform and distinguished” (158). The black and white distinction indicates the equally forceful contrast of race(s) in the Enquiry, which I will analyze in the next part of my argument.


18. Note also the complicity of Burke’s rendering of the feminine with a “homosexual panic,” which is obvious with Burke’s simultaneous effort to craft the masculine as “admirable” while at the same time excluding any possibility for same-sex relations. As Gould (2001) argues, the introduction of “desire” for the female as a supplement to love is exclusively grounded in this need to forcefully heterosexualize the aesthetic model.

19. This interpretation of Burke’s physiologism goes in line with an observation that Furniss makes. On the grounds of his considerations of labor, he reads
the Burkean subject as expression of a work ethic that carries connotations of both gender and class: “In effect, Burke seeks to create an image of the upwardly mobile man of ability (the ‘self-made man’) as an heroic and virtuous labourer whose sublime aspirations are quite different from the beautiful but debilitating luxury of the aristocracy (and of women)” (1993, 2). His characterization of the Enquiry as a supplement to the political writings however, leads him to the conclusion that Burke's graphic descriptions of pain, muscles, and nerves serve merely as rhetoric and its physiological excursions are essentially “fictional” (30).

20. A further argument in this direction might be extracted from Anne Mallory’s article commenting on the notion of “boredom” in Burke’s antirevolutionary writings. Here, similar to the idea of anesthesia (non-feeling), Burke is shown to attack the revolutionaries of Paris for their lack of compassion, and their “lazy but restless” temperament (2003, 227). For him, the revolution happens primarily not from “true feelings,” but from an irritable and fundamentally bored sensibility, only excitable by atrocity.

21. See Gibbons (2001) for a detailed discussion of Burke’s rhetorical evocation of Native Americans as “barbarians,” and the association of revolution with “civilization” enabled through that trope in his Reflections.

22. The “discourse of the heart” is hardly acknowledged in Foucault’s genealogy as a supplement to disciplinary power, but it has been identified and contextualized within Foucauldian frameworks by several scholars (see, e.g., Boltanski 1999; Samuels 1992; Camfield 1993).

23. To harden the soul, and thus numb the important inherent “sympathetic sensibility” between human bodies, was the principal argument with which the spectacular punishments of the Ancién Regime were criticized (see Foucault 1979, especially chapter II).

24. See also Crary’s important work on the emergence of the observer as an “embodied authority” around 1800 (1993).

25. Which it nevertheless implies. Burke was recognized by several critics as the founder of “sensationalist aesthetics” (see Wilton 1981, 29; and Halttunen 1993, 1995).

26. In this the Enquiry differs fundamentally from the later Kantian theory of the sublime, which eventually references back to the sublime core of the human mind, Vernunft, or reason. Where Kant is, as Ryan (2001) suggests, basically fortifying the Cartesian “mind/body” hierarchy by subsuming everything to reason, Burke, by way of his physiological foundation of sublime, is able to articulate a self-governing corporeal subject, with all the naturalizing and gendering implications that the nineteenth-century regimes of scientific knowledge production would turn into the objective science of “natural differences.”

27. See also Boltanski’s philosophical discussion of the “moral spectator” (1999, ch. 1).

28. On British colonial and slave trade enterprises, see Armitage and Braddick (2002), and Morgan (2000).

29. The colonial novel translates the Burkean liminality of darkness into narrations of white men breaking down in and overwhelmed by the darkness of the jungle (see Haschemi Yekani 2011). This light/dark dichotomy (see also Husman 2010), relating to barbarity and civilization, dominates also colonial literature such
as Stedham’s *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition Against the Revolting Negroes of Surinam* of 1796 (see Klarer 2005), which became an important publication for the abolitionist movement. As Marcus Wood writes, these accounts also frequently draw on depictions of tortured black male bodies to illustrate the violence in the colonies, while at the same time referring to the black body as almost without emotion or an unreal incapacity to feel pain. In Stedham’s depictions of black torture victims in the *Narrative*, he finds an equal rendering that relates to the “vacuity” Burke attests to black bodies: “These figures, who exist outside white legal and moral codes and who relate only to white legal property codes, cannot be shown to feel. In this sense they are systematically cut off from participation in their own trauma . . . the suffering appears to operate within a vacuum, moral, physical, and descriptive” (2000, 232).

30. See Crary (1993, 66). Note also that Burke’s use of the Cheselden boy obviously contradicts Crary’s remark, that “[i]n all the speculation surrounding the . . . Cheselden boy, no one was ever to suggest that a blind person restored to sight would initially see a luminous and somehow self-sufficient revelation of colored patches.” Where Crary takes Diderot’s discussion of the case as index that the eighteenth century was not capable to think of the observer as an innocent position, for there was no consciousness of the subjectivism of vision in general, Burke’s use of the case seems to indicate two things: that cultural constructs shape our vision, and that black things are terrible, i.e., aesthetic in themselves.

31. See also Armstrong, who writes: “While [it] may serve as a basis for power and mastery with aesthetic ideology, the sublime is also a figure for the terror of images and passions which transgress the ‘natural’ orders of society. In aesthetic discourse, the threat of this excess must be simultaneously provoked by, contained within, and sacrificed to the economy of sublime vision” (1996, 214).

32. A general notion of racial difference—or “races”—for the eighteenth century is however argued by Saakwa-Mante, who observes that the concept of polygenesis—one of the fundamentals for the ontological differentiation of races occupying nineteenth-century racial scientists—was well established in Continental thought around 1730 (Saakwa-Mante 1999). While the notion of “races” may have thus been familiar to Burke, it does not feature in the *Enquiry*, whose chromatic considerations rather fall in line with racially infused color-theories also recognizable in many philosophical writings from the seventeenth to the twentieth century (see Husman 2010).

33. See an extensive discussion of these in Gibbons (2003, 113–18). I do not want to enter into longer discussion here, for I think that Burke’s biopolitical implications are not at odds with his quarrels with colonialism. Rather, Burke’s outraged descriptions of colonial violence, quoted by Gibbons, to me circle primarily around two topos: the violation of the (racial) family as a sympathetic body and the loss of (white) “civilizing” power through colonialist violence. “They [the Indians] were assaulted on the site of their sympathy. Children were scourged almost to death in the presence of their parents. . . . The son and father were bound together, face to face, and body to body, and in that situation cruelly lashed together, so that the blow which escaped the father fell upon the son, and the blow which missed the son wound over the back of the parent. The circumstances were combined by so subtle
a cruelty, that every stroke which did not excruciate the sense, should wound and
lacerate the sentiments and affections of nature” (2003, 114). The foreign body is
here suffering primarily as a family, something generally denied to enslaved subjects
(see Spillers 1987). Gibbons notices Burke’s “lurid” attention to sadistic detail.

The second aspect of his descriptions is the barbarity of committing violence
and repeats the basic concern of colonial rulers to lose their civilization in colonial
conditions. Burke condemns the torturing of young Indian “virgins” by members
of the East India Company, and sentimentally refrains from description: “[T]hese
infernal furies planted death in the source of life, and where that modesty, which,
more than reason, distinguishes men from beasts, retires from the view, and even
shrinks from expression, there they exercised and glutted their unnatural, monstrous
and nefarious cruelty” (quoted in Gibbons 2003, 114).

34. I have several troubles with Gibbons’s approach (2003), which nevertheless
holds crucial insights on Burke’s engagement with the colonial. On the one hand,
Gibbons wholeheartedly ignores Burke’s thoughts on “blackness,” which indicate a
set of hierarchies that (in Burke’s view) would render the Irish as white oppressed
and therefore dependent on different strata of racial discrimination. The analysis of
gender difference I have carried out so far is of equal nonimportance to Gibbons.
However, I think a true discussion of the colonial cannot be addressed without a
consideration of racism and sexism. I am therefore quite opposed to Gibbons when
he tries to rescue Burke as a “counter-Enlightenment” thinker, who in a very post‑
modern fashion counts the failings and cruelties involved in Enlightenment politics
(see also Gibbons 2001).

35. This is also indexed by the observation that Burke was much more attacked
for his classism than for his sexism.

36. On “ideology versus common sense” as a distinction between Europe and
the United States, see also Fluck (2002, 218).

37. This point is also raised by Claviez (2009).

CHAPTER THREE. ANESTHESIA. BIRTHPAIN AND CIVILIZATION

1. I’ll give the alleged names of the slaves in small caps; for further expla‑
nation see also the next chapter on “racial photography” where the practices of
naming and misnaming slave subjects are centrally investigated.

2. Sims subjected the women to repeated surgical procedures in his various
projects, such as his experiments on new techniques for caesarean operations, which
he is said to have performed more than a dozen times on one subject alone (see

3. According to Foucault, medical discourses heavily changed in the ways
they conceptualized the role of patient and physician, the relation between medi‑
cine, body, and sickness. In opposition to the preclinical system, which followed a
semiotics focused on symptoms, classifications, and therapies—often still based on
humoral theories of the organism—modern medicine conceived of the body as an
intricate and complex machine, where diseases could objectively be grounded on
lesions and specific malfunctions. In this episteme, medical diagnosis figured as a
process of knowledge production working through description and observation, a
subjection of all bodily processes and conditions to a regime of “constant visibility”
and complete intelligibility. What Foucault thus describes with the “medical gaze”
is the installation of a regime of visibility that effectively severs the body from the
patient, and constitutes it as a passive and fully transparent object for the rational

4. On the language politics of Davy’s experiments, with regard to normalized
and pathological states, see Griesecke (2005).

5. See, e.g., Dierig (2004), Dror (1999), Schmidgen (2005), Rheinberger
(1993), and Steinle (2002).

6. See also Lisa Forman Cody’s article (1999) on the performativity of male
midwives.

7. This has been established by many feminist critics, and is also visible
from an almost biblical flood of literature on “female pathologies” being published
throughout the nineteenth century. See, e.g., Bleier (1984), Bordo (1993), Fox Keller

8. The progress in anesthesia methods reflects a sort of quest for the living
dead body: after ether, medical science pursued techniques of introducing anesthetics
via the bloodstream and thus making the continuous application—and longer,
more intricate operations—possible. In 1942 followed the implementation of the
poison known as “Curare” into surgery by Griffith and Johnson, which strips the
body of its respiratory reflexes and involuntary muscle twitching, thereby turning it
into a virtually undead body that is devoid of any reaction and totally dependent
on life-maintaining medical machinery and supervision. The anesthetist in today’s
operation rooms is mainly concerned with keeping the operated body in a state of
limbo between life and death (see Hirschauer 1996, 93–100).

9. Of course, this reading leaves out many issues of the development of anes‑
thesia techniques that have been very thoroughly researched by medical historians.
In fact, the early history of anesthesia is a meticulously researched area, at least
from a medical history perspective. The classical accounts are Caton (1985, 1999),
Stratmann (2003), and Smith (1982); for the political and social aspects of anesthesia
see Pernick (1987) and Browner (1999); an interesting account of the connections
between literary imagination and scientific innovation concerning anesthesia can
be found in Papper (1995); an illustrated and thorough account of anesthesia his‑
tory, including an analysis of pre-nineteenth-century methods of anesthesia, can be
found in Brandt (1997).

10. If sympathy and sensibility are seen from ca. 1750 on as fundamental
resources for democracy and the “universal bond” of humanity, then the unfit female
physiology Burke describes circumscribes women as a potential democratic liability.
Wollstonecraft amply understood this point, as her scornful criticism of “oversensitive
women” in the concluding chapters of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman indicates.

11. For an extensive account of the contributions, see Caton (1999); for a criti‑
cal one, see Farr (1980). The debate is not to be thought of as overly controversial,
though many medical professionals participated in it. On the contrary, obstetricians
and doctors in Europe and America were surprisingly quick to employ ether, nitrous
oxide, and chloroform in their procedures and to report their findings and experiments
in medical journals—quarreling less about the general question whether anesthesia was advisable or necessary, than about the optimization of chemical mixtures. The public also rapidly accepted the new remedy: following the example of Queen Victoria in 1853, who subjected herself to a medium chloroform treatment by Dr. John Snow, chloroform-aided parturition—*anesthesia à la Reine*—became fashionable among middle-class women. See Caton (1999, 63).

12. See also Donnison (1988), and Daly (1978).

13. The prestigious American obstetrician Walter Channing, brother to abolitionist William Channing, also exhibits this greater humanitarian cause, as he welcomes the invention of anesthesia, but laments the many animals that had died in French scientists’ Flourens experiments on the effects of ether and chloroform on the respiratory apparatus: “[T]he poor lower orders have suffered terribly. Vivisections have been done without number and without mercy. It would seem, that ether had come to destroy life, not to save it. I have read the reports over and over, and doubt not for a moment that many animals have suffered, and many more have been killed, in the toil” (Channing 1868).

14. The “religious objections” Simpson went up against have been proven nonexistent by several medical historians (see Farr 1980; Russell 1998). Their findings thus “demolish . . . one of the most established myths of recent medical history” (Russell, 180), namely that the rise of scientific medicine was predominantly a constant struggle against the obscurantist and conservative ideas of religious authorities. Simpson’s arguments therefore present not what their title indicates—an intervention against religiously infused criticism of anesthesia . . . but must be understood as a discursive operation within medicine itself and concerning primarily its cultural status.

15. As Poovey (1987, 140) notes, Simpson’s etymological analysis is inaccurate.

16. The salutary aspect is further expressed in the biblical terms of Simpson’s article. In what appears on the first glance as a comical refutation of religious objections, Simpson argues that anesthesia is already biblical: “Those that urge . . . that an artificial and anaesthetic state of unconsciousness should not be induced . . . forget that we have the greatest of all examples set before us . . . that most singular description of the preliminaries and details of the first surgical operation ever performed on man, which is contained in Genesis ii. 21: ‘And the Lord caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam; and he slept; and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof.’ In this remarkable verse the whole process of a surgical operation is briefly detailed” (42). God emerges not only as first surgeon and anesthecist, opening and closing bodies, and sending them into anesthetized states to be operated on; moreover, in a peculiar reversal, the creation of the two sexes is narrated as a medical operation. By claiming thus quasi-divine authority for anesthesia in birth, Simpson poses medical science as analogous to the creation and workings of the divine precedent. Like the above-quoted explanation by Simpson that anesthesia merely eliminates the painful sensations of labor and thus ensures the unhindered natural efforts of the uterine muscles (’atzebh), the discursive superimposition of medicine and theology ultimately reflects new claims the life sciences in the nineteenth century laid to scientific subject and object: medicine not only reveals and objectively describes nature, but akin to the divine creator medical knowledge “makes” nature qua gender. Simpson’s argument in this way presents less an intervention against
Notes to Chapter Three

religion, a “secularization of pain” (Caton 1985), than a superimposition of medical and theological discourses. The text thus instances what Braun/Stephan call the “biologization” of theological discourses, which contributed to the substitution of theological authority by scientific authority (2005, 11).

17. The easiness with which obstetricians described anesthetized births, however, could also be imagined as again perilous to the male physician. As Poovey has distilled from various articles of medical professionals at that time, anesthesia releases not only the natural labor of the uterus, but with it also the “natural” sexual energies of femininity. She cites W. T. Smith's Manual of Obstetrics: “In ungravid women, rendered insensible for the performance of surgical operations, erotic gesticulations have occasionally been observed, and in one case . . . the woman went unconsciously through the movements attendant on the sexual orgasm, in the presence of numerous bystanders” (1987, 142). The general function of these “scenes of indelicate character” was to construct femininity as sexually pathologic and excessive, through which yet another sacrificial imaginary of the male scientist could be deployed: the risk of losing his chastity and sexual integrity for the profession. This imaginary, building on the notion of women's uncontrollable (and therefore to be controlled) “reproductive instincts” (Stratmann 2003, 54), was also employed to excuse occurrences of rape under anesthesia, which had been a problem of the male accoucheur since the eighteenth century, as Poovey writes (128). The assemblage—sexual exploitation, the construction of the “uncontrollable sexual drive” of female patients, the sacrificial sacrifice of the male scientist—prefigures in important ways the vicious logistics of hysterical treatment in the second half of the nineteenth century, epitomized in Charcot's Salpetrière (Didi-Huberman 2003).

18. For good bibliographies on the topic see, e.g., Briggs (2000), Birnbaum (1999), and Archimedes (2005).

19. The date marks the publication of Cuvier's dissection report of “Saartje Baartman.” See Sander Gilman's (1985) influential article on the images of black and white female sexuality in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which provides also an early example of the approach here taken, analyzing how race was articulated through gender (and vice versa) in the natural sciences of the nineteenth century.


21. On Sims's experiments, and more connections between medical experimentation and slavery, see Kapsalis (2002), Savitt (1989), and Bankole (1998). Though the evidence is scarce, several sources indicate that Crawford Long, one of the co-inventors of ether anesthesia, since the early 1840s had also experimented on slaves to test the analgesic effects of the chemical, which had been in popular use for “ether frolics” but hadn't been recognized in its anesthetic usability. Long, a medical doctor in Athens, Georgia, after 1846 issued several publications in order to prove himself as the inventor of ether anesthesia (there exists until today a major debate who the first employer of anesthesia was, the so-called ether controversy). These articles basically present various documents, letters, and certificates as evidence that Crawford Long was the first to use ether as anesthetic. In a more passing manner, one of these documents—undersigned by a certain J. F. Groves, M.D.—mentions several operations which Long conducted on young slaves, with and without ether: “The first case that came under his care where its use was applicable after my going into his office was
not till January 8, 1845, which was the case of a negro boy having two fingers to amputate, caused by neglected burn. I, as the only student still with the doctor, he had me to accompany him to see the operation, and assist in the administration of the ether. The first finger was removed while under the influence of ether, the little fellow evincing no pain; the second without ether, the child suffered extremely. This was done to prove that insensibility to pain was due to the agent used” (Buxton 1912). On another early instance of a racial body under anesthesia, see also Lewis (1931). On eighteenth and nineteenth-century medical practice and the problem of race see Byrd and Clayton’s book (2000) and Washington’s Medical Apartheid (2006).

22. See also Gilman (1985) and Saillant (1995).

23. The law classified as undesirable any individual from China who was coming to America to be a contract laborer, any Asian woman who would engage in prostitution, and all people considered to be convicts in their own country. In 1882 Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act. As another significant event, in 1876 a federal California court decided in the first so called “prerequiste cases”—court cases in which the whiteness of immigrants was decided—on the racial status of Chinese people (see Haney-Lopez 2006).

24. “Positive eugenics” designates the politics of regulating the racial composition of populations through breeding, i.e., generating more offspring of one racial group. “Negative eugenics” describe all methods from immigration restriction to the prohibition of interracial marriages, forced sterilizations, and abortions that seek to limit the reproduction of one or several racialized groups (see also Lindquist Dorr 1999). As my reading of the ultimately eugenicist discourse on reproduction, civilization, and race indicates, eugenics is always a discourse dealing in the racialized tropes of “civilization” and “the primitive,” even when applying these also to class-differentiated groups. This decidedly contradicts Thomas Leonard’s statement that “eugenics does not require racism—biological superiority need not be premised on racial hierarchy. In fact, early eugenic research in the United States studied white families thought to have ‘degenerate’ attributes—criminality, pauperism, alcoholism, and prostitution were the chief worries” (2003, 691). Even these forms of abjection, via the terms heredity and civilization, carried racial undertones.

25. The notion of purity is traced by Harris (1995), who follows the informal aspects of racial segregation in the reconstruction South. Focusing on etiquette between the races, he argues, that (even indirect) contact between white women and African Americans (especially men) was construed in terms of becoming “dirty” or “unclean,” of course always connoting sexual contact: “The most important of all rules of purity involved sexual contact. As both the progenitors of whiteness and the special repositories of white purity, white women had to be protected from defilement through contact, however slight and indirect, whether from a plate, a touch, or a glance from ‘unclean’ black men and women” (392).

26. I propose the term here in reference to Gabriele Dietze’s concept of the “patriarchal dividend,” which she diagnoses for socially marginalized men, who are able to claim cultural capital by subscribing to the norms of hegemonic patriarchal rule (2009, 35).

27. Lauren Berlant has coined (albeit in a different context) the term hygienic governmentality, which fits the assemblage of meanings implied in Woodhull’s “breeder”
metaphor: “a ruling bloc’s dramatic attempt to maintain its hegemony by asserting that an abject population threatens the common good and must be rigorously monitored and governed by all sectors of society” (1997, 175).

28. Gilman’s feminist classics The Yellow Wallpaper and especially Herland have in recent years been reinterpreted in the light of her political and frequently nationalist writings such as “A Suggestion on the Negro Problem” (Gilman 1908). Among the turn-of-the-century current that Nadkarni (2006) and others call “eugenic feminism” Gilman’s contribution to nativism is the best researched (see, e.g., Bederman 1995; Seitler 2003; Weinbaum 2001). Further accounts of the intersections between racist discourse and white feminism can be found in Newman (1999), and on eugenic feminism in the early twentieth century see also Ziegler (2008).

29. Prostitution, as Seitler notes, was one of the main targets of feminist social reform. While on the one hand prostitution denoted women's sexual exploitation, it became—in the eugenicist framework—associated with class and racial aspects. The before mentioned Page Act of 1875 was not only the first legislation regulating immigration, it also equated Asian women with prostitution, “lewd morality,” and therefore social (and “genetic”) undesirability. White feminists’ crusade against prostitution in the late nineteenth century is in this view complicit with racial discourses holding sway till well into the twentieth century. See also Ordover (2003) for this question, as well as for the repercussions of eugenic feminists for sexual minorities.

30. The imbrication of white feminism with racial discourse has been crucially argued in black feminism and intersectionality studies (Crenshaw et al. 1995; Collins 1999; Giddings 1984). See also the recent anthology edited by Taylor et al. (2011).

31. This is not to say that the abolition of the slave economy in the South did equate to scientific racism’s stopping its dehumanizing work. For critical arguments on the various transformations of “raciology’s” doctrines, methodologies, and technologies into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, see especially Paul Gilroy’s Between Camps, published in the United States as Against Race (2000; see also Kohn, 1995).

32. The interesting connection between anesthesia, humanitarian politics, and the treatment of criminals is also visible in a slightly obscure text of 1848 that discusses the use of chloroform in executions: “On the Use of Chloroform in Hanging” (Peck 1848).

33. Caton, whose book is primarily concerned with the medical history of anesthesia, here stresses primarily class distinctions, and misses the fundamentally racializing categories evoked by the association of “education,” “culture,” and “civilization” with degrees of sensitivity and thus sympathy.

CHAPTER FOUR. PICTURING RACIAL PAIN

1. This abolitionist “division of labor”—reducing African Americans to an “evidential body” and white editors as interpreters of that body—has been consistently argued in many scholarly critiques of the slave narrative (Carby 1987; Gilroy 1993; Andrews 1986; Spillers 1987; Smith 1987; Sanchez-Eppler 1988). The point has since these pioneering works been reformulated and further contextualized by several authors, e.g., Castronovo 1999; DeLombard 2007; Reinhardt 2002.
2. Eugenicist Francis Galton also later articulated his theories on “racial heritage,” and its relation to criminality and intelligence through photographic “evidence.” Galton invented the method of composite photography, in which many pictures of “European” faces superimposed on each other resulted in the facial construction of a “racial archetype.” The composite method was famously used by Time magazine in 1993 to imagine the “new face of America,” a strategy of racializing visuality that Smith (1999, 222–26) and Berlant (1997, 175–220) have brilliantly discussed.


4. Historical scholarship has generally understood antislavery discourse of the antebellum period as “vigorously opposed” (Lowance 2000, xx) to the prescriptions of scientific racism of the same era. As Harriet Beecher Stowe’s comment on the “Negro’s” nervous system demonstrates, biological notions of race pervaded discourses both of pro- and antislavery activists—articulations of the slave’s humanity did not necessarily imply equality in biological and evolutionary terms. Louis Agassiz also sympathized with abolitionist concerns, as Wallis maintains (1995, 54). Though most of his academic and scientific work in the United States was dedicated to the scientific defense of “natural” differences between races and their social meanings, Agassiz publicly supported the abolition of slavery, which for him (and many abolitionist) did not necessarily negate the evolutionary inferiority of African Americans.

5. These daguerreotypes today reside in the Peabody Museum at Harvard University. For the process leading to the Swiss ethnologist and botanist Agassiz working in the United States (he later founded the Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology), and on the selection of persons to be photographed, see Wallis (1995). Wallis also reprints all fifteen daguerreotypes.

6. The taxonomic disciplines of racial science, however, were also associated with the “portrait,” prominently in white bourgeois practices of self-representation. Colbert’s exhaustive book on Phrenology and the Fine Arts (1997) suggests a pervasive knowledge of phrenology (the study of skull shape and its relation to intelligence, character, degree of civilization, and race) among artists, photographers, and their bourgeois customers. As he demonstrates, the phrenological portraits of white persons in the nineteenth century always were overdetermined with information on the subjects’ social and professional position, indicated by clothing, props, and posture—indeed, phrenology for white people was in this view a sub-criterion of a “good artistic” portrait. In their historical study on the daguerreotype, Barger and White argue that the doctrines of phrenology essentially belonged to the basic knowledge of early portrait photographers: “[Phrenology] was based on both visual and tactile information about head shapes and daguerreotypes provided records for specific ‘types’ that could be studied and reproduced in journals. The nearly simultaneous popularization of phrenology and the introduction of the daguerreotype wedded two professions together” (1991, 80).

7. The remnant of the portrait prompted historian Alan Trachtenberg to liken Agassiz’s pictures to the “dignity of Roman busts” (1982). For an extensive critique of his “dignifying reading” as an instance of compassionate “misrecognition,” see Mandy Reid’s article (2006).
8. First introduced by the French photographer A. A. Disdéri in 1854, cartes de visite appeared in the United States in the summer of 1859 and in one year had become a major fashion. Pocket-sized and mounted inexpensively, the carte de visite quickly became collectible; people not only had their own cartes made, but they purchased cartes of celebrities, notable Americans (statesmen and military leaders), and so-called oddities (Siamese twins, thin men, dwarfs) as “cartomania” spread. Prices ranged from $1.50 to three dollars per dozen, the average price being less than twenty cents per carte. Its popularity and accessibility caused the carte de visite to be hailed as the democratization of photography in the United States, an inexpensive form of studio portraiture used by citizens and celebrities alike. They quickly became a widespread means of advertising for authors, politicians, actors, and lecturers. Also, as Reid explains, cartes functioned as a means of “providing and cataloging visual information” (2006, 297). Pictures of political events, such as the government’s vote on abolition or the Civil War, were widely distributed and collected by large parts of the middle-class population.

9. In order to provide some means of a brief survey, I reference the scarce scholarly literature that exists on these photographs: Kathleen Collins (1985a; 1985b) was the first to remark both on The Scourged Back and the Emancipated Slaves series; however, she did so in a largely uncritical manner that merely established the provenance and (occasionally incorrect) historical background of the pictures, primarily for art historians. Brian Wallis (1995) is singular in his differentiated treatment and contextualization of Agassiz’s 1850 daguerreotypes. Reid (2006) aligns Sojourner Truth’s auto-portraits with Agassiz and The Scourged Back. On the “slave children” pictures, Mary Niall Mitchell has written concisely (2002). Despite her focus on a photographically augmented “runaway slave notice,” Rachel Hall’s article is the most contextualizing (2006) for the “slave children” series and The Scourged Back. Connor and Rhode have done pioneering research of the medical photographs of white soldiers (2003). The two books by cultural historian Shawn Michelle Smith (1999; 2004) extensively deal with late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century photographs and their investments in race, gender, and class representation. While these books offer few close readings of photographs, Smith’s arguments provide crucial contexts to my readings.


11. On the historical contexts of miscegenation, see the monographs by Hodes (1999), Lemire (2002), and Rothman (2003).

12. Abolitionism’s “visual turn”—marked by the commercial circulation of The Scourged Back in 1863—did not produce a vast archive of pictures of suffering black bodies. Indeed, judged against the plethora of abolitionist literature that sought to humanize different enslaved bodies by investing them with difference, suffering, and (potential for) redemption, the photographic memory of slavery as a system of injury to black bodies is small—the pictures presented in this chapter, centered around the Scourged Back, are almost all of the photographic depictions of suffering black bodies that can be found. Photography’s failure to substantially supplement textual abolitionism, and its late entry into antislavery discourse, suggests a mutually exclusive relation of the two media. As Mitchell observes, the slave narrative
virtually disappeared during the Civil War, a circumstance that he relates essentially to the factual breakdown and abolition of the plantation system: “The slave narrative proper could no longer exist after slavery was abolished. The value of the slave narrative seemed to depend on the real existence of chattel slavery, as if a gold reserve of ‘real wealth’ in human suffering had to back up the paper currency of the writings on slavery” (1994b, 197). The relatively sudden disappearance of the slave narrative can also be understood as a consequence of emerging photographs of suffering; the picture of black suffering succeeds the “gold standard” of slavery and devalues the freed slave’s written testimony to it. Abolitionist photography amalgamated the rhetorics of objectivity, evidence, and the black body “speaking its own difference/oppression,” and in this view led to the cultural neglect of the testimony of black voices.

13. The Schomburg Center’s database has catalogued the photograph under the name “Escaped slave displays wounds from torture” (Record ID 298932; Digital ID 487461).

14. Since one of my arguments is the instability of this naming, I’ll give the alleged names in small caps. This spares “distancing” quotation marks, while also acknowledging the dilemma of having to produce and reproduce names for persons where there are at once none and too many. The name Gordon seems to have originated from the Harper’s Weekly article, which was uncritically taken up by Collins’s first art-historical appreciation of the image (1985a). Scholars vary between citing the more allegorical title and naming the person they assume to be depicted: “The Scourged Back” (Reid 2006; Mitchell 2002; Wallis 1995), “C. Seaver Jr.’s photograph of Gordon” (Masur 1998), or simply “Gordon” (Wood 2000).

15. Only one source (Fusco and Wallis 2003) has acknowledged this image, while Hall reproduces it erroneously under the name The Scourged Back (see, e.g., Hall 2006). As my research indicates, the image has never been discussed, reproduced, or acknowledged under the name Peter yet, and the image’s history also never has been registered in a scholarly fashion, or any fashion at all.

16. The photograph is kept at the National Archive at College Park, in the collection “Photographic Prints in John Taylor Album, compiled ca. 1861–1865.” The Web address is http://arcweb.archives.org; the image’s Inventory ID: 165-JT-230.

17. I am not engaging in a critique of Barthes’s concepts here, but his later work on photography significantly revises the structuralist approach. In what may be a slight reversal of theorization, he later wrote in Camera Lucida describing the photograph of a former slave made by Richard Avedon: “Since every photograph is contingent (and thereby outside of meaning), Photography cannot signify except by assuming a mask” (2000, 34). In Barthes’s view, the photograph—traumatic or not—always evades meaning by endlessly producing readabilities.

18. Stowe herself, as the epigraph heading this subsection indicates, knew about the critical difference between visual and literary representation. In her Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin, she commented the representational problem of slavery as this: “Slavery, in some of its workings, is too dreadful for the purposes of art. A work which should represent it strictly as it is, would be a work which could not be read” (quoted in Sanchez-Eppler 1997, 26). While Stowe probably did not imply photography here, which in the nineteenth century was not considered as “art,” the
19. On the problem of ekphrasis, the other, and the unrepresentability of slavery, see also WJT Mitchell’s argument in *Picture Theory* (1994b, 151–212). My following analysis owes much to Mitchell’s brilliant discussion.

20. Collins’s article does not reproduce the verso, wherefore the inscriptions on the back of the picture could not be verified. Also, the alleged title *The Scourged Back* is not truly confirmed. Though many scholars have used it to refer to the picture, it is not printed below the picture (as was common in cards). Collins’s article is the first registration of the photograph in an art history context.

21. Wood refers to the carte he consults as a “British print” (2000, 268).

22. The *Harper’s Weekly* text reads as follows: “A Typical Negro. We publish herewith three portraits, from photographs by M’Pherson and Oliver, of the Negro Gordon, who escaped from his master in Mississippi, and came into our lines at Baton Rouge in March last. One of these portraits represents the man as he entered our lines, with clothes torn and covered with mud and dirt from his long race through the swamps and bayous, chased as he had been for days and nights by his master with several neighbors and a pack of blood-hounds; another shows him as he underwent surgical examination previous to being mustered into service—his back furrowed and scarred with the traces of a whipping administered on Christmas-day last; and the third represents him in United States uniform, bearing the musket and prepared for duty.” After this brief passage the text quotes a letter with descriptions of slaveholder brutality (see anonymous 1863, 429).

23. Nineteenth-century photographers often named their depictions of “atrocities of war” in allusion to biblical motifs, e.g., Roger Fenton’s famous photograph “The Valley of the Shadow of Death” (1855), or Timothy O’Sullivan’s “Harvest of Death” (1863) (see also Faust 2009), both recalling biblical themes. *The Scourged Back* retains this aspect from the *Harper’s Weekly* article, and interpolates Gordon into a Christian martyr, substituting the body’s individuation for allegorical saturation.

24. The interpretation of “display,” and thus the image as an intentional and political act carried out by Gordon, is also suggested in the heading under which the Schomburg Center has archived the carte de visite. Here, it is called: “Escaped slave displays wounds from torture.”

25. The motion picture *Glory* (Edward Zwick 1989) plays out this connection of scars, the psychological fitness of freed slaves for (white) America, and the military. The generic portrayal of the 54th Massachusetts African American regiment stars Denzel Washington as a troublemaker in the newly formed battalion during the Civil War. In a climactic scene, he is whipped by order of Colonel Robert Shaw (Matthew Broderick) for desertion. As he is undressed for the punishment, he—in a reference to *The Scourged Back*—reveals extensive scarring on his back, obviously from a past whipping. The film links Washington’s scars from slavery to his present status as the distrustful and disrespectful black man, who threatens the integrational and disciplinary success of the military campaign, and national redemption. In the film’s final battle for Fort Wagner, Washington overcomes his traumatic relation to America as he seizes the regiment’s flag, which he had before refused to do. He is
instantly shot, and dies in a heroic pose. My thanks to Nezam al Jaru for bringing
the movie to my attention.

26. My thanks to Holly Reed from the National Archives at College Park,
who kindly provided me with crucial information and scans of the images.

27. See also Spillers (1987) for a reflection on how gendered subjectivity is
complicated by the slave’s prohibition from relations of kinship and relations to
the self. Mitchell makes the point that the memory of one’s own birthday usually
is a knowledge passed on by relatives, especially the mother (see 1994b, 187–95).
This is interesting as the children’s status of “slave” in the plantation system was
“inherited” from the mother, i.e., all children born from female slaves were slaves
themselves. Slavery thus achieved the multiplication of slave-property by matri-
linearity, while at the same time shattering kinship structures and the channels of
knowledge implicit in them.

28. During my research of photographic representations of the injuries black
bodies received in slavery, I could not evade the impression that the black body
becomes a “representational sign for the democratizing process” (see King 2008; Wieg-
man 1991; my italics) primarily as the “back,” i.e., the backside of this body. Gordon
and Peter evidence that black subjectivity is recognized in white looking-regimes
from behind. The adequate white representational sign of democratic advancement,
on the other hand, seems to be the “face,” as a popular photographic print of 1865
documenting the congressional decision to outlaw slavery suggests. The image is
titled “Photographs of Representatives who voted ‘Aye’ on the resolution submitting
to the legislatures of the several states a proposition to amend the Constitution of
the United States as to prohibit slavery.” The montage was widely distributed after
the war, and shows an overwhelming mass of white faces—evidencing the compas-
sionate agency and politically righteous resolve of white male America to remove
its regime of enslavement. “Black back” and “white face” seem to supplement each
other in a racial aesthetics of bodies. In the light of this racial blazon I suggest a
further investigation of the racial and gendered ideology of the “back” and the
“face,” or, as Deleuze and Guattari call it, “faciality” (1987). See also Bernadette
Wegenstein’s highly inspiring consideration of the posthuman body in terms of
its loss of “faciality” in her article “Getting Under the Skin, or, How Faces Have
Become Obsolete” (2003).

29. I here use the verb “to present” both in the sense of “display,” and
“actualization,” i.e., to draw something into the present tense. While for the black
subject, slavery is always past and escaped from, the white subject can point to the
‘presentness’ of slavery. The photograph’s specific relation to temporality capitalizes
on this structure: showing an always past thing, it actualizes or “re-presents” it.

30. The radical temporal alterity of black liberated subject and white com-
passionate viewer resonates with a point Paul Gilroy has raised about the “extreme
patterns of communication defined by the institution of plantation slavery.” As he
claims, black slaves and white slaveholders inhabited different systems of commun-
ication, making impossible most linguistic relations: “There may, after all, be no
reciprocity on the plantation outside of the possibilities of rebellion and suicide,
flight and silent mourning, and there is certainly no grammatical unity of speech
to mediate communicative reason. In many respects, the plantation inhabitants live non-synchronously” (1993, 57). This communicative, even linguistic nonsynchronicity of slavery in a way is transformed into the different temporal strata black and white subjectivities inhabit in these pictures, a visual and temporal nonsynchronicity characterizing post-slavery race relations. Also, with relation to Gilroy’s thoughts on the master/slave dialectic, I want to note that this memorialization of the male slave body is the very opposite of what Gilroy describes as “the consciousness of the slave as . . . an extended act of mourning” (63), which is for him present in Douglass’s heroic embrace of the possibility of death and thus his advance to the position of “man.” The photographs I discuss here rather remove the site of mourning slavery from black consciousness to the “backside” of the black body.

31. On the implicit, Foucauldian differentiation between spectacular orders of punishment and a catalogue of wounding and hurt (1979; see also Lingis 1994, 53–77), here equating a distinction between North and South, see Wiegman’s remarks on the plantation’s simultaneous articulation of panoptic and sovereign principles (1995, 30–42).

32. Emmett Till’s mother publicly exhibited the photograph of her son’s mutilated corpse in 1955, which may provide a counterexample to what Debra King calls the commodified “everyday sign of suffering.” In Susann Neuenfeldt’s (2011) inspiring reading, the photograph provides an irreconcilable challenge to white compassion, in that it exhibits “the wound that never closes.” In seizing on bourgeois traditions of mourning photography and a reversal of lynching photography’s politics, Emmett Till’s mother was able to disrupt white viewing conventions and rites of “unspeakability”—and inserted both the abyss of white racial terror and a black politics of mourning into the regimes of visual representation.

33. An early example of the circulation of a mediating white pain in antebellum discourse is the daguerreotype Walker’s Branded Hand. Made only six years after the birth of photography in 1839 (see Orvell 2003), the image depicts the right hand of white sea captain Jonathan Walker, the letters “SS” branded into the palm, displayed against a black background. Walker, moving from Florida to the Northern states in 1844, had taken with him several African American slaves, wherefore he was arrested, fined, incarcerated for eleven months and after a court ruling branded with the initials “SS,” denoting “Slave Stealer.” After that, as Marcus Wood notes, “the white hand of Walker became a fragmentary monument to the cause of abolition and the suffering of the slave” (2000, 246), and Walker himself pursued a lively career as popular speaker and living reliquary at abolitionist rallies. The picture was in 1846 mass-reproduced as a broadside woodcut, accompanied with an elaborate poem by John Greenleaf Whittier that associated Walker’s hand with the iconography of religious martyrology. Remarkably, the image and poem provided American audiences with the earliest photographic evidence for the injurious effects of slavery, albeit inscribed on a white body. The picture and poem not only displayed Southern slaveholder violence and corruption, but further misread the white branded hand as a universal (white) cipher for “Slave Salvation.” Consequently, the mise en scène of the hand—starkly lit from above—makes the dark-seeming hand appear to belong to a black body, thus investing the white subject position with black corporeality. Racially ambiguous, the hand hovers between expressing racial victim-
hood and political heroism. *Walker's Branded Hand* thus referenced a white painful sacrifice and implicitly articulated the white body as capable of incorporating the black experience of enslavement. Saidiya Hartman has commented critically on this generalizing function of the “white body suffering for the black body”: “The effort to counteract the commonplace callousness to black suffering requires that the white body be positioned in the place of the black body in order to make this suffering visible and intelligible. . . . [I]t becomes clear that empathy is double-edged, for in making the other’s suffering one’s own, this suffering is occluded by the other’s obliteration” (1997, 19). This sentimental model of mimicry or “displacing mediation” of black suffering through white bodies ceased to work during the Civil War. The rupture to “romantic racialism” occurred partly because an image like *The Scourged Back* provided an incommensurable and visible equation of blackness and trauma, which as a supplement to white compassion was in no need of moderation, as the viewer could feel/see “viscerally” for him/herself.

34. Faust’s book focuses primarily on the issue of death and its connections to national American discourse. She points to various national practices of white memory and care fertilized by the mass production of dead bodies, such as the rise of the embalming industry, the pension system, and burial practices (Faust 2009).

35. The image is reprinted in Davis et al. 2007, 194.

36. I thank Dorothea Löbbermann for bringing this collection of medical photographs to my attention.

37. There is only one visual display of female woundings from enslavement—in the vein of Gordon and Peter—which appears as an afterthought to the Civil War era. On July 28, 1866, *Harper’s Weekly* published an image entitled *Marks of Punishment Inflicted upon a Colored Servant in Richmond, Virginia*, a wood engraving after a photograph that probably was kept by abolitionist Wendell Phillips. The image displays the highlighted scars on the back, arms, and head of an African American person, the white garment rolled down, leaning easily on a cushioned chair with an obviously bandaged hand. The attendant article, “A Cruel Punishment,” narrates the backstory given by the person who had sent the image to the paper, and involves a young female “servant” and her cruel mistress: “I send you a photograph showing in part the effect of a punishment by a hot iron on the back of a negro girl about 18 years of age, inflicted by a mistress the name of Mrs A—, living in King Williams Country in this state, a few weeks ago. . . . The girl was locked up in a private room, for some trivial offense, and kept in there over a week, during which time the burning was inflicted upon her. Her screams were frequently heard by the servants. Live irons were pressed upon her back and the back of her head, and the flesh on her back and head was burned . . . hard.” The narration situates the anonymous woman’s body as an afterthought to slavery, for it links the punishment to the fate of the several African Americans who were subjected to the mistress’s cruelties “while they were her slaves and until they were liberated.” The article trivializes the corporeal injury as relating to the irrational cruelty of the white woman, and not the systematic dehumanization of the plantation system in which it occurred. This abnegation of systemic violence is further amplified by placing black female pain firmly within the domestic realm. The picture visualizes a narration of slavery that equated racialized violence with personal irrationality and
femininity, thus collapsing the structural violence between slave and slaveholder into a quarrel between white and black women—"cruel mistress" and "silent servant." Black female pain—narrated after the "official" Americanization of male black bodies such as Gordon—thus signified not only a singular, domestic incident without context; moreover, its averted eroticization simultaneously alluded to and concealed the sexual violence of the plantation system. This process of disarticulating sexual violation was reflected and further displaced in the article's opening commentary by the magazine's editors: "The time is now gone when things of this nature are to be hidden from the public" (my italics).

38. For a historically exacting account of the incidents and various sources, see Reinhardt (2003) and Yanuck (1953). Much of the controversy and historical interest lies in the juridical fate of Garner, for it served as a controversial example of the Fugitive Slave Law that was passed to prevent escaped slaves from becoming free by entering "free soil." See both texts by Reinhardt on this context. Since the Garner case has been subject to extensive historical and feminist research—especially after Toni Morrison's novelization of her story in Beloved—I will only briefly analyze the discourse surrounding her to introduce some themes that influence how black femininity (and/as motherhood) is connected to narrations of pain and slave emancipation, and thus inserted into the sentimental framework of the nation after the war. On Garner see, e.g., Gilroy (1993, 41–72), Reinhardt (2002, 2003), Reyes (1990), and Wolff (1991). On Beloved, see Sengupta (2006), and particularly Barbara Christian's critical commentary on the reception of the novel in Abel et al. (1997). Morrison fuses the iconic figures of The Scourged Back and Garner into protagonist Sethe, who both shares Garner's story and carries the "chokecherry tree" on her body. None of the articles consulted has yet elaborated or problematized Morrison's amalgamation of black male and mixed-race female icons to slavery into a black female character, or the meaning of this subsuming move concerning African American pain.

39. Looking to both stories of slave suicide and white (Southern) formulas of "independence or death," Castronovo elaborates that "the metaphor of death as freedom saturates nineteenth-century culture, recurring across a range of texts from African American narratives to the moonlit, magnolia settings of proslavery novels. With little connection to social or material life, an inert freedom fits the diverse agendas of black abolitionist, white antislavery activist, and slaveholder. Although divided by race, background, and education, free white citizen and black noncitizen adhere to a vocabulary whose abstruseness best suits the normative legal identity of white manhood" (2000, 123). Castronovo's observation that a vocabulary of freedom embedded within a teleology of death resonates profoundly with white masculinity is in critical dialogue with Paul Gilroy's earlier meditation on Douglass's and Garner's "necropolitics" in the Black Atlantic (1993, 63–71): Gilroy saw Douglass's willingness to die as a decidedly African American reversal of the master/slave dialectic. See also Mbembe (2003).

40. The painting is further discussed in Furth (1998) and Morgan (2007).

41. The scene's historical descriptions are characterized by representational extremes: Lucy Stone's sentimental explication that "one child of hers was safe with the angels" (quoted in Reinhardt 2002, 103) is met by sensationalist representations of the scene: "Margaret Garner seized a butcher knife and turned upon her three
year-old daughter. With swift and terrible force she hacked at the child's throat. Again and again she struck until the child was almost decapitated" (see Yanuck 1953). The image seems to subscribe to the former genre.

42. My usage of the term here might be controversial, since Mbembe devises the term explicitly to describe the lethal underside of Western knowledge production on “legitimate forms of life” (i.e., biopolitics): the mass production of what Orlando Patterson calls “social death” in the regimes of slavery and colonialism. The regimes of slave- and colonial subjection are biopolitically infused in that they enact and enforce biopolitical differentiation through racism, but to produce forms of “death-in-life,” as Mbembe calls it: “Slavery . . . could be considered one of the first instances of biopolitical experimentation. . . . in the context of the plantation, the humanity of the slave appears as the perfect figure of a shadow. Indeed, the slave condition results from a triple loss: loss of a ‘home,’ loss of rights over his or her body, and loss of political status. This triple loss is identical with absolute domination, natal alienation, and social death (expulsion from humanity altogether). . . . As an instrument of labor, the slave has a price. As a property, he or she has a value. His or her labor is needed and used. The slave is therefore kept alive but in a state of injury. . . . Slave life, in many ways, is a form of death-in-life” (2003, 21). In this view, slavery itself is characterized by necropolitics as it produces only further forms of “death-in-life,” even through biopolitical technologies such as the “breeding” of slaves. The representation of Garner’s actions, however, invests her with a sort of personalized necropolitics that disrupts slavery precisely at the junction of bio- and necropolitical mechanism; at the moment of coercion to reproduce slave bodies, Garner produces “life-for-death.” This seeming investment of Garner by abolitionists (white and black) with a certain amount of sovereignty is fundamentally ambivalent and needs to be viewed together with other representations of African American motherhood in relation to futurity.

43. Notably, Morrison’s novel fuses both topoi explicitly by her description of the “milk theft” Sethe endures—an act enfolding maternal, female, bodily, and sexual violation into one monstrous scene.

44. While this phrasing owes to Lauren Berlant’s discussion of Harriet Jacobs’s Incidents, her argument shows that the discourse in Jacobs, which foregrounds issues of sexual violation and “sexual citizenship,” is rather different (1997, 228–36). For an extensive critique of Berlant’s argument, see Foreman (2002). As I want to argue, the same aspects are contained in Garner’s case, but are visually disarticulated. See also Wolff’s comparative discussion of the figuration of the black mother in Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin and the Margaret Garner story (1991).

45. While an adequate discussion of Morrison’s novel, and Jonathan Demme’s film adaptation (1998), is beyond the historical scope of my project, I’d like to note that both texts devise Sethe as not of mixed-race origin. To my knowledge, the implications of this crucial deviation from the original Garner story have not yet been acknowledged in critical scholarship.

46. Mary Niall Mitchell’s article (2002) discusses the images and Beecher’s extensive touring with FANNY, and contends that not even the blackness of the girl can be confirmed, much less her status as a “former slave.” The most extensive collection of FANNY pictures can be found at the Library of Congress, Photographs and Prints Division.
47. Miscegenation was regarded as producing “racially inferior” children, as is reflected in a Georgia Supreme Court declaration from 1869: “[T]he amalgamation of the races is not only unnatural, but is always productive of deplorable results, the offspring of these unnatural connections are generally sickly and effeminate, and they are inferior in physical development and strength, to the full-blood of either race” (in Foreman 2002, 536). This view persisted well into the twentieth century.

48. As Foreman notes, almost all of the protagonists in the fiction penned by black women from Our Nig (1859) through Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937) are light-skinned. According to her article, Lutie Johnson in The Street (1946) is the first dark-skinned protagonist in African American women’s novels (Foreman 2002, 535).

49. In certain ways, the pathology ascribed to African American families in the Moynihan Report of 1965 is prefigured by this. See Hortense Spillers’s crucial discussion on the report, which informs many of my arguments (1987).

50. In my view, several scholars have moved in the direction of understanding “pain” as a violent act of “deconstructing humanity” that does dehumanizing “work” within subjugating, enslaving, and colonizing regimes: see, e.g., Mbembe’s concept of “Necropolitics” (2003); Hartman’s work on subjection (1997); or Castronovo’s work on the politics of slave suicide (2000).

CHAPTER FIVE. LATE MODERN PAIN

1. Barack Obama’s affective politics were articulated in his widely received speech on race, A more perfect Union, during the 2008 presidential race. In his controversy with Jeremiah Wright, he accused the reverend of speaking about racial injury “as if our society was static, as if no progress had been made, as if this country . . . is still irrevocably bound to a tragic past”—the unchanging pain and trauma of American slavery. Obama distinguished his politics from Wright’s by calling for a collective overcoming of America’s “racial pain”: a collective, sympathetic working-through, which articulated pain and compassion as sources of change, affirmation, and good politics. Barack Obama also has the most entries in the “Empathy Group’s” online database of political texts that talk about “empathy” (http://www.humanityquest.com/Projects/ProgressiveValues).

2. Braidotti made this statement in her keynote at the sixth European Gender Research Conference at the University of Łódź in 2006. Her underlying theoretical point about an “affirmative ethics” is elaborated in several articles (2006, 2009), which argue for a theory of ethics that takes pain as its central problem and regards it as always experienced in difference, in and through circumstances of social injustice and oppression. Her theory calls for an acknowledgment of marginal subject positions and their experiences of pain and trauma. Similar to feminist standpoint theory, Braidotti formulates the pain of dispossession, loss, and injustice as a privileged epistemological position. For her, ethics itself emerges by “working through” the painful experience of marginalization and loss: “Migrants, exiles, refugees have first-hand experience of the extent to which processes of disidentification from familiar identities is linked to the pain of loss and uprooting. Diasporic subjects of all kinds express the same sense of wound. . . . The qualitative leap through pain, across the mournful landscapes of nostalgic yearning, is the gesture of active
creation of affirmative ways of belonging” (2006, 243). Marginal subjects, in their “existential” need to transform loss and hurt into identities, are predestined to enact Braidotti’s affirmative ethics: “Paradoxically, it is those who have already cracked up a bit, those who have suffered pain and injury, who are better placed to take the lead in the process of ethical transformation. Their ‘better quality’ consists not in the fact of having been wounded, but of having gone through the pain” (2009, 53). Her idea of affirmation thus aims at a dynamization of “all affects, even those that freeze us in pain, horror, or mourning. Affirmative ethics put the motion back in e-motion and the active back into activism” (2006, 248). Braidotti’s sloganism here exhibits the primary distinction that the trope of pain enables her to establish: that between stasis and motion, negativity and affirmation. As long as one’s pain is not worked through and overcome, one remains, as Braidotti stresses, caught in the negativity of “a rigid, eternal present tense” and “the stultifying effects of passivity, brought about by pain” (2006, 248). Braidotti further identifies this negativity as the basis for most contemporary discourses on identity and subjectivity, which she sees as part of a concerted “politics of melancholia” (2009, 58) focusing primarily on the negativity of experience. To my mind, this affirmative ethics based on pain as a common denominator eradicates important differences in discrimination, experience, and politics in marginalized groups groups, Braidotti not only posits a common pain as motivation or indeed benchmark of being a member of these marginalized groups, but also constitutes the abandoning—“moving beyond”—of that (always specific, always personal) pain as the index of having become political. She thus formulates a homogenizing program of what it means to become ethical, and what critical identity politics and critical theory should do.

3. Legal scholar Lynne Hendersen for example has argued that the canonical minority decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court have decisively revolved around the question of pain. In her reading of Brown v Board of Education she finds frequent “narratives of the painful experience of being black in American society” (1987, 1596), which for her attests to the compassionate nature of the decision, an emotional jurisdiction: “Legality . . . has clashed with empathy, and empathy has transformed legality” (1594).

4. Since the proliferation of the neurosciences in the late twentieth century, a host of scientific publications have argued and popularized the gendered and racialized meanings of the brain. From studies such as Baron-Cohen’s research into the “empathy capacities” of male and female brains (2003), or the location of “evil” in neural terms (2011), to investigations into how regarding the pain of others affects pain sensations (thus sympathy) in the obver's brain (Freedberg and Gallese 2007), or research on how racial difference impacts on feeling of empathy (Avenanti et al. 2010; Eberhardt 2005), these scientific discourse recapitulate many of the objectifying and biologizing knowledge productions I have analyzed in my historical chapters on the nineteenth century.

5. My analysis of this mechanism of “deracialization” owes to Ellen Feder’s lucid article on the deployment of the trope of “family” in contemporary scientific research on violent behavior in inner city areas. Tracing how scientific discourse on the causes of violent behavior in the 1990s switches from sociological circumscriptions of the “black welfare mother” to biochemical research carried out in the field of
primatology, Feder argues that “the [scientific] investigation into the causes of violence has shifted the focus from behaviors with roots in the racist legacy of slavery that accordingly require social remedies [e.g., the Moynihan Report] to behaviors purportedly caused by such ‘natural’ factors as deficient levels of serotonin, genetic flaws, bad mothering, and other possible matters of ‘heritability.’ While ‘the mother’ remains a potent figure in this latter discourse, she is not the mother we find in the ‘Moynihan Report’” (2007, 73). This descriptive transformation enacts what Feder calls the “deracialization” of the racializing discourse on violence, which now elaborates on “the serotonin levels of monkeys [and] what kind of mothers they had and what their genetic heritage was” (67), while retaining the (now also biochemically) failing black motherhood as the “background-body” (67), on which the racial meanings and hereditary status of social deviance are inscribed.

6. Bush’s prescription of national trauma, as Donald Pease has consistently argued in his article “The Global Homeland State: Bush’s Biopolitical Settlement” (2003), enabled the symbolic transformation of U.S. mythologies such as Virgin Land (never attacked before) into the military and political states of exception denoted by the Homeland, in need of state protection. These national topoi are, in presidential rhetoric and politics, saturated with racialized and biopolitical meanings, as Pease argues.

7. Obama’s effort to understand the phenomenon of terrorism in late capitalism as a product of poverty, lack of education, and thus as a suitable object for American compassion and empathy, recalls nineteenth-century discourses about the insensitivity of underclass bodies, which medical historian Donald Caton has described: “Ignorance, hard physical labor, and bad living conditions, on the other hand, made people less sensitive to their own pain and less sympathetic to the pain of others” (1999, 118–19). As chapter 3 argued, this exclusion of lower-class bodies from sympathy and compassion was fundamentally complicit with biologizing and racializing discourses that funneled into the eugenics movement, by which America organized the nation’s biopolitical definition in the light of abolition, immigration, industrialization, and the threat of racial mixing. In this view, Obama’s statement that the particular lack of feeling in terrorist bodies cannot be traced back to ethnic or cultural differences proves at least historically wrong, as bodily sensitivity and sympathetic authority crucially served American culture to produce racially significant bodies.

8. Notably, Mbembe reflects here on the logistics of the suicide bombings in Palestine which for him, as he stresses, exemplify a reaction to colonized/occupied existence: “To live under late modern occupation is to experience a permanent condition of ‘being in pain’” (2003, 38). Whether his analysis is transposable to the context of the 9/11 attacks on America is a question beyond the scope and intention of my argument.

9. “Madness” also recurs in Mbembe’s argument, however, to describe the conditions of living under colonial rule (39). The term in Obama’s usage denotes a collapse of rational politics, an unassimilable instance of politicized performance. “Madness” also prominently figured in the spectacular dramatization of Western heroic sacrifice, Zack Snyder’s feature film 300 (2006), which represented the Greek armies withstanding Xerxes I’s invasion of Greece at the historic battle of
Thermopylae (480 BC). The film’s strangely exposed political metaphor for the war on terror however trumps the “madness” of American heroic sacrifice in the face of overwhelming “Persian armies” assailing Western civilization by exchanging loss of rationality with an assertion of national/militaristic/racial identity. King Leonidas of Sparta’s (Gerard Butler) most recognizable and most popularized line is: “This is madness? THIS IS SPARTA!” The phrase has since then become a popular cultural marker for masculinist resolve beyond the terms of political correctness; a search for “This is Sparta” on YouTube returns no fewer than 12,000 videos, associating the phrase with everything from hitting children to George W. Bush or soccer star Zinedine Zidane’s infamous headbutt.

10. Not at all surprisingly, this preoccupation with the “inhuman” and the “invulnerable” has also inspired a resurgence of zombie films and novels (from the various remakes and retakes of George Romero’s of the Dead series to Zombieland (2009), or Max Brooks’s highly successful novel World War Z) and—on a more highbrow note—inspired such masculinist meditations on existentialism and human cruelty/dignity as The Road (2010), The Book of Eli (2010), and the Oscar-decorated No Country for Old Men (2007). Mark Seltzer diagnoses a similar obsession of sentimental society with the inhuman in his book on serial killers, which emerge in what he calls American “wound culture” (Seltzer 1998).

11. As an index of the proliferation of cultural texts dealing with torture, a look at the cinematic productions of the past decade may suffice: the Internet Movie Database lists more than one thousand movies and TV productions of the last ten years that are tagged with the plot-keyword torture.

12. Arguably, Mel Gibson’s The Passion of the Christ (2004) should be included in this category, because physical torture is its primary means of narration. On the rise of the torture drama in mainstream cinema, see also the recent dissertation by Maja Bächler (2011). See also McClintock’s discussion of “torture porn” in the context of the Abu Ghraib pictures (McClintock 2009).

13. The Saw series and the figure of the Joker in Dark Knight are prime examples: both villains excel in concocting scenarios in which the sentimental principles of democracy are challenged, e.g., by prompting people the choice of either killing or being killed.

14. For a review of this controversially discussed movie, see Alford (2010). Critics are generally divided over the film’s quality or political effectiveness, but it won the 2010 Direct-to-DVD Award for Best Film. That the movie never reached cinematic distribution may be attributed to the overly “controversial” intention of negotiating the sensitive issue of torture, but there has been no statement by the production team on this.

15. Mohammed/Younger’s demands to the American government are a liberal patriot’s dream, since his message essentially consists in a revision of American foreign policies: to stop financial support for “puppet regimes” across the globe and to withdraw all American troops from Muslim countries. Mohammed/Younger: “I know you want to bring our men and women home to the nation we love. Thank you. And may Allah bless America.” I will not extend on the quagmire of political intentions or implications assembled in Unthinkable.
16. This ending, which evokes the presence of a fourth bomb and thus imminent catastrophe, was cut from the DVD version of Unthinkable, which concludes with the image of Brody and terrorist’s children. The bomb scene, however, is present in the “leaked” version of the film, which appeared on the Internet several months before its release.

17. Notably, H is presented as an “unfree” character throughout the movie: his obviously long career as torture specialist and the American military’s “secret weapon” has earned him a life of constant protection and surveillance. In this view, the black subject by virtue of its expertise in pain and dehumanization, remains connected to slavery not only in its terms of its never fully achieved affective humanity (in need of white protection), but also through the restrictive measures white society has to employ to protect itself from its ethical vacuity.

18. Crucially, the figure of the “inhuman black man” serves in the movie to fictionally racialize and legitimate a “limitlessness” of torture that seems to be standard military procedure. Anne McClintock cites the memories of American torturer Tony Lagouranis who was stationed in Iraq: “The prisoner will not break unless he believes the potential for escalation is endless and the only way to convince him of that is to be the embodiment of evil. For a truly evil person, the rules of civilization do not apply, and any course of action is possible. The prisoner who faces an evil captor is transported to a totally alien world that makes no sense and that he finds impossible to fathom. This is where true terror and panic set in” (2009, 72–73).


20. Brody is also presented as a “career woman,” which H amusedly points out as he peruses her file: “I see why they picked you. . . . No boyfriends, no children. [Reads] ‘Chose a career over family.’ You watch that, they might think you’re a lesbian.” Brody’s “overethical” stance therefore is also linked, very much like the nineteenth-century verdict of “overcivilization,” to improper sexual and reproductive behavior. I will not expand on the issue of sexuality; it may suffice to say that the film’s ending finally transports the homosexualized career woman toward motherhood, as Brody symbolically adopts the white terrorist’s kids.

21. H and Rena in this view constitute a further iteration of the pathological “black’ family incapable of racial integrity,” the analysis found in the last chapter (see also Feder 2007, 72). In a similar vein, Rena’s trauma legitimizes H’s violence as Mohammds/Younger’s fundamentalist fanaticism is outsourced to his Arab wife Jehan.

22. In this respect, Unthinkable’s claim to the figuration of the terrorist is crucially different from Mbembe’s above-cited description of the suicide bomber, who negates the body’s value in order to transpire death. Mohammed/Younger, though enabled by the popular association of terrorist subjectivity with inhumanity and invulnerability, is precisely the most valuable body, because its sacrificial heroism reinstates the sentimental and racial order of the nation.

23. I subscribe to Elaine Scarry’s discussion, wherein torture’s effects are the precise opposite of humanization (1985, ch. 1).

24. This phrasing owes to a rather problematic (and rarely quoted) passage by Agamben on the writings of the Marquis de Sade. In Homo Sacer, Agamben considers “bare life” in sexualized terms and devises a political conceptualization of
sexual practice: “The growing importance of Sadomasochism in modernity has its roots in the exchange [of political life with bare life]. Sadomasochism is precisely the technique of sexuality by which the bare life of a sexual partner is brought to light” (1998, 134). While Agamben’s notion seems to me fully inappropriate as a description of S/M—see, e.g., Taylor and Ussher’s (2001) qualitative research about whether people actually experience themselves or each other as “bios/bare life/homo sacer” in “sadomasochist” practice—his problematic equation of sadomasochism and torture resonates with many cultural critics that have commented on the atrocious practices that have visually surfaced from the Abu Ghraib Prison. As Anne McClintock critically summarizes, numerous critics have analyzed the pictures of torture as being inspired by a pervasive and dangerous culture of “S&M pornography,” which has undermined American culture: “Pornography, S/M, gays, women in the military, feminists, dominatrices, and drugs were all named as culprits . . . tragically complicit in this regard, however, were critics in the liberal middle—Slavoj Zizek, Arthur Danto, Katherine Viner, Rochelle Gurstein, Maureen Dowd, and even Susan Sontag, to mention only a few—who likewise argued that it was pornography and the culture of S/M that made the guards do it. Even as sophisticated a reader of images as Sontag, for one, saw the relation between porn and torture as one of explicit causality and mimetic iteration. . . . Zizek argued that the abuses were incited by a culture of gay S/M going back to Mapplethorpe” (McClintock 2009, 61). The frequent intermixing of discourses on terrorism with homophobic, anti‑queer, and heteronormative arguments is also argued by Puar and Rai (2002).

These simplifying and moralizing abjections of torture implicitly reiterate the crucial function of race and gender within any politics of pain. Rather than revealing the “bare life” and “true humanity” of the victim, or the “moral barbarity” and “sexual deviancy” of the torturer, a politics of pain always works through race and gender and affirms the corporeal reach of these categories. On the topic of the torture pictures of Abu Ghraib, the various feminist contributors to McKelvey’s important anthology One of the Guys: Women as Aggressors and Torturers (2007) agree that violence, torture, and pain are always already racialized, gendered, and sexualized, i.e., torture is a material performance of these categories.

25. See also Lauren Berlant’s discussion of “infantile citizenship,” where she argues that within American popular culture there is “a strong and enduring belief that the best of U.S. national subjectivity can be read in its childlike manifestations” (1997, 25–51).

26. One could argue that the deployment of a white male Muslim also demonstrates a “deracializing” intention of the film.