

## **Fragment of “Reverse Monstrolology”:**

Tracing a route that departs from Edouard Glissant (1990) elaboration on the right to opacity, Sadiya Hartman (1997), in a commentary on slave songs, advances and unfolds this idea by suggesting that such songs are more than a mirroring of the condition of enslaved people, they are an ambivalent form of inscription of the black experience in the plantation fields and, at the limit, a way of resisting the impositions of transparency and the degrading hyper-visibility of the enslaved body in this context. “The right to obscurity must be respected”, Hartman argues, “for the ‘accumulated hurt’, the ‘rasping whispers deep in the throat’, the wild notes and the screams lodged deep within confounds simple expression.”

The right to obscurity, in this sense, more than a right not to enunciate, configures itself as an affirmation of a particular mode of enunciation, which no longer obeys the cognitive politics of enlightenment, as it incorporates the very limit of mere expression in the form of an opaque or obscure language, which is profoundly crossed by an under-articulation which can better be understood as a strategy of articulation of the non-articulable. That is to say, that expression at the limit of expressiveness which Hartman identifies in the slave songs, more than registering the brutal regime of silencing staged by the domination of the slaves exposes an entirely other speech, one which cannot be heard or read – in the sense Spivak attributes to subaltern speech – in a transparent manner, given that it is the practice of an obscure language which is co-extensive with the right to opacity.

Fred Moten, in an interview entitled “Words Don’t Go There”, brings the concept of “the secret” to help think about this obscure language of the right to opacity:

This is a political imperative that infuses the unfinished project of emancipation as well as any number of other transitions or crossings in progress. It corresponds to the need for the fugitive, the immigrant and the new (and newly constrained) citizen to hold something in reserve, to keep a secret. The history of Afro-diasporic art, especially music, is, it seems to me, the history of the keeping of this secret even in the midst of its intensely public and highly commodified dissemination. These secrets are relayed and miscommunicated, misheard, and overheard, often all at once, in words and in the bending of words, in whispers and screams, in broken sentences, in the names of people you’ll never know.

Thus elaborated, the secret becomes much more than that which is simply not told. It becomes a particular way of telling, a broken and informal language, a movement of forces which upset simple expression and which are untranslatable from the point of view of any kind of transparency. How, then, to listen to these forces and adhere to them? How to frustrate this academic thirst for knowledge which becomes confused with power's thirst for transparency? How to enable a movement through the shadows, a movement which is not translated, and which expresses itself at the limit of expression? How to preserve and enable the potential of the monstrous secret of the monstrous lives which can be confused with my own?