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The Body in the Field of Tensions between Biopolitics and Necropolitics: Analyzing the Future of the Prosthetic Body in the 21st Century¹

Keywords

body, biopolitics, necropolitics, prosthetic body, tensions, 21st century, future

Abstract

The article contributes to the understanding of how societal conflict, aggression, and racism are intertwined with the concepts of the body and necropolitics. Achille Mbembe's exploration of historical conflicts refers to the way in which states and other necropolitical entities exert control over life and death. Persistent conflicts reflect a form of necropolitics in which certain groups are subjected to violence and death as a means of maintaining power. Frank B. Wilderson III's analysis of aggression towards Black individuals reveals how the body, particularly the Black body, is subjected to policing and violence. This speaks to the concept of necropolitics as it highlights how certain bodies are deemed expendable or "killable" in society, and how the policing of Blackness can be seen as a form of controlling and subjugating these bodies. The rationalization of racist acts against meticulously selected groups and bodies that are highly racialized in contemporary necrocapitalism illustrates how the politics of death and violence are used to maintain class and racist hierarchies and control over different bodies.

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Telo v polju napetosti med biopolitiko in nekropolitiko: analiza prihodnosti protetičnega telesa v 21. stoletju

Ključne besede

telo, biopolitika, nekropolitika, protetično telo, napetosti, 21. stoletje, prihodnost

Povzetek

Članek prispeva k razumevanju, kako se družbeni konflikti, agresija in rasizem prepletajo s koncepti telesa in nekropolitike. Raziskovanje zgodovinskih konfliktov Achilla Mbembeja se nanaša na način, na katerega države in druge nekropolitične entitete izvajajo nadzor nad življenjem in smrtjo. Trajni konflikti odražajo obliko nekropolitike, v kateri so določene skupine podvržene nasilju in smrti kot sredstvu za ohranjanje moči. Frank B. Wilderson III v svoji analizi agresije do Črnskih posameznikov razkriva, da je telo, zlasti Črnsko, podvrženo policijskemu nadzoru in nasilju. To govori o konceptu nekropolitike, saj osvetljuje, kako določena telesa v družbi štejejo za potrošna ali za tista, ki jih je možno ubiti, in kako je policijsko nadzorovanje Črnskosti oblika nasilnega nadzora in podrejanja teles. Racionalizacija rasističnih dejanj proti skrbno izbranim skupinam in telesom, ki so v sodobnem nekrokapitalizmu močno rasizirana, ponazarja, kako se politika smrti in nasilja uporablja za ohranjanje razrednih in rasističnih hierarhij ter nadzora nad različnimi telesi.



Introduction

My starting point is necropolitics, because it is obvious and it is proven every day anew that biopolitics, which has its roots in the post-World War II period, has not been able to properly grasp, to conceptualize the new millennium: we see increasing racializations, exploitations, militarization, and so on. What I want to say is that biopolitics is not enough. The management of life by postwar liberal politics occurred in two steps: the reproduction of capitalism and profit after the Holocaust as a massive genocidal extermination of millions of Jews who were well-integrated citizens of Europe, despite centuries of exposure to the constant pogroms of right-wing political formations in Europe. The extermination of millions of Black people and communities under transatlantic slavery and the horrors of colonialism is an almost unimaginable genocide in terms of duration, spatiality, and scale.

I did not adopt these terms and ideas to save my “innocence,” White innocence as Ruth Gilmore defines it.² In 2008, I unraveled the constitution of the “Swiss jewel” on the sunny side of the Alps, namely how Slovenia was supposed to function after its 1991 declaration of independence (undeniably, I say that quite clearly) and what we have gotten in the 30 or so years since. Slovenia, in fact, has steadily and decisively transformed itself into a nation-state, following an almost textbook 19th-century constitution of the nation-state. In 1992, it created an internal enemy for itself, and then, with a swift governance that only after 2003 (when Achille Mbembe introduced the term worldwide) could be called necropolitics, for what it really was: an instituted murderous decision who may live and who should die.³

The result was that Slovenia erased 30,000 people from its civil register,⁴ most of them in 1992, at that time, they were internal migrants of the working class from other republics of the former Yugoslavia. The erasure from the register of permanent residents carried out by the administrative authorities of the Republic of Slovenia was an arbitrary act for which there was no legal basis, as the Constitutional Court found. It mainly affected persons who were born in other republics of the former Yugoslavia, held citizenship of another republic of the former Yugoslavia but lived in the former Socialist Republic of Slovenia, where they had a permanent address.

In 2008, I called this act of erasure, the act of social and real death (in “Euro-Slovenian Necrocapitalism”),⁵ for the future interests of neoliberal capitalism. This necropolitical act found its continuation in the former Yugoslavia with a genocide classified as such by both the International Criminal Tribunal for

² Ruth Wilson Gilmore, “Abolition Geography and the Problem of Innocence,” in *Futures of Black Radicalism*, ed. Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin (London: Verso, 2017), 225–40. See also Ruth Wilson Gilmore, “Insurgent Flows. Trans*Decolonial and Black Marxist Futures: A Conversation with Ruth Wilson Gilmore,” by Marina Gržinić and Tjaša Kancler, in *Political Choreographies, Decolonial Theories, Trans Bodies*, ed. Marina Gržinić and Jovita Pristovšek (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2023), 218–38.

³ Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” trans. Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 40, <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-15-1-11>.

⁴ “About Erasure,” *The Erased: Information and Documents*, Peace Institute, accessed August 28, 2023, <https://www.mirovni-institut.si/izbrisani/en/about-erasure/index.html>.

⁵ See Marina Gržinić, “Euro-Slovenian Necrocapitalism,” *Transversal* (webjournal), Transform, February 2008, <http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0208/grzinic/en.html>.

the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ)—the Srebrenica genocide in 1995.⁶ In 2002, the late feminist Žarana Papić referred to the genocide in Srebrenica by the macabre plan of the Serbian president Slobodan Milošević and the Serb paratroopers of the “Republika Srpska,” the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as “turbo fascism.”⁷

The Map

What do we have as coordinates for this article? Let’s start with the historical context of biopolitics, drawing on Foucault’s exploration of state racism and its development, particularly in relation to Nazi ideology. We also draw on the work of Domenico Losurdo, who explores Michel Foucault’s stance on issues such as apartheid, torture, and oppression. Losurdo incorporates historical references to Karl Marx’s observations on slavery to illustrate the intertwining of racism and power dynamics.

In one of the best-known works on biopolitics, “*Society Must Be Defended*,” *Lectures at the College de France, 1975–76*, Michel Foucault writes:

At the end of the nineteenth century, we see the appearance of what might be called a State racism, of a biological and centralized racism. And it was this theme that was, if not profoundly modified, at least transformed and utilized in strategies specific to the twentieth century. On the one hand, we have the Nazi transformation, which takes up the theme, established at the end of the nineteenth century, of a State racism that is responsible for the biological protection of the race. [...] Nazism was thus able to reuse a whole popular, almost medieval, mythology that allowed State racism to function within an ideologico-mythical landscape similar to that of the popular struggles which, at a given moment, could support and make it possible to formulate the theme of race struggle.⁸

⁶ In July 1995, Serb military forces of Republika Srpska invaded the town of Srebrenica in eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina. Within days, more than 8,000 Bosnian Muslim boys and men were imprisoned, abused, tortured, and then executed.

⁷ See Žarana Papić, “Europe after 1989: Ethnic Wars, the Fascisation of Social Life and Body Politics in Serbia,” in “The Body/Le corps/Der Körper,” ed. Marina Gržinić Mauhler, special issue, *Filozofski vestnik* 23, no. 2 (2002): 191–204.

⁸ Michel Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*”: *Lectures at the College de France, 1975–76*, ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 82.

In their 2018 Spanish text entitled “Necropolitics: Strategy of Extermination of the Black Body,”⁹ Eliseu Amaro de Melo Pessanha and Wanderson Flor do Nascimento, both from the University of Brasilia (UnB), decode some details about the possibilities offered by Foucault in relation to the work of Domenico Losurdo. Here I refer to Losurdo’s text published originally in German in 2008 to be translated in Spanish in 2011¹⁰ and then appearing also in Losurdo’s 2017 Italian book.¹¹

Losurdo pens that “when Foucault holds his course of lectures at the Collège de France analyzed here—we are in 1976—the apartheid regime of racist South Africa is still very much alive. On the other hand, about ten years earlier Hannah Arendt had drawn attention to an important point.”¹²

In *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, published in 1963, Arendt writes: “There certainly was something breathtaking in the naiveté with the prosecution denouncing the infamous Nuremberg Laws of 1935, which had prohibited intermarriage and sexual intercourse between Jews and Germans.”¹³

More, referring to Bernhard H. F. Taureck’s 2004 *Michel Foucault*,¹⁴ Losurdo comments:

The protest against the massacre of Algerians in Paris promoted by Jean-Paul Sartre and which also sees the participation of Pierre Boulez, a friend of Foucault, the latter does not seem to join. More generally, he does not seem to play any role in the fight against torture and the ferocious repression with which power tries to

⁹ Eliseu Amaro de Melo Pessanha and Wanderson Flor do Nascimento, “Necropolítica: Estratégias de extermínio do corpo negro,” *ODEERE* 3, no. 6 (July–December 2018): 149–76, <https://doi.org/10.22481/odeere.v3i6.4327>.

¹⁰ Domenico Losurdo, “Como nasceu e como morreu o ‘marxismo ocidental,’” trans. Carlo Alberto Dastoli, *Estudos de Sociologia* 16, no. 30 (2011): 213–42. Originally published as Domenico Losurdo, “Wie der ‘westliche Marxismus’ geboren wurde und gestorben ist,” in *Die Lust am Widerspruch: Theorie der Dialektik—Dialektik der Theorie; Symposium aus Anlass des 80. Geburtstages von Hans Heinz Holz*, ed. Erich Hahn and Silvia Holz-Markun (Berlin: Trafo, 2008), 35–60.

¹¹ Domenico Losurdo, *Il marxismo occidentale: Come nacque, come morì, come può rinascere* (Bari: Laterza, 2017).

¹² Losurdo, “Como nasceu,” 230; my translation.

¹³ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 7.

¹⁴ Bernhard H. F. Taureck, *Michel Foucault*, 3rd ed. (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2004).

crush the struggle for national liberation. It has rightly been observed with regard to Foucault that “his critique of power continues to look to Europe.”¹⁵

Losurdo notes meticulously that even prior to the whole period in focus relating biopolitics, Karl Marx writes in “The North American Civil War” in London on 20 October 1861:

At the same time, under Buchanan’s government the severer law on the surrendering of fugitive slaves enacted in 1850 was ruthlessly carried out in the states of the North. To play the part of slave-catchers for the Southern slaveholders appeared to be the constitutional calling of the North. On the other hand, in order to hinder as far as possible, the colonisation of the Territories by free settlers, the slaveholders’ party frustrated all the so-called free-soil measures, i.e., measures which were to secure for the settlers a definite amount of uncultivated state land free of charge.¹⁶

This intertwining, which goes hand in hand and reveals the deadly entanglement of the South and the North on the common ground of deadly racism, is obvious on the juridical-legal and constitutional levels.

Following Pessanha and Nascimento, I must emphasize another point highlighted by Mbembe in 2016, which reads:

Pushed to its logical conclusion, the phantasy of annihilation or destruction envisions not only the bombing of the planet, but also the disappearance of humans, their outright extinction. This is not an apocalypse as such, if only because the notion of the apocalypse presupposes the survival, somewhere, of a witness whose task it is to recount what they see. It is a form of annihilation conceived not as a catastrophe to be feared, but rather as a sort of act of purification by fire. However, it remains the case that this purification would be the same as an annihilation of present humanity. Such an act of annihilation is supposed to open

¹⁵ Losurdo, “Como nasceu,” 228; my translation.

¹⁶ Karl Marx, “The North American Civil War,” in *Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: Collected Works* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975–2004), 19:37.

the way to another beginning, the inception of another history without today's humanity. It is, in this sense, a phantasy of ablation.¹⁷

Mbembe's perspective of annihilation, and purification, is precisely punctuated, as are David Theo Goldberg and Susan Searls Giroux's insights into the persistence of racism in the world.

With a reference to Goldberg's 2015 *Are We All Postracial Yet?*¹⁸ and Goldberg's and Susan Giroux's 2014 *Sites of Race*,¹⁹ Mbembe also argues somewhat earlier in the text:

Racism—whether in Europe, South Africa, Brazil, the United States, the Caribbean or the rest of the world—will remain with us for the foreseeable future. It will continue to proliferate not only as a part of mass culture, but also (we would do well not to forget it) within polite society, not only in the old settler colonies, but also in other areas of the globe, long deserted by Jews and where neither Negroes [Nègres] nor Arabs have ever been seen.²⁰

The opening sentences of Mbembe's "The Society of Enmity" are also revealing, as he reports on two positions that currently dominate our lives, the Freudian and the Lacanian. Mbembe states, "Perhaps it has always been this way"²¹ and adds a reference to both in an endnote: "As Freud argued in 1915, history 'is essentially a series of murders of peoples.' [. . .] Lacan went further in the 1950s, remarking that 'our civilisation is itself sufficiently one of hatred.'"²²

These can be parallel with accounts of Frank B. Wilderson III on the role of policing in maintaining White social equilibrium and psychological well-being, particularly with violent re-racialization of Black communities. In an interview

¹⁷ Achille Mbembe, "The Society of Enmity," trans. Giovanni Menegalle, *Radical Philosophy* 200 (November/December 2016): 34.

¹⁸ David Theo Goldberg, *Are We All Postracial Yet?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2015).

¹⁹ David Theo Goldberg and Susan Searls Giroux, *Sites of Race* (Cambridge: Polity, 2014).

²⁰ Mbembe, "The Society of Enmity," 31.

²¹ Mbembe, 23.

²² Mbembe, 23n1. See also Sigmund Freud, "Our Attitude towards Death," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–74), 14:289–300; Jacques Lacan, *Freud's Papers on Technique, 1953–1954*, trans. John Forrester (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991).

conducted after the 2014 incidents in Ferguson, Missouri and the shooting of Michael Brown, Frank B. Wilderson III says: “Policing—policing Blackness—is what keeps everyone else sane. And if we can start to see the policing and the mutilation and the aggressivity towards Blackness not as a form of discrimination, but as being a form of psychic health and well-being for the rest of the world, then we can begin to reformulate the problem and begin to take a much more iconoclastic response to it.”²³

Ana Guglielmucci’s exploration of misplaced bodies and decontextualized representations of death is instructive in this regard. Guglielmucci’s 2020 “Necroscapes: The Political Life of Mutilated and Errant Bodies in the Rivers of Colombia,”²⁴ exposes the misplacement of bodies and corpses as historical fact. Referring to Pamela Colombo and her 2017 book *Espacios de desaparición: Vivir e imaginar los lugares de la violencia estatal* (Vanishing spaces: Living and imagining the places of state violence),²⁵ Guglielmucci reflects on decontextualized representations of death in spaces that appear outside of place and outside of time, without any clues that might allow us to understand the reason for a particular death, if I put it in my own words.

Finally, I want to put into the discussion Scott Burnett and John E. Richardson’s analysis of racial justifications for atrocities, drawing on current events such as the Utøya massacre, the Charlottesville rally, and the mass shooting in Christchurch. They note in their 2021 “‘Breeders for Race and Nation’: Gender, Sexuality and Fecundity in Post-war British Fascist Discourse, Patterns of Prejudice”:

The demographic threat of racialized Others often features in rationalizations for racist atrocities, such as misogynistic fantasies about socialists and women allowing Muslims to “swamp” Europe (expressed by the perpetrator of the Utøya massacre in 2011), white Americans being “replaced” by other races as part of a Jew-

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²³ Frank B. Wilderson III, “We’re Trying to Destroy the World”: *Anti-Blackness and Police Violence after Ferguson; An Interview with Frank B. Wilderson, III*, interview by Jared Ball, Todd Steven Burroughs and Dr. Hate (n.p.: Ill Will, 2014), 7.

²⁴ Ana Guglielmucci, “Necroscapes: The Political Life of Mutilated and Errant Bodies in the Rivers of Colombia,” *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 29, no. 4 (2020): 555–80, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569325.2021.1885356>.

²⁵ Pamela Colombo, *Espacios de desaparición: Vivir e imaginar los lugares de la violencia estatal (Tucumán, 1975–1983)* (Buenos Aires: Miño y Dávila, 2017).

ish plot (which “united” the right in Charlottesville in 2018), and the Christchurch mass murderer’s repetition.²⁶

Historical atrocities such as the Holocaust, transatlantic slavery, and colonialism call into question the efficacy of biopolitical theories. Foucault’s exploration of biopolitics is significant, his study of state racism and its metamorphosis in the twentieth century, especially in the context of Nazi ideology. However, contemporary philosophers of Black thought develop a thought-provoking facet when they consider the notion that police violence and hostility against Black positions and communities could be understood as a manifestation of neoliberal necrocapitalist societal well-being and equilibrium. It also invites us to critically rethink conventional perspectives on social dynamics and delve deeper into the intricate webs of power, racism, and ideological justifications. It quickly becomes clear, however, that contemporary philosophers of Black thought offer an alternative perspective, viewing police violence against Black communities as an expression of neoliberal necrocapitalism and challenging conventional views of power dynamics, racism, and ideological justifications.

Racism and Racial Capitalism

This is not an epic account of Black thought (for us mostly “innocent” White readers and writers in the European context), but a political-theoretical task to unearth Whiteness along with racial capitalism. The re-emergence and global visibility of the actions and protests of the Black community, particularly through the Black Lives Matter movement, pushes us to move beyond philosophical rhetoric and engage with the struggles of marginalized communities, particularly the Black community. Therefore, we do not only live in necrocapitalism, but “racial capitalism.”²⁷

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In his seminal book *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, published in 1983, Cedric Robinson challenges the point of Marxist theory, according to which capitalism in its primitive accumulation phase was not yet

²⁶ Scott Burnett and John E. Richardson, “‘Breeders for Race and Nation’: Gender, Sexuality and Fecundity in Post-war British Fascist Discourse, Patterns of Prejudice,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 55, no. 4 (2021): 332, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2021.2011088>.

²⁷ Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000). Originally published in 1983 by Zed Press.

proper capitalism. Robin D. G. Kelley writes about Robinson's work in the introduction to the *Boston Review*'s issue on "Race, Capitalism and Justice":

Capitalism and racism, in other words, did not break from the old order but rather evolved from it to produce a modern world system of "racial capitalism" dependent on slavery, violence, imperialism, and genocide. Capitalism was "racial" not because of some conspiracy to divide workers or justify slavery and dispossession, but because racialism had already permeated Western feudal society. The first European proletarians were *racial* subjects (Irish, Jews, Roma or Gypsies, Slavs, etc.) and they were victims of dispossession (enclosure), colonialism, and slavery *within Europe*. Indeed, Robinson suggested that racialization within Europe was very much a *colonial* process involving invasion, settlement, expropriation, and racial hierarchy.²⁸

Robinson's theory suggests that racial categorizations and hierarchies were integral to the development and maintenance of capitalist structures. In a racial capitalism, economic exploitation is intertwined with the exploitation and subjugation of racialized groups. This theory challenges the notion that capitalism operates independently of racial dynamics and shows how these systems intersect and reinforce each other. It challenges us to confront the deeper impotency and violence inherent in our White discourses and perspectives.

Robinson writes that the

violent event of colonial aggression and its corollary of "Indian" slavery had already been transmuted in [Benjamin] Franklin's [1753] neo-nativistic "American" mind into a relationship of supplication secured by an economic rationale; indeed, the dependence of "new Comers" on natives already reversed. The curtain of supremacist ideology had by now begun its descent on American thought, obscuring from the historically unconscious generations of descendants of colonialists and later immigrants the oppressive violence and exploitation interwoven in the structure of the republic.²⁹

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²⁸ Robin D. G. Kelley, "What Did Cedric Robinson Mean by Racial Capitalism?," *Boston Review*, January 12, 2017, <https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/robin-d-g-kelley-introduction-race-capitalism-justice/>.

²⁹ Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 77.

It underscores the need to deconstruct these discourses of the White power regime by recognizing our own limitations and the harm that is in our words and ideas. Both passages underscore the importance of moving beyond theoretical consideration to engage with actions, and consequences that shape the discourse of racism, and to work to understand the complexities of racial dynamics in ways that are not just neat academic pursuits but promote meaningful change.

Crucial to racial capitalism is a terrifying repetitiveness. A continuous murderous act of capitalism that brings death to Black people again and again, as an “afterlife of slavery.”³⁰

The task will be to once again draw a double root in this context and enter into an analysis of Fanon’s 1952 work *Black Skin, White Masks*.³¹ Fanon, as a psychoanalyst, refers directly to Freud, Jung, Lacan, etc., to address the question of race and racism, the unconscious, and ultimately the universalization of the Black body in the perspective of disalienation rather than through decolonization, which, as one of the key themes of studies of anti-colonial struggles, pushes Fanon and other Black thinkers to a particular place “outside” the White framework of “universal philosophy and theory” and locates them within what is called “separate” studies. Fanon’s analysis in *Black Skin, White Masks* addresses the complex interplay of individual psychology, social structures, and racial dynamics. He explores the multifaceted nature of racism and how it shapes identities and relations on personal and collective levels.

In 2008, the second translation by Richard Philcox of Fanon’s book *Black Skin, White Masks* was published.³² This triggered a series of reflections and comparisons with the much more popular *The Wretched of the Earth* which was published in 1961, when Fanon passed away.³³ Sunit Singh’s 2010 review of Fanon’s

³⁰ Saidiya V. Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006). See also Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

³¹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967). Originally published as *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Seuil, 1952).

³² Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008).

³³ See Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963). Originally published as *Les damnés de la terre* (Paris: François Maspero, 1961).

second translation highlights differences with the first English translation by Charles Lam Markmann in 1967, in addition to many important points in the new translation, and continues a number of lines of thought.³⁴

A crucial point Singh makes is that racism is presented in the context of *Black Skin, White Masks* as a symptom of capitalism. This perspective connects the problem of racism to larger socioeconomic structures and suggests that racism is intertwined with capitalist systems and power dynamics.

Singh criticizes the newest in the aftermath of the 2008 translation, triptych structure of Fanon's book, that is summarized as follows: "'The Eurocentrism of psychoanalysis,' a bid to reckon accounts with Negritude, and a concerted effort to develop a 'philosophy of decolonization'—as if these formed a triptych."³⁵ Singh points out, however, that this apparent triptych of concerns is deceptive or illusory (*trompe l'oeil*), indicating that there might be more complexity to Fanon's approach than a simple three-part framework.

Singh highlights the distinction between the theme of "disalienation" in *Black Skin, White Masks*, and the anxieties about "decolonization" in Fanon's later work, *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* discusses the concept of wanting-to-be-White as a form of neurosis resulting from the internalization of colonial subjugation. He argues that due to the historical context of colonization and the promotion of White superiority, Black individuals have been made to feel inferior, leading to a desire to emulate White characteristics and norms. This internalized sense of inferiority is deeply rooted in the history of colonial oppression and economic exploitation, creating what he calls an "inferiority complex."

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Fanon's concept of "epidermalization" refers to the way in which these feelings of inferiority become ingrained in their own skin color as a sign of their perceived inferiority, leading to a psychological conflict and a desire to be "White" in order to escape this negative self-perception. For the Black man, this aliena-

³⁴ Sunit Singh, review of *Black Skin, White Masks*, by Frantz Fanon, *Platypus Review* 21 (March 2010), <https://platypus1917.org/2010/03/15/book-review-frantz-fanon-black-skin-white-masks/>.

³⁵ Singh, review of *Black Skin, White Masks*.

tion results in a double dilemma, the “first, economic. Then, internalization or rather epidermalization of this inferiority.”³⁶

In Singh’s words, an individual Black man cannot overcome racism merely by immersing himself in the mythical or cosmic aspects of Black civilization, as if it were solely a matter of spiritual salvation, just as a neurotic cannot heal solely through knowledge. A “cure” is possible only by analyzing racism as a symptom of capitalism. This process involves challenging preconceived notions and examining the impact of racism. Fanon challenges the notion that Whiteness is merely the inverse of Blackness. He argues that disalienation, the process of regaining one’s true self, cannot be a simple negation of Blackness due to the deep-seated and negative associations attached to it.³⁷ As Singh points out, Fanon’s ideas have parallels with Jean-Paul Sartre’s assertion about antisemitism “overdetermining” the Jew. Both thinkers highlight how certain identities are burdened with societal preconceptions and biases that affect personal experiences. Fanon addresses how assimilation remains elusive for the Black man due to the burden of historical experiences and the “fact of Blackness.”

As Singh states, “Fanon attempts to hook the temporal core of psychoanalysis explicitly to the Marxist conception of emancipation.”³⁸

Disalienation will be for those Whites and Blacks who have refused to let themselves be locked in the substantialized “tower of the past.” For many other black men disalienation will come from refusing to consider their reality as definitive. [...] In no way do I have to dedicate myself to reviving a black civilization unjustly ignored. I will not make myself the man of any past. I do not want to sing the past to the detriment of my present and my future.³⁹

Fanon discusses disalienation for both White and Black individuals who refuse to be confined by the weight of history. He advocates for transcending past grievances and not fixating on resurrecting a particular historical identity, as this can hinder progress. Overcoming racism’s inherent narcissism involves breaking

³⁶ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (2008), xv.

³⁷ Singh, review of *Black Skin, White Masks*.

³⁸ Singh.

³⁹ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (2008), 201.

free from the neurotic repetition of racial constructs and embracing a vision of a more just future. Drawing from Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*,⁴⁰ Fanon emphasizes that the socialist revolution finds its inspiration in the future.⁴¹ However, he also critiques the reification of the concept of "race," which tends to fix individuals into societal roles.⁴²

Fanon touches on the burden of history that Black individuals carry. Their historical experiences shape their present identities and affect their struggles for recognition and agency. Fanon states: "I am not a prisoner of History. [. . .] I must constantly remind myself that the real *leap* consists of introducing invention into life. [. . .] And it is by going beyond the historical and instrumental given that I initiate my cycle of freedom."⁴³

In *Critique of Black Reason*, Mbembe's commentary on race emphasizes the concept of "race" as an iconic currency, a visual and symbolic representation that operates on the periphery of perception and human interaction. He discusses how power in colonial contexts often revolves around the ability to control what is seen and what remains invisible, highlighting the sovereignty of those who dictate visibility: "To a large extent, race is an iconic currency. It appears at the edges of a commerce—of the gaze."⁴⁴ In his discussion of Fanon, he points out that "Power in the colony [. . .] consists fundamentally in the power to see or not to see, to remain indifferent, to render invisible what one wishes not to see. [. . .] Those who decide what is visible and what must remain invisible are sovereign."⁴⁵

Fanon's passage and Mbembe's commentary together underscore the insidious nature of structural racism. This form of racism is embedded in social systems, including necrocapitalism, and affects not only social structures but also the deep-rooted psychological layers of individuals. Fanon's emphasis on the pres-

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⁴⁰ Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, trans. Eden Paul and Cedar Paul (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1926).

⁴¹ Singh, review of *Black Skin, White Masks*.

⁴² Singh.

⁴³ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (2008), 204–5.

⁴⁴ Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, trans. Laurent Dubois (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 110.

⁴⁵ Mbembe, 111.

ent and future aspirations of the oppressed speaks to the urgency of addressing systemic racism and its pervasive effects on individuals and societies. Mbembe's insights also illustrate how power dynamics are intertwined with the control of visibility and invisibility and how this plays a role in perpetuating racial inequalities.

In 2020, when his life was snuffed out under the knee of a police officer in the United States, the three words "I can't breathe" by George Floyd once again became a call for racial justice and police reform in the United States and around the world. The last time these words caused an uproar, they were shouted by Eric Garner when police killed him in New York City in 2014. In a historic act of solidarity not seen since the days of the American civil rights movement, millions of people took to the streets for weeks. They protested, knelt, chanted, and demanded change, not just in the United States, but around the world.⁴⁶ The phrase was written in July 2014 to mark the death of Eric Garner, who had been placed in a chokehold by Daniel Pantaleo, an officer with the New York City Police Department. In the video, which shows Garner being held down by several officers, he can be seen saying "I can't breathe" eleven times before losing consciousness and dying. When it was announced on December 3, 2014, that the jurors had decided not to indict Pantaleo after a two-month review of the case, protests erupted using Garner's last words, "I can't breathe," as slogans and chants. After the acquittal of the police officer who put Garner in a chokehold in December 2014, the use of the slogan rose dramatically amid widespread protests.

C. Riley Snorton's 2017 *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* is a book about racial history whose "problem under review [. . .] is time."⁴⁷ Following Fanon, Snorton is interested in the "mechanics of invention" and seeks to understand "the conditions of emergence of things and beings that may not yet exist."⁴⁸ Snorton claims that relating Blackness and transness leads to "insights that surpass an additive logic" and can foster "strategies for inhabiting

⁴⁶ "I Can't Breathe': The Refrain That Reignited a Movement," Amnesty International, June 30, 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/06/i-cant-breathe-refrain-reignited-movement/>.

⁴⁷ C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), xiv.

⁴⁸ Snorton, xiv.

unlivable worlds.”⁴⁹ In search of a new vocabulary, Snorton argues that “blackness finds articulation within transness.”⁵⁰ The two categories share connections that he calls “transversal,” but there are also transitive connections that unite the two in “moments of transition.”⁵¹ Snorton reveals how “captive flesh expressed an ungendered position that defines race as the sine qua non of sex.”⁵² Central to Snorton’s discussion is Hortense Spillers and her formulation of the flesh: its existence and persistence “in excess of linear time [. . .] gives rise to how sex and gender have been expressed and arranged according to the logics that sustained racial slavery.”⁵³ “Captive flesh,” he argues, “figures a critical genealogy for modern transness, as chattel persons gave rise to an understanding of gender as mutable and as an amendable form of being.”⁵⁴ Furthermore, he discusses “fungible flesh as a mode for fugitive action,” and the Black mother, “rendered as the zone of nonbeing,” as an “onto-epistemological framework for black personhood.”⁵⁵ Blackness is “a condition of possibility that made transness conceivable in the twilight of formal slavery.”⁵⁶

Snorton writes in his magnificent and painful book about “Blake Brockington, a black trans man who garnered national attention in 2014 as the ‘first out trans homecoming king in . . . North Carolina.’”⁵⁷

He continues later on:

In an interview, Brockington related, “I’m still a person . . . [and] trans people are still people. Our bodies just don’t match what’s up [in our heads]. We need support, not people looking down at us or degrading us or overlooking us. We are still human.” The frequency with which he availed himself of interviews and participated in Black Lives Matter rallies and events associated with Transgender Days of Remembrance is perhaps the evidence of an impetus to replace one collective

⁴⁹ Snorton, 7.

⁵⁰ Snorton, 8.

⁵¹ Snorton, 9.

⁵² Snorton, 33.

⁵³ Snorton, 53.

⁵⁴ Snorton, 57.

⁵⁵ Snorton, 12, 106, 108.

⁵⁶ Snorton, 135.

⁵⁷ Snorton, x.

function with another. In one of a number of photographs taken at a rally in late November 2014, Brockington is positioned between two signs, which read “I have the right to be alive” and “I am not a criminal.”⁵⁸

This photo prompts Snorton to point to another image of racial capitalism. He says:

The photograph occurs as an afterimage, what Kimberly Juanita Brown defines as “an ocular residue, a visual duplication as well as an alteration,” in a riff on Audre Lorde. Dressed in all black, Brockington wears a shirt that bears a list of names conjoined by ampersands and “finished” with an ellipsis: “Emmett&Amadou&Sean&Oscar&Trayvon&Jordan&Eric&Mike&Ezell& . . .” A few months later, his own name occupied the elliptical space.⁵⁹

In 2015, the death of Blake Brockington, the Black trans man and Black Lives Matter activist was reported as suicide. Brockington’s shirt with a list of names begins with Emmett Till. Till was a 14-year-old Black boy who was brutally beaten and killed in the Mississippi Delta in 1955 for allegedly whistling at a White woman, Carolyn Bryant.

After kidnapping and pistol-whipping Till, Bryant’s husband Roy and half-brother J. W. Milam shot him in the head, tied a 74-pound cotton fan around his neck, and dumped the boy’s body in the Tallahatchie River. Determined to publicize the atrocity, Till’s mother Mamie Emmet insisted on an open casket, and images of her son’s mutilated body flooded the media to the horror of White and Black Americans.⁶⁰

In her 2015 *The Repeating Body: Slavery’s Visual Resonance in the Contemporary*, Kimberly Juanita Brown writes:

Mamie Till, Emmett Till’s mother, is the other “her” who forces a photographic engagement with the murder of her only child, and in Lorde’s poem Mamie Till is also the “her” who “wings her hands / beneath the weight of agonies re-

⁵⁸ Snorton, xii; brackets in the original.

⁵⁹ Snorton, xii.

⁶⁰ Anne Sarah Rubin, “Reflections on the Death of Emmett Till,” *Southern Cultures* 2, no. 1 (Fall 1996): 45–66, <https://doi.org/10.1353/scu.1995.0000>.

membered,” and her son’s famous photographic imprint lingers over and through Lorde’s articulation. In the doubling properties of her use of “refuse” (“lying amid the sidewalk refuse”), Lorde locates an urban iteration of a southern horror steeped in what Saidiya Hartman calls “the afterlife of slavery.”⁶¹

Mamie Till, the mother of Emmett Till, becomes a central figure in forcing a confrontation with the horrifying reality of her son’s murder. In Audre Lorde’s poem, Mamie Till is depicted as the one who carries the weight of agonizing memories, symbolizing the ongoing impact of the tragedy.

This brings us to Audre Lorde’s “Afterimages”:

I
 However the image enters
 its force remains within
 my eyes
 rockstrewn caves where dragonfish evolve
 wild for life, relentless and acquisitive
 learning to survive
 where there is no food
 my eyes are always hungry
 and remembering
 however the image enters
 its force remains.⁶²

The “doubling properties” of Lorde’s use of the word “refuse” connects urban settings to the traumatic history of the South. This reflects an afterlife of slavery, as articulated by Saidiya Hartman, where historical traumas continue to reverberate. Brown defines the position of the afterimage of the Black body as the afterlife of slavery, repetitions of the indelible memory of slavery, whether it functions as “afterimage, double exposure, hyperembodiment, or the ocular and auditory meditation of a diasporic riff, repetition brings the figuration of slavery

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⁶¹ Kimberly Juanita Brown, *The Repeating Body: Slavery’s Visual Resonance in the Contemporary* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 2.

⁶² Audre Lorde, “Afterimages,” in *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), 339.

into being.”⁶³ Easily said, but deeply under the image “we think of the afterimage as a violation of the gaze.”⁶⁴ What does “violation of the gaze” mean here? The idea of the afterimage as a “violation of the gaze” suggests that these recurring images challenge the comfortable viewing experience. They demand attention to the distressing realities they represent, breaking away from traditional modes of passive observation. It also suggests that contemporary art often appropriates images of suffering and the “Other” in ways that perpetuate White innocence. These images can become a means for Whites to show emotional concern without necessarily addressing the systemic problems that cause the suffering.

As Michael A. Chaney writes in his 2008 *Fugitive Vision: Slave Image and Black Identity to Antebellum Narrative*: “Whether through citation to an unexpected portrait, appropriation of traditional visual technologies, or proximity to illustration, the intertexts of *Fugitive Vision* require a critical sensibility open to an aesthetics based on experiences of oppression that challenge a hermeneutics of accessibility, rationality, and correspondence.”⁶⁵ This requires a critical stance that goes beyond mere accessibility and rationality to understand the complex layers of meaning behind such imagery.

What is the meaning of this? That there is a whole set of libidinal mechanisms, essentially racist, operating at the heart of capitalist society, forming its social bond and at the center of the (White) unconscious. It is an intertwining between the capitalist system’s pursuit of a never-ending surplus value and an inexorable exploitation made possible by mechanisms that constantly racialize the produced “Other,” disposable, exploitable, and so on.

Which Bodies Matter?

In his 2022 “Diversity or Exclusion? Psychoanalysis ‘Explains,’” Stephen Frosh writes that “Exclusions take place across many domains—sexuality, gender, class, nationality—and in many circumstances. All these need to be observed and documented, but it is probably fair to say that the racialization of exclusion

⁶³ Brown, *Repeating Body*, 13.

⁶⁴ Brown, 11.

⁶⁵ Michael A. Chaney, *Fugitive Vision: Slave Image and Black Identity to Antebellum Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 211.

is paramount.”⁶⁶ Or, to put it more bluntly, as Frosh explains, this rationale is central to Afropessimism, something that I think is crucial to understanding, as Frosh lays out:

To use the trope activated by Christina Sharpe, we all live “in the wake” of slavery, a wake that widens with time; yet, pushing this further, those who are most in the wake—the descendants of slaves and the inheritors of the mantle of slavery—are now bordered by it, so that they are distinct from those outside the wake, who are nevertheless impacted upon by its flow and force. Expressed more simply, let us just say that in this view, the lives of black people are radically differentiated from the lives of white people; and the barrier between them, which is anti-black racism, structures this differentiation as subjugation and exclusion.⁶⁷

The metaphor of living “in the wake” of slavery, as articulated by Sharpe,⁶⁸ highlights the ongoing influence and repercussions of historical events like slavery, which continue to shape contemporary society. Importantly, Frosh extends this metaphor by suggesting that those most affected by the wake—descendants of slaves and those inheriting the legacy of slavery—are not just living in the wake, but are effectively bordered by it.⁶⁹ This border creates a distinct separation between those inside the wake, who experience the direct and systemic effects of racial oppression, and those outside the wake, who may still be impacted by its flow and force but not to the same extent.

Frosh’s analysis emphasizes the enduring impact of historical injustices on marginalized communities. These historical injustices, that include colonialism, slavery, apartheid, have far-reaching consequences. In simpler terms, Frosh’s perspective acknowledges a radical differentiation between the lives of Black people and White people, with anti-Black racism serving as the structural barrier that enforces this differentiation through subjugation and exclusion. This viewpoint aligns with Afropessimism, a theoretical framework that critically ex-

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⁶⁶ Stephen Frosh, “Diversity or Exclusion? Psychoanalysis ‘Explains,’” *Free Associations: Psychoanalysis and Culture, Media, Groups, Politics* 86 (September 2022): 9.

⁶⁷ Frosh, 10.

⁶⁸ Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

⁶⁹ Frosh, “Diversity or Exclusion?,” 10.

amines the persistent anti-Blackness in society and the ways in which it shapes the social, economic, and political realities of Black individuals.

As Frank B. Wilderson III argues in his 2010 book *Red, White & Black*, “no slave, no world. And in addition, as Patterson argues, no slave is *in* the world.”⁷⁰ He underscores the central role that slavery played not only in the existence of the Black community but also in the global world. The violence is unique, particularly during the traumatic experience of the Middle Passage. This violence, he argues, erases their metaphysical foundations, customs, and sources, leaving them vulnerable and disconnected from their cultural roots. “Rather, the gratuitous violence of the Black’s first ontological instance, the Middle Passage, ‘wiped out [his or her] metaphysics . . . his [or her] customs and sources on which they are based.’”⁷¹ Thus, “as an accumulated and fungible object, rather than an exploited and alienated subject, the Black is openly vulnerable to the whims of the world, and so is his or her cultural ‘production.’”⁷² Wilderson’s argument takes a critical turn when he characterizes the Black individual as an “accumulated and fungible object” rather than an “exploited and alienated subject.”⁷³

He argues: “All these Others are none other than the Lacanian contemporaries or, in the vernacular most salient to the Slave, Whites and their junior partners in civil society—Humans positioned by the Symbolic order.”⁷⁴ Wilderson sees Lacan’s process of full speech for Whites as contingent on the Black Other as a frame of reference, “which remonumentalizes the (White) ego” and “is an accomplice to social stability, despite its claims to the contrary.”⁷⁵ Moreover, “whereas Lacan was aware of how language ‘precedes and exceeds us,’ he did not have Fanon’s awareness of how violence also precedes and exceeds Blacks.”⁷⁶

⁷⁰ Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 11.

⁷¹ Wilderson, 38; brackets in the original.

⁷² Wilderson, 56.

⁷³ Wilderson, 56.

⁷⁴ Wilderson, 70.

⁷⁵ Wilderson, 75, 77.

⁷⁶ Wilderson, 76.

Wilderson brings in Lacanian theory and contends that Lacan's notion of full speech for Whites is interlinked with the presence of the Black Other as a reference point. This dynamic reinforces the (White) ego and contributes to societal stability, despite claims to the contrary. Wilderson's analysis challenges conventional paradigms and highlights the intricate interplay of power, language, violence, and identity in the context of racial dynamics. This distinction points to the objectification of Black individuals, rendering them vulnerable to the arbitrariness of the regimes of White capitalist power, including the manipulation of their social and cultural production.

In his 2021 article titled "Do Black Lives Matter in Psychoanalysis? Frantz Fanon as Our Most Disputatious Ancestor," Daniel Jose Gaztambide revisits a similar theme and argument.⁷⁷ He begins by noting that each psychoanalytic tradition identifies its lineage with a particular ancestor—Sigmund Freud as the "father" of psychoanalysis, Sandor Ferenczi as a once-lost "mother," and Jacques Lacan as the prodigal son advocating a "return to Freud."⁷⁸ These figures have served as foundational sources for scholars exploring psychoanalytic perspectives on various aspects of society, including race, class, sexuality, and gender both within the consulting room and in broader societal contexts. But where does Fanon stand in this trajectory? Gaztambide's article situates Fanon as a controversial and influential figure in this evolving psychoanalytic landscape, contributing to the broader conversation about the intersection of psychoanalytic theory and social justice.

More, Gaztambide, in his recent 2022 article "*Entre Negros, Blancos y Judios: Revisiting Claudia Tate's 'Freud and His Negro' with Puerto Rican Eyes,*"⁷⁹ refers to a now epochal 1996 text by Claudia Tate, in which she presents and then analyzes an anecdote narrated by Freud and recalled by Ernest Jones.⁸⁰ The direction

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⁷⁷ Daniel Jose Gaztambide, "Do Black Lives Matter in Psychoanalysis? Frantz Fanon as Our Most Disputatious Ancestor," *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 38, no. 3 (July 2021): 177–84, <https://doi.org/10.1037/pap0000365>.

⁷⁸ Gaztambide, 177.

⁷⁹ Daniel Jose Gaztambide, "*Entre Negros, Blancos y Judios: Revisiting Claudia Tate's 'Freud and His Negro' with Puerto Rican Eyes,*" *Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society* (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41282-022-00304-1>.

⁸⁰ Claudia Tate, "Freud and His 'Negro': Psychoanalysis as Ally and Enemy of African Americans," *Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society* 1, no. 1 (1996): 53–62.

taken by scholars like Gaztambide and Tate delves into the complex and often uncomfortable intersections of psychoanalysis, race, and power dynamics. By revisiting historical texts and anecdotes, they reveal how psychoanalytic theory and practice have been entangled with racialization, colonialism, and oppressive hierarchies.

Namely, Freud, who came regularly to Vienna in 1886, actually took his American patient, his “Negro,” as Freud called him, with him. Gaztambide offers a number of thoughts that I recuperate here, recalling that Tate argued how

for African Americans, psychoanalysis was both an ally, “a weapon . . . to articulate the complex effects of racism” and an enemy aligning itself “with the forces of domination and oppression.” Analyzing Freud’s infamous “joke,” “twelve o’clock and no negro,” referring to an American patient who missed their session, Tate revealed his enactment of a kind of “discursive Blackface,” eliding the equation of Jewishness and Blackness made in his turn-of-century European world while repositioning himself as a colonial master. The effacing of Freud’s racial difference as a Jew was made possible by whiteness, whose “social borders were marked by ostracized blacks. This confinement repressed the ‘primal scene’ of the larger culture and its racial castration.” Anti-Blackness functions precisely as a “primal scene” confronting the racialized subject—whether white, Black, or non-white—with the gratuitous violence visited upon Black people.⁸¹

By obsessively repeating this joke, Freud “reconstitutes the polarized economy of [White over Black] power . . . by transforming this relationship into a tripartite one of . . . whites, Jews, and Negroes before collapsing the triangular formulation into the simple polarity of white and black.”⁸²

Tate argued that this allowed Freud “to erase the figurative blackness of the Jewish body.”⁸³ As demonstrated by Gaztambide, Tate shows how “Freud was haunted by this association, performing his anti-Black ‘joke’ as a way of dis-

⁸¹ Gaztambide, “*Entre Negros, Blancos y Judios*.”

⁸² Gaztambide.

⁸³ Tate, “Freud and His ‘Negro,’” 57.

elling his racial anxieties—as if to say ‘I am not a negro,’ not as statement of fact but as anti-Black performance.”⁸⁴

Tate’s analysis reveals how this seemingly innocuous joke actually embodies a form of “discursive Blackface,” where Freud elides the racial and colonial implications of his language while reinforcing a power dynamic that positions him as a colonial master.

Importantly, Tate highlights the dual nature of psychoanalysis for African Americans—it can be both an ally for articulating the complexities of racism and an enemy aligning itself with forces of domination and oppression. By examining Freud’s joke and its repetition, Tate exposes how it reconstitutes and reinforces the power dynamics of White over Black, eventually collapsing the intricate tripartite relationship between Whites, Jews, and Blacks into a simplistic polarity of White and Black.⁸⁵

Gaztambide draws attention to the equation of Jewishness and Blackness in Freud’s time and the erasure of Freud’s racial difference through the lens of Whiteness. This erasure was facilitated by the societal borders marked by ostracized Black individuals, effectively repressing a larger cultural understanding of race and its castration of racial identities. He further underscores the role of anti-Blackness as a “primal scene” that confronts individuals of all racial backgrounds with the gratuitous violence inflicted upon Black people.⁸⁶

Historicization of the (White) Unconscious: Freud, Fanon, Malabou, and the Racial Unconscious

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In addition to the civil protests and disobedience of Black African American citizens in the United States in the previous century and their struggles through the long centuries of colonialism through the Jim Crow era to Black Lives Matter today, the question of the impact on psychic structure under the heavy processes of extractivist exploitation and structural racialization has once again, as so often in history, risen to the surface. More precisely, where is and where was

⁸⁴ Gaztambide, “*Entre Negros, Blancos y Judios.*”

⁸⁵ Tate, “Freud and His ‘Negro,’” 57.

⁸⁶ Gaztambide, “*Entre Negros, Blancos y Judios.*”

psychoanalysis in this process? In the Freudian and Lacanian elaborations of the psyche, the libido, and the unconscious, the lineage of Black thought in contemporary psychoanalysis is almost absent, but it can be enumerated: Fanon, Spillers,⁸⁷ Tate.

But at the same time, in retrospect, we see a reordering of vocabulary and implications because, due to the specific constellation of the new millennium and the war in Iraq and the Middle East, the year 2000 brought to the American public corpses and US soldiers disfigured to a degree that even the heavily controlled mass media coverage of the post-2001 intervention by the United States and its allies in the Middle East could not prevent. The images of the mid-2000s, the trophy images (paraphrasing Suvendrini Perera)⁸⁸ captured in hyper-racialized selfies of US soldiers in Iraq, and the contemporary trophy bodies captured in these racist images in the Middle East as a “gift of freedom” (paraphrasing Mimi Thi Nguyen)⁸⁹ from the White Military Coalition, as the Occident embarked on a mission of perpetual war to save our “innocent” White civilization, were reflected in a theoretical turn regarding the White Unconscious and its new elaboration.

In 2017, in “Racialized Bodies and the Digital (Financial) Mode of Production,” I wrote the following, “I want to radicalize the status of images of the digital (financial) mode of production; more than that, I want to ask: (1) what is the racial(ized) unconscious (see the adjective in front of the unconscious) of these images, and (2) what is their status in relation to the imperial, colonial, necropolitical and racial line that cuts global neoliberal capitalism from within and heavily conditions contemporary necropolitical capitalist production and its financial-images?”⁹⁰

⁸⁷ See Hortense J. Spillers, “‘All the Things You Could Be by Now If Sigmund Freud’s Wife Was Your Mother’: Psychoanalysis and Race,” *Boundary 2* 23, no. 3 (Autumn 1996): 75–141, <https://doi.org/10.2307/303639>.

⁸⁸ Suvendrini Perera, “Dead Exposures: Trophy Bodies and Violent Visibilities of the Nonhuman,” *Borderlands e-journal* 13, no. 1 (2014): 1–26, <https://doi.org/20.500.11937/4074>.

⁸⁹ Mimi Thi Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

⁹⁰ Marina Gržinić, “Racialized Bodies and the Digital (Financial) Mode of Production,” in *Regimes of Invisibility in Contemporary Art, Theory and Culture: Image, Racialization, History*, ed. Marina Gržinić, Aneta Stojnić, and Miško Šuvaković (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 13.

This view holds that racial terms and their extensions accumulate over time and form racial populations, driven by predictable effects arising from real physical experiences and encounters. Controlling the movement and positioning of racialized individuals. This control is a form of exercising power that places racialized bodies in specific social, physical, and psychological contexts. The experiences of marginalization, dehumanization, and racialization Fanon speaks of can be understood through the lens of spatial dynamics in which individuals are denied full existence and agency within particular spaces, histories, and presentations that are reordered by the racial unconscious. Necropolitical racial capitalism, in the wake of Robinson theory, has created a new relationship to all possible density; no concept can escape the processes of racialization, can it? Fanon already hinted at this in the 1950s with a not-so-dramatically different vocabulary (he speaks of the cultural unconscious, disalienation, etc.).

This is consistent with Jeffrey Prager's thought-provoking 2017 article "Do Black Lives Matter? A Psychoanalytic Exploration of Racism and American Resistance to Reparations," in which Prager examines the complex dynamics of racism and its impact on the reparative impulse and social progress. Prager's analysis focuses on the concept of racism and its role in maintaining a divisive barrier between racial groups, particularly between Whites and Blacks. Prager writes:

Racism, however, emphasizing the reality of *racial difference*, continues, as always, to serve as a powerful defense thwarting the reparative impulse. The result has been the securing of physical separation between Whites and Blacks and the persistence of psychic enmeshment. Absent the implementation of a politics of reparations, African Americans will never achieve externality, or independence, from the White mind.⁹¹

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Prager contends that racism, which focuses on highlighting and exaggerating racial differences, functions as a powerful defense mechanism for the regime of Whiteness that maintains a physical separation between White individuals and Black individuals, thereby perpetuating an ongoing sense of psychological

⁹¹ Jeffrey Prager, "Do Black Lives Matter? A Psychoanalytic Exploration of Racism and American Resistance to Reparations," in "Psychoanalysis and the Political Unconscious," special issue, *Political Psychology* 38, no. 4 (August 2017): 637, <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12436>.

imprisonment. In essence, Prager's study illuminates the complicated interplay between racism, reparations, and the broader struggle for racial equality and autonomy. By taking a psychoanalytic look at these complex dynamics, he provides insight into the deep-rooted obstacles that stand in the way of the need to address historical injustices for a more just society.

These thoughts are all the more pertinent given the persistence of the thesis of understanding the unconscious, which is mutable and changeable, along racial disparities, which received a new theoretical twist in 2007.

In 2007, Catherine Malabou published the book *Les nouveaux blessés: De Freud à la neurologie, penser les traumatismes contemporains* [The new wounded: From Freud to neurology, thinking about contemporary trauma],⁹² translated into English in 2012 as *The New Wounded: From Neurosis to Brain Damage (Forms of Living)*.⁹³ This is how Catherine Kellogg describes it in her chapter "Plasticity and the Cerebral Unconscious: New Wounds, New Violences, New Politics," I quote:

In her 2007 book *Les Nouveaux blessés*, Catherine Malabou stages an encounter between contemporary neuroscience and psychoanalysis that is without peer. She identifies a constituency she names as the "new wounded"; those whose brains are ineradicably changed as a result of brain damage or severe trauma. These wounds can neither be explained nor offered help by way of psychoanalysis, as it presently understands itself. In proposing a theory of subjectivity that has the "matter" of the brain and its relationship to the psyche at its root, this chapter asks whether Malabou's new materialist approach to psychic events threatens to alter a theory of psychic life that was materialist all along?⁹⁴

Symptomatically, in 2007, one of the most famous images of the Iraq War was a photograph taken by Nina Berman at a commercial portrait studio in a small

⁹² Catherine Malabou, *Les nouveaux blessés: De Freud à la neurologie, penser les traumatismes contemporains* (Paris: Bayard, 2007).

⁹³ Catherine Malabou, *The New Wounded: From Neurosis to Brain Damage (Forms of Living)*, trans. Steven Miller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012).

⁹⁴ Catherine Kellogg, "Plasticity and the Cerebral Unconscious: New Wounds, New Violences, New Politics," in *Plastic Materialities: Politics, Legality, and Metamorphosis in the Work of Catherine Malabou*, ed. Brenna Bhandar and Jonathan Goldberg-Hiller (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 114.

town in Illinois. A young couple stands side by side, looking at the camera. The groom is wearing a decorated uniform, but his facial features have literally melted away. He has no nose, no chin, no ears, and no hair. His head seems to hang straight down from his shoulders, and his face is so badly burned that it is difficult to decipher his facial expression. The portrait is just one of a much larger series Berman shot on behalf of *People* magazine showing the recovery, homecoming and wedding day of Marine Sgt. Ty Ziegel. Ty's second deployment to Iraq was interrupted when a suicide bomber blew himself up near his vehicle during a routine patrol. The searing heat melted most of the skin from Ty's body and blinded him in one eye. His skull was so badly crushed that doctors had to replace it with plastic. Ty had to endure 19 surgeries. Berman completed the series over the course of three separate visits. First, he documented Ty's recovery and then, after his release, the couple's wedding in late 2006.

Back to Malabou and the context presented: what is this we have before us? Why does it appear in 2007? While we have images of brutal disfigurements of Black bodies and those made "the Other" through ongoing hyperviolent processes of racialization, should not we also say that we are looking back from the future? As the images of disfigurements are ubiquitous, it is necessary to invest in a new logic that also takes in the necropolitical brutalities in general that are exponentially increasing along the racial/colonial divide, millions of disposable refugees, overkilling. Add to this the connection of the repressed history of colonialism and slavery with disfigurements of soldiers coming home from wars in the Middle East. The horrors of disfigurements and brutalized Black bodies, from slavery to colonialism, are shaped by racial structures that are visibly imprinted on the body. The body is literally melted down in colonialism through whipping, beating, and cutting. But also, in recent history, as Kimberly Juanita Brown described in 2015 the afterimage of the Black body as the afterlife of slavery, repetitions of the indelible memory of slavery.⁹⁵ Second, the cerebral unconscious makes a shift (bypassing the racial unconscious) from what Nina Cvar points out in this volume, "from labor to affect."⁹⁶

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⁹⁵ Brown, *The Repeating Body*.

⁹⁶ See Marina Gržinić in Bogdan Popa, "Insurgent Flows. Trans*Decolonial and Black Marxist Futures: A Conversation with Bogdan Popa," by Marina Gržinić and Tjaša Kancler, in Gržinić and Pristovšek, *Political Choreographies*, 139.

In *Black Skin, White Masks* Fanon starts a very important sequence of thoughts. He is discussing the concept of the collective unconscious and the archetype of the “uncivilized savage” or the “black man” that Jung suggests exists within the European collective unconscious.⁹⁷ Fanon begins by mentioning that he’s examining the symbolic crystallization of reality and how it relates to psychology. He then introduces Jung’s notion of the collective unconscious, which is a concept in Jungian psychology that refers to a shared reservoir of experiences, memories, and archetypes that are inherited from our ancestors. Jung’s idea, as Fanon notes, includes the presence of an archetype that represents “bad instincts” and the “uncivilized savage,” which Jung associates with the “black man.”⁹⁸ Fanon, however, expresses skepticism about Jung’s interpretation. He states that he believes Jung is mistaken in linking these negative aspects solely to the “black man.” Fanon’s skepticism stems from his broader critique of how racial biases and colonial ideologies have influenced psychology and the understanding of race. He argues that these ideas have been used to perpetuate the subjugation and inferiorization of Black individuals by pathologizing their identity and attributing negative characteristics to them based on their skin color.

In the next step Fanon underlines, “We need quite simply to demonstrate that Jung confuses instinct and habit. According to him, the collective unconscious is part of the psyche; the myths and archetypes are permanent engrams of the species. We hope we have shown that this collective unconscious is nothing of the sort and that, in fact, it is cultural, i.e., it is acquired.”⁹⁹ It is not surprising, then, that, as Sara Ahmed notes in her 2006 *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, “what bodies ‘tend to do’ are effects of histories rather than being originary.”¹⁰⁰ Ahmed emphasizes the idea that human behavior and actions are shaped by historical and cultural contexts. This perspective aligns with Fanon’s critique of Jung’s concept in that it emphasizes the influence of history and culture on individual and collective behavior.

In 2018, in “Giving Back the Land,” Burnett writes:

⁹⁷ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (2008), 164.

⁹⁸ Fanon, 164.

⁹⁹ Fanon, 164.

¹⁰⁰ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 56.

Fanon invokes a highly context-specific *cultural unconscious*. He characterises it, in a manner that points towards the importance of discourse, as “a constellation of postulates, a series of propositions that slowly and subtly—with the help of books, newspapers, schools and their texts, advertisements, films, radio—work their way into one’s mind and shape one’s view of the world of the group to which one belongs.” For white-skinned people, a Black body is a dirty body, both morally and physically; Blackness is to whiteness as darkness and sin are to innocence and “magical, heavenly light.” The unconscious is populated with these indexical relationships, which shape profoundly individual desire and behaviour.¹⁰¹

And continues: “The Black imago plays a role in the development of the white self, as the perfect Other, ideally not-self and “absolutely unassimilable.”¹⁰² Burnett, like us, does not want to leave the implications of this reinsertion of Fanon in the canonical White history.

In short, racial concepts and their extensions, as well as the control of the movement and positioning of racialized populations and individuals, constitute modes of (racial) governance and (racial) sovereignty that place racialized bodies in specific, disposable, disfigured social, physical, and psychological contexts. Fanon’s concept of the zone of non-being for highly racialized subjects, maintained through the logic of an “afterlife of slavery,” leads to a different understanding of the unconscious in racial necro-capitalism.

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¹⁰¹ Scott Burnett, “Giving Back the Land: Whiteness and Belonging in Contemporary South Africa” (PhD diss., University of the Witwatersrand, 2018), 264, <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.18854.14401>.

¹⁰² Burnett, 264.

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