

# THE INSTRUMENTALITY OF THE BLACK “OTHER” IN PRIMITIVIST MODERNISM: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF MODERN DANCE AND MODERNIST LANGUAGE

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## Abstract

*Blaming the logic-stricken culture of Western civilization for the bloodshed of World War I, the avant-garde artists of the early twentieth century set out on a quest for alternative cultures. The desire to find the redeeming life force eventually resulted in modernists' fascination with the long subalternized African culture. However, the black Other, represented as primitive and exotic, was no more than an instrument in the hands of primitivist modernists. This paper tries to analyze modern dance and modernist language as the two major spheres in which the instrumentality of the black Other is evident in the discourse of primitivist modernism.*

**Keywords:** Primitivism, Modernism, Instrumentality, the “Other”, World War I, Disillusionment

## 1. Introduction

The qualities that mark a subaltern group as deviant and in need of white control are labile (Brown, 1993: 664). In pre-twentieth century discourse of colonization and enslavement, blacks were mostly portrayed as minstrel buffoons, wicked brutes or angel-like creatures (Ellison, 1972: 26), all images that justified the sociopolitical misdeeds practiced against blacks and provided whites with “the comforting shock of unfavorable contrast to the social ‘realities’” (Redding, 1964: 66). All the same, these stereotypes were replaced, or better still, reinvented, in the modernist discourse of the early twentieth century through the image of the primitive, exotic and hedonistic black. In other words, the instrumentality of black stereotypes was not reduced to the negative representations; the positive myths about blacks also served Western self-definition (Keim, 2009: 11). According to James Snead, the mythification of the Other simply replaces history “with a surrogate ideology of [white] elevation or [Black] demotion along

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a scale of human value" (cited. in Yancy, 2005: 216). In effect, the exotic black became an object of fascination for white modernists who sought to unchain their consciousness from the constraints of the Victorian values of Western civilization; that is to say, black life and culture were estimated and appreciated just in terms of their utility in undermining the restrictive puritan conventions of early twentieth century (Moses, 1987: 64-66).

This paper first addresses the great impact of World War I, a watershed that gave many "the feeling of having lived in two eras, almost on two different planets" (Cowley, 1973: vii), on engendering a pervasive sense of disillusionment with Western civilization among the avant-garde intellectuals of the day, and thus their quest for alternative cultures, as a result of which the vogue of primitivist modernism gained momentum. This paper tries to demonstrate the instrumentality of the "Other" in the discourse of primitivist modernism through analyzing modern dance and modernist language in the early twentieth century.

## **2. World War I, Disillusionment and the Rise of Primitivist Modernism**

The storm has died away, and still we are restless, uneasy, as if the storm were about to break. Almost all the affairs of men remain in a terrible uncertainty. We think of what has disappeared, and we are almost destroyed by what has been destroyed; we do not know what will be born, and we fear the future ... Doubt and disorder are in us and with us. There is no thinking man, however shrewd or learned he may be, who can hope to dominate this anxiety, to escape from this impression of darkness. (Paul Valéry, cited in Spielvogel, 2009: 831)

Perceptions of war throughout history and in different civilizations have for the most part been centered on two opposite sets of images: the first speculated war as an uplifting and heroic experience; the second posited war as a site of destruction and grief. Thus, the dichotomy in the depiction of war either as an opportunity for mankind to show its nobility and/or as an occasion for human savagery to come to the fore is profoundly implanted in different cultures and civilizations (Bartov, 2000: 10). In a similar manner, the same extreme reactions were repeated before, during and after World War I. In its early stages, many Western intellectuals considered World War I to be invigorating, ennobling and purifying, and believed that it was the natural pursuit of all men and nations (Pinker,

2003: 148). The eagerness with which its outbreak was welcomed in the major competitive nations was compounded with a wave of youthful volunteerism, all-encompassing industrial mobilization, intellectual and academic propagandistic activities, and political consensus to convert war into a noble and edifying experience (Bartov, 2000: 10).

However, to use the German Expressionist George Grosz's words, "after a few years when everything bogged down... when everything went to pieces, all that remained ... were disgust and horror" (cited in Spielvogel, 2009: 832). The war cost approximately ten million lives; twenty million were crippled or severely injured, nine million children orphaned, five million women widowed, and ten million individuals dislocated from their homelands to become refugees (Heyman, 1997: 114). There were also numerous traumatically scarred soldiers of the war who were forced to live in the complex network of trenches and dugouts with its discomfiting constant din of gunfire, the stench of decomposing bodies, and the ever present menace of a gas attack (Allen et al., 2003: 8).

World War I was Europe's first industrial war and drew together the power of industry and science as never before. Between 1914 and 1918, governments appealed to their scientists and inventors for new discoveries and to their manufactures for new acts of production (Heyman, 1997: 124). World War I witnessed the application to warfare of the telephone, barbed wire, air travel, safety apparatus like the guidance and control gyroscope, and even mustard gas (Dawes, 2002: 73). Among many people, the unwholesome experiences of the war created a kind of technoskepticism which finally resulted in the belief that human beings were bloodthirsty and impetuous animals incapable of originating a sane and rational world (Spielvogel, 2009: 829). Consequently, foundational epistemological borders (like the distinction between the morally sanctioned and the morally forbidden), the dominant Spencerian-Hegelian notion of teleological evolution and the concepts of national purpose, history, identity and human will were all deemed in the post-war atmosphere as tenuous sociopolitical constructs, a widespread attitude that finally gave birth to a radical uncertainty and a crisis of confidence in Western civilization (Dawes, 2002: 131; Baker, 1987: 86).

The Great War was marked by a kind of prevalent, collective and irremediable shell-shock which affected not only soldiers but also the artists of the day, and on that account, the world of art and intellect

underwent a drastic metamorphosis. Prewar artistic trends, such as abstract painting or the interest in the absurd and the unconscious substance of the mind, which had then been the preserve of a small group of avant-garde artists and often frustrated the expectations and conventions of plebeians, became more widely diffused in the 1920s and 1930s as they seemed more fitting after the bloodcurdling experiences of war battlegrounds (Spielvogel, 2009: 831). As an aftermath of war, the assumed supremacy of the racist, sexist, wealthy Anglo-Saxon males collapsed and a sense of inevitable doom, of being wounded, of living in an unsafe irrational world wormed its way into the circles of avant-garde artists and intellectuals (Baker, 1987: 86). With the recognition that “the Europe of earlier centuries was broken, possibly beyond repair” (Raymond Sontag, qtd. in Heyman, 1997: 123), there appeared a tendency among artistic movements to discuss the inanity of human existence, as in Dadaism, or initiate a quest for reality beyond the material and tangible world, as in Surrealism and Symbolism (Spielvogel, 2009: 832); in other words, post-World War I writers, disaffected and disgruntled, headed for human subconsciousness and also for the primitive origins of mankind in an attempt to arrive at a cure-all for the malaise of the modern man (Baker, 1987: 86). Primitivist Modernism began to gain momentum in such an atmosphere.

## **2.2. Primitivist Modernism**

Other regions give us back what our culture has excluded from its discourse (Michel de Certeau, cited in Sweeney, 2004: 1).

After World War I, the promises of Enlightenment human rationality and the idea of history as moving towards progress were committed to the earth with the young soldiers who had died in the trenches. One significant result of the increasing disenchantment with Western civilization was a primitivist vogue which appeared primarily among writers and artists in Europe. Maintaining that emotional and sexual freedom, believed to constitute the essence of human happiness, existed only among primitive peoples; a number of European avant-garde writers and artists of the day went for those groups who had presumably avoided the corruptive effects of civilization. South Sea Islanders, American Indians, bullfighters, culprits,

and even the insane were considered to be leading a natural life and so were attributed with a primitive identity. However, it was black Africa, the formerly notorious and frightening Dark Continent, which appeared as the typical symbol of primitive life. The primitivist modernist vogue began in Europe with the alleged discovery of “primitive” African paintings and sculptures by French artists, as a result of which many painters (such as Picasso, Derian, Matisse and Vlanick), composers (including Satie, Honneger, Milhaud and Poulenc) and writers (like Apollinaire, Cocteau, Jacob and Cendars) were inspired by primitive Negro art (Washington, 2001: 32).

The depiction of Western culture as spiritually lacking and dominated by an unproductive consumerist capitalism and the representation of modern urban life as dilapidated, unoriginal, and devoid of exuberance was a common theme in European cultural settings in the early twentieth century and especially in the years immediately following World War I (Sweeney, 2004: 1). Rejecting the repressive ambiance of their homelands and trying to break from their parochial culture, many modernist intellectuals and artists such as Guillaume Apollinaire, Filippo Marinetti, James Joyce, Gertrude Stein and Pablo Picasso underwent a self-imposed expatriation, a phenomenon that gained momentum after World War I with the morally and spiritually confounded Lost Generation moving to Paris in their search for a richer literary and artistic milieu and a more liberated way of life (Burt, 1998: 17; Cuddon, 1999: 479). To all these artists, the metropolis was the embodiment of modernity; nevertheless, living in it was an alienating experience with the sense of living in exile and of being an immigrant in an unknown foreign environment, a feeling of discomfiture which was indispensable to the development of the new formal and artistic idioms of modernism (Burt, 1998: 18). And out of such a climate grew primitivism which came along with a condition of exile, as the exile desperately casts about man’s primeval past for another spiritual abode (North, 1998: 32).

Up to that time, black culture was shown by colonialist discourse to be demonic, backwards and without any kind of cultural presence. At the turn of the century and under the influence of Freudian psychology, the concept of the violently repressed id which symbolized the natural state of humanity unaffected by civilizing forces was combined with the recurrent trope of the nineteenth century Africanist writing which

depicted primitive blacks as debased and irredeemable (Sweeney, 2004: 15). To the turn of the century writers, the Freudian id contained all the Dionysic energies repressed in order to build up a civilized facade; this signified that the primitive existed in us, and if not allowed expression, it could change into the negative impulses of annihilation (Sweeney, 2004: 28).

The trope of the malevolent primitive was best depicted in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) whose barbaric wild-eyed Africans inhabited the "black and incomprehensible frenzy" of the Congo (Conrad, 2009: 42). Relating the supernatural vice with the African wilderness, the novel portrayed Africa as "a place of negations ... in comparison with which Europe's own state of spiritual grace will be manifest" (Chinua Achebe, cited in Watts, 1996: 53). Throughout the novel, Africans were dehumanized and demeaned, represented either as grotesque figures or a howling mob; they were robbed of voice, or were granted voice only to denounce themselves out of their own mouths. In fact, the novel presented Africa as a "setting and backdrop which eliminates the African as human factor" (Chinua Achebe, cited in Watts, 1996: 53). Partaking of dark romanticism and the Nietzschean philosophy (Lemke, 1998: 25), Africa was portrayed to be dark, menacing and unfathomable, a space in which one could pursue everything that was tabooed and censored by Western civilization (Fortunati and Franceschi, 2007: 662).

Though in Conradian primitivism, Africanness was placed in a completely negative oppositional relationship to Western identity and symbolized the irrational, the spontaneous and even death, the desire to leave civilization and its discontents goaded the exhausted Westerner to set out on journeys into the African jungle, the Other inhabitants of which helped him or her (Kurtz in the case of *Heart of Darkness*) to escape from the tedious, mechanical rationalism of the Western civilization (Lemke, 1998: 28). In fact, the quest for identity necessarily passed through the definition of the Other; the primitive was a kind of mirror to come to a better understanding of the Westerner's identity, a site upon which he could project his needs and fears (Fortunati and Franceschi, 2007: 662).

However, although the 'negative' portrait of blacks was transformed into an apparently 'positive' representation in the modernist primitivism of the post-World War I era, the instrumentality of the black Other was still the cornerstone of 1920s primitivism. Here, we will address the

influence of primitivist modernism on the formation of modern dance and the mongrelization of modernist language, and will later discuss the critiques of the primitivist modernist vogue in the concluding section.

### **2.3. Modern Dance**

To have one's dark body invaded by the white gaze and then to have that body returned as distorted is a powerful experience of violation. The experience presupposes an anti-Black lived context, a context within which whiteness gets reproduced and the white body as norm is reinscribed (Yancy, 2005: 217).

In line with the spirit of the age, modern dance was employed by the younger generation of the West as a tool in getting away from the Victorian customs of the nineteenth century societies and their stale cultural conservatism. Representing the deconstructive inclination of modern consciousness, modern dance intentionally eschewed the employment of traditional aesthetic conventions. With its visceral characteristics, modern dance deliberately emphasized the affective power of the body in order to pose a challenge to the Judaeo-Christian value system which generally marginalized and neglected the body (Burt, 1998: 5). In order to materialize the program to frustrate bourgeois expectations, modern dance moved toward the primitive dances which, according to Freudian principles, were deemed to manifest the childlike, simple, and innocent nature of the savage (Burt, 1998: 138; Kraut, 2003: 435); and so there emerged a vogue for the Negro "danse sauvage" and the black body which represented not only a reservoir of ancient history but also a layout for a prospective future (Lemke, 1998: 8; Sweeney, 2004: 5). This new consciousness reasoned that while Europeans could only dance with their minds, Negroes danced with their passionate senses and that was why European civilization was in dire need of Negroes whose blood could recultivate the "long-since dried-up land that can scarcely breathe" (Ivan Goll, cited in Lemke, 1998: 95). Overnight, the West was infatuated with Negro jazz music and dance, and out of this craze emerged the animal dances (e.g., turkey trot, fox trot, bear hug, bunny hop, etc.), Charleston and Black Bottom, which were mostly performed in down-and-out cabarets (Barros, 1999: 308).

The most notable example of the Europeans' immense infatuation with the black female body and dance was *La Revue Nègre* at the Theatre des Champs-Elysees in 1925 which staged the primitive dance of the African-American Josephine Baker (1906-75). Up to that time, the chief presentation of the black female body as a sexual objectified commodity was that of the "Hottentot Venus" which primarily referred to an African woman known as Saartje Baartman. For ten years, this woman was put to exhibition at street fairs and dances all over France. Her physiognomy itself was regarded as a curio and intrigued many visitors who were attracted to her hair, buttocks, and breasts. When she died in 1815 at the age of twenty five in Paris, she became an object of immense scientific interest. After the performance of an autopsy, several treatises studied her physiognomy and pathologized her extended buttocks, large labia, and bulky pelvis as anatomical anomalies. Consequently, at the end of the nineteenth century most Europeans viewed black female sexuality as repulsive and degenerate (Lemke, 1998: 100-101; Burt, 1998: 63). However, with the advent of modernism and its unconventional stance, the Victorian ethos of the late nineteenth century drastically changed and this time, the black body was to serve a different function.

In the first act of *La Revue Nègre*, Josephine Baker crawled onto the stage on all fours. Then, she bent over and recited the following nonsense syllables: "Boodle am, Boodle am Boodle am now. Skoodle am, Skoodle am Skoodle am now" (cited in Lemke, 1998: 96). In the final act, called "Charleston Cabaret", Baker was brought to the stage on the shoulders of a sturdy black man, Joe Alex. Both of them were sparsely dressed, their bodies embellished with pearls and feathers. After a while, she bent toward the back, with her head down and her feet up, and exposed her naked breasts to the audience. As Baker started her dance, a pink feather between her thighs began to move, and immediately, her steps grew wilder. These seemingly unrestrained, spontaneous, and violent movements fascinated her audience who acclaimed her "danse sauvage" with a hysterical standing ovation. Very quickly, nineteen-year-old Josephine Baker became a celebrity. The Parisian audience were enamored with this provocative young girl from St. Louis and many of them returned to see her dance five or six times. Because of the show's remarkable success, *La Revue Nègre* went on for ten weeks at the Theatre des Champs-Elysees, and for the most part it was sold out (Lemke, 1998: 96).

During those years, when the Europeans' aspiration to eradicate the moral concepts of the previous generation had reached its culmination, the exhibition of black female sexuality on stage was an outlet through which many spectators attempted to counteract the inherited social and religious conventions toward sexuality. Indeed, Baker's black body was viewed as a catalyst that could stir up the exhausted European spectators from the morbid lassitude and teach them, in the words of a review published in *Volonte* in 1929, "the secret that would impede them from dying from the weight of civilization" (cited in Lemke, 1998: 101). In other words, Baker's primitive dance was considered to be the messiah and the saving grace of Western civilization, and was employed as a spiritual weapon to contend any sense of lethargy and to soothe mundane worries (Lemke, 1998: 100; Burt, 1998: 51).

In sum, the popularity of Baker and her dance illustrated the instrumentality of the primitivist vogue which pandered to the Western colonialist fantasies of the exotic: with a jungle décor in the background, Josephine Baker, dressed in a skirt of bananas, crept on the floor, walked on all fours, and shook her ebony body in tempting ways before coming back to one of her favorite postures, i.e., knees bent and back extended, after which she would crisscross her eyes and smile coquettishly at the audience. Bringing herself to cater to the repressed fantasies of the Westerners and become exactly what they wanted, she placed the eruption of sexual energy at the core of her appeal and made Parisian spectators voyeurs who desired Baker's black body (Lemke, 1998: 96-97). As Crispin Sartwell put it, "the [white] oppressor seeks to constrain the oppressed [Blacks] to certain approved modes of visibility (those set out in the template of stereotype) and then gaze obsessively on the spectacle he has created" (cited in Yancy, 2005: 217).

#### **2.4. Modernist Language**

Words have been used too often; touched and turned, and left exposed to the dust of the street. The words we seek hang close to the tree (Virginia Woolf, cited in Dawes, 2002: 76).

Linguistic imitation and racial masquerade are so important to transatlantic modernism because they allow the writer to play at self-fashioning (North, 1998: 11).

In the early twentieth century, it had been tacitly established that a white man had to act black in order to become modern (Locke, cited in Gates, 1997: 4; North, 1998: 66). This concept was literally materialized by many modernist writers, especially in America, when they passed for black in different situations. This racial masquerade gradually worked its way into the sphere of language and created a vogue of racial ventriloquism. There are many accounts of white modernists' fascination with the so-called "mesmeric" quality of black dialect. In 1923, Sherwood Anderson wrote to Jean Toomer about listening to some black longshoremen sing, and described how he craved for their voice while at the same time he was held back from talking to them by an inscrutable reluctance. Likewise, the heroine of *HERMOINE*, Hilda Doolittle's autobiographical novel written in 1927, sensed a similar kind of vocal magnetism in the speech of her family's black cook. Moreover, Wallace Stevens signed himself "Sambo" while corresponding with his fiancée; T. S. Eliot signed himself "Tar Baby" when he was in London; Gertrude Stein randomly utilized "dey" and "dem", and Ezra Pound called Eliot "de Possum" and employed what he considered to be black dialect in his letters (North, 1998: 8-9).

However, this linguistic imitation should be analyzed and interpreted in the light of the demands for linguistic standardization which had been put forward from the earliest days of printing. The call for "language loyalty" was intensified with the publication of the OED in the 1880s which stirred a fad for the criticism of linguistic faults. The belief that language was a precious thing to which one must remain faithful was a generalized application of Romantic philology, under the influence of which language became the foundation of national identity and an indication of cultural health. With the increasing urbanization and mass emigration of the industrialization era, all kinds of languages, dialects and idiolects, formerly segregated by space and social distinction, were brought together. The influx of linguistic criticism was in fact an effort to assort these competitive languages and rank them in the order of prestige, an agenda that stigmatized dialect and thus excluded dialect words from the entries of the OED. This exclusionary attitude was more forceful regarding Black English which was deemed not only aberrant and corrupt but also the source of corruption (North, 1998: 12-21).

All the same, this strict view of the inviolability of the standard language underwent a drastic change in the early twentieth century and many

researchers and intellectuals of the day, such as Franz Boas and Bronislaw Mallinowski, rejected the alleged superiority of one specific language. As already discussed, the advent of modernism was concomitant with a fascination with the black Other. Richard Huelsenbeck's dada manifesto, *The New Man* (1917), described the disgruntled modernist writers as "saturated, stuffed full to the point of disgust with the experience of all outcasts, the dehumanized beings of Europe, the Africans, the Polynesians, all kinds" (cited in North, 1998: 29); in other words, Africans and Polynesians came to represent all outcasts, and so did their languages, which, in the eyes of the avant-garde writers of the day, enjoyed an extralinguistic power of expression in which syntax and semantics were avoided in favor of a direct, unmediated representation of the senses; and that was exactly what "*the New Man*" desired (Sweeney, 2004: 24).

To cite an example, Huelsenbeck himself was reported to have cited some of his own Negro poems at the Cabaret Voltaire. These poems were among the numerous "chants nègres" read at the Cabaret Voltaire where the pastime also included Huelsenbeck's drumming and the exhibition of "African" masks by Marcel Janco. Dadaist poetry at that time largely hinged on what can be called "pseudo-African" languages which were composed of nonsense syllables like "umba umba", "mee low folla", "fango fango" and "mee too buggi", all without any kind of signification (North, 1998: 30-31). At its extreme, Dadaist poetry even overstepped nonsense syllables and used the very letter itself, as in Huelsenbeck's *Chorus Sanctus* (1916):

aao a ei iii oii  
ou ou o ou ou e ie a ai  
ha dzk drr br obu br bouss bourn  
ha haha hi hi hi l i l l i li leiome. (cited in Sweeney, 2004: 23)

This pattern of rebellion and defiance through racial ventriloquism was more evident in the cultural and literary scene of early twentieth century United States in which the clash between linguistic authoritarianism and American dialects was in fact a conflict between oppression and liberty (North, 1998: 26). For long, the American Academy had related immigration with linguistic decline and denounced modernists' linguistic experimentation as another form of mongrelization which was "against virtue and decorum and... against the grammar and idiom of English

speech” (Stuart Sherman, Cited in North, 1998: 27). However, to the younger generation of writers who aimed to mix English with several other tongues and dialects in order to depict the complicated states of mind and the multi-layeredness of emotional responses (Adams, 1978: 28), the black dialect was in effect an instrument of rebellion not only against smothering linguistic authoritarianism but also against all kinds of tyranny and standardization. Put simply, the generational conflict between the older critics of the American Academy and the younger iconoclastic writers was fought over the body of the black Other (North, 1998: 27; Lemke, 1998: 11-12).

In short, dialect played an equivocal role in the 1920s. As “broken English”, dialect was the inverse without which “pure English” could not be alive; that is to say, dialect, slang and other kinds of linguistic deviations had to be kept in circulation to keep “pure English” viable. This can be observed in the case of black dialect which served as a kind of refuge for the whites and provided them with an opportunity to escape from the social tensions imposed by the standard language movement. However, at the end of the day, such an escape only confirmed and reinforced whites’ long-held categories and resulted in no great metamorphosis in the dominant view of Black English (North, 1998: 24-28).

### **3. Conclusion: Critiques of Primitivist Modernism**

The traces of imperialism can ... be detected in Western modernism, and are indeed constitutive of it (Fredric Jameson, cited in Ramazani, 2009: 96).

Primitivism repeated certain paradigms of imperial and colonial relations in specific cultural and institutional ways (Sweeney, 2004: 5).

No one can deny that many avant-garde branches of modernism such as Dadaism, Vorticism, Imagism, Cubism, Expressionism, Futurism and Surrealism attempted to perpetuate the binarisms of self/Other and civilized/primitive, and were even engaged in finding the cracks in these hierarchical binaries and in changing the mechanisms which kept the dynamics of center and periphery at work. The dialogism created by modernism’s openness to and fascination with the Other was a space in which different voices could be heard, a multivocal space that turned

out to be anti-establishmentarian, internationalist and nonhierarchical. Primitivist modernism was often a countercultural effort that denounced the silencing of colonial subjects; in fact, it worked to restore the agency and voice of the primitive Other and to create new spaces of articulation in which anti-colonialism could develop (Sweeney, 2004: 7).

Nevertheless, no major concrete improvement took place in the status of colonized blacks during and after the vogue of primitivist modernism. A close look at the sociopolitical occurrences of post-World War I France, considered the cradle of primitivist modernism, can elucidate the futility of the vogue in ameliorating blacks' living conditions. The epidemic popularity of "l'art nègre" and "le jazz hot" in the clubs of Paris did not make trendy Parisians aware of the Pan-African Congress of 1919 in Versailles or of the establishment of the Union Inter-Coloniale in 1921. While black jazz musicians and dancers were glorified in 1920s Europe, an anti-imperial uprising in North Africa was cruelly cracked down by French and Spanish forces, Senegalese soldiers who had participated in the war for France were denied citizenship or even war pensions, and North African workers imported to France from colonies during the war were being evicted in favor of a more tractable European migrant labor force from Poland and Czechoslovakia (Sweeney, 2004: 3).

To put it concisely, the modernist fascination with the Other was not translated into the sociopolitical scene because primitivism, in the words of Lemuel A. Johnson, was "a one dimensional taste for the exotic and the picturesque" which lionized only certain aspects of black culture and identity (cited in Sweeney, 2004: 3). A similar belief was shared by bell hooks who maintained that "colonial imperialist paradigms of black identity ... represent blackness one-dimensionally in ways that reinforce and sustain white supremacy" (cited in Burt, 1998: 53). Scrutinizing the colonial rhetoric of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, David Spurr, in *The Rhetoric of Empire* (1993), designated four major categories for the appreciation of Otherness in literature and journalism: debasement, negation, idealization and aestheticization. Broadly speaking, the first two categories are purely negative and pejorative, while the latter are based on a nostalgic longing for a return to origins and original plenitude and integrity (cited in Sweeney, 2004: 15-16). Following Spurr's outline, one can conclude that the negrophilie vogue was in fact a shift from the blatant racism of the nineteenth century to a more paternalistic program which

represented blacks as primitive, infantile and picturesque. The erratic tastes of urban whites in the early twentieth century ephemerally lauded particular aspects of blackness which were previously deprecated and scorned (James Clifford, cited in Burt, 61). Consequently, what happened was in fact an inversion and a continuation, and not an elimination of earlier derogatory racial stereotypes of blackness (Moses, 1987: 63-64); and this new stereotype was so powerful that the real black presence was battered down by its objectifying weight (Fanon, cited in Sweeney, 7).

Another factor that should be taken into consideration is that it was not the real black subject with a visible existence in the world which was being invoked in primitivist modernism, but a metaphorical creation and construction. (North, 1998: Preface). This racial “Other”, then more materially accessible through the systematic plundering of the colonization juggernaut, was deemed to provide the potential of revitalization for a bedraggled Western modernity. We should note that since the early European encounter with the Americas, the West has been representing its “Others”. However, the ideological and epistemological discourses forming the representations of Otherness have changed over geographies, histories and political regimes, but the West’s relationship with its Others has always been an unbalanced act of the self reaching out, going for the unknown, and for the most part, the unknowable Other; that is, the figure of the racial Other was required so that against and through it the modern subject could be retranslated and reinterpreted (Sweeney, 2004: 11-12). In other words, the modern man regarded the primitive Other as an “alterity” that was essential in constructing and molding his own image and consciousness (Fortunati and Franceschi, 2007: 661).

As a matter of fact, the primitivist vogue functioned as a critique of the barrenness of Western civilization and a way of avoiding a homogenous Western monoculture. The figure of the black Other provided a means of reconnection with the past, while also offering a path conducive to the future. Primitivist modernism was a response to the yearning for historical amnesia, i.e., the desire to forget the past through an escape from the incubus of recent human history, and simultaneously spoke to a kind of nostalgic longing for the past and a redeeming mythological space in which time, not disjointed by the trauma of destruction and slaughter, was still whole. In other words, this past was always represented in a reflexive relationship to a European present which was considered to develop and

move forward while the time of the Other stood still, and this meant that the time and the space to which the primitive Other belonged existed in an alternate constructed continuum (Sweeney, 2004: 13-22; Fortunati and Franceschi, 2007: 668). The black Other was not more than an instrument in the hands of the faddist Westerner.

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