Vesna Madžoski

Get Out

Engrams of Racism, Dynamograms of Oppression

Or: Writing About A Thing Nobody Asked Me To

"Why am I writing this book? Nobody asked me to.
Especially not those for whom it is intended.
So? So in all my serenity my answer is that
there are too many idiots on this earth."
Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

Here I am, writing about a thing nobody asked me to. And still, I cannot stop. Obviously, some parts of me got provoked, some emotions were stirred, some old wounds reopened, searching for a form in which they are to be verbalized. I would like to start with an image, with a seemingly unimportant conversation I had with one of my tutors during MA studies in Amsterdam in mid-2000s. Going through a painful and seemingly never-ending process of administrative discrimination as a non-EU student in 21st century Europe, I recall my tutor's words trying to console me, "You should feel lucky for not being a young black man. Not only that you would have to deal with administrative and procedural obstacles, you would be checked daily for simple offenses such as riding your bike without lights on." (These were the days when overnight, those activities became offensive and fines were being introduced in previously anarchic biking rules of Amsterdam.) Her words shocked me, coming from a person I had a high opinion of, not knowing how I am supposed to feel better after hearing this. I somehow couldn't come to terms of accepting the fact of living with a recognized, deeply imbedded practice of discrimination targeting a very specific group of people next door. There was no image of someone in worse conditions than mine that was to make me feel better in my own suffering.[1]

Hence, since I am (luckily) not a young black man, I guess I definitely cannot speak about the particularities of existence under the confinement of this particular designation. Therefore, I will be speaking from a position of a *non-young-black-man* as that is the

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[1] It might be worth mentioning that one of the greatest contributions of the Dutch to the world culture was the concept of apartheid, or the process of legal categorization that shamefully existed as practice until only a few decades ago.

only way I can do it. This *non-young-black-man* had a recent chance to see a movie about a young black man living in today's USA, written and directed by Jordan Peele, entitled *Get Out.* Released in early 2017, the film turned into a sort of a cultural phenomenon, forcing Hollywood establishment to pay attention, and winning an Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay in 2018.[2] The storyline is simple: "A young African-American visits his white girlfriend's parents for the weekend, where his simmering uneasiness about their reception of him eventually reaches a boiling point."[3] Being classified as a horror movie, it also contains certain comical breaks in the narrative, hence opening up a space for the discussion on 'crossover' forms. As David Brackett notices, genre is "one of the arenas in which the patterns and contradictions of ideology became visible,"[4] relying on the stability of genres and identities but also heightening their instability. Therefore "genres… may be understood as modes of feeling, and as ways of experiencing embodied emotion."[5] Hence, what could be a frightening emotion, or a horror element in a story of a guy meeting his girlfriend's family? As it turns out, in case of a young black man, horror could be anywhere.[6]

For the ones who had not seen the movie, I would like to

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[2] Released in February 2017, the film reached an astonishing number of audience, grossing more than 250 million USD on a 4,5 million USD budget. A year later, it was nominated by the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences for Best Actor, Best Original Screenplay, Best Director, and Best Picture in 2018. For more, check: www.imdb.com.

[3] Official description of the film on IMDB, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt5052448/?ref_=nv_sr_1 <visited April 2, 2018>

[4] David Brackett, "Black or White? Michael Jackson and the Idea of Crossover." *Popular Music and Society*, vol.35, no.2, 2012, pp.171.

[5] *Ibid*, pp.176.

[6] In the Hollywood history, the 'white' version of the visit to the parents seems to find the best expression in the genre of comedy (such as *Meet the Parents* (2000), *Meet the Fockers* (2004), etc.); we could perhaps push things even further and interpret this horror version as a new take on the definition of the 'black comedy,' or the 'Black comedy.'

share here a short description as published in *The Guardian* in one of the reviews. So, *Get Out* is a movie about

> a rich, white and – at least on first impressions – apparently liberal family, the Armitages. Rose and Jeremy Armitage, the young-adult children of the clan, kidnap or lure suitable [black] prospects to the family home; their mother, Missy, hypnotizes them with the mesmeric power of a steadily stirred cup of tea; and their father, Dean, a prominent neurosurgeon with a lustrous white beard and a fantastic line in ethnocentric virtue-signaling, performs a cerebral transplant in a basement operating theatre, removing all but a nugget of the victim's brain. Once that grey matter is out, the whites move in. Their bodies are occupied by the Armitages' elderly, infirm friends and relatives, enabling the new hosts to live a full life, with just a flicker of the old mind, languishing in some impotent psychic netherworld, at the very base of unconsciousness.[7]

WARBURG'S ENGRAMS AND DYNAMOGRAMS

On a quest of addressing various questions this film confronts us with, I propose to introduce the conceptual framework of the German art historian and cultural theorist Aby Warburg (1866-1929), more precisely his concepts of the engram and dynamogram. In short,

> The term 'engram' is often used by Warburg, and also

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[7] Alex Rayner, "Trapped in the Sunken Place: How *Get Out's* Purgatory Engulfed Popular Culture." *The Guardian,*
https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/mar/17/trapped-in-the-sunken-place-how-get-outs-purgatory-engulfed-pop-culture <visited March 18, 2018>

modified into that of 'dynamogram': i.e. an energetic sign, or as a 'symbol-preserve of energy': engram, dynamogram and symbol are equivalent terms in Warburg's conception used to refer to a moment of accumulation of an energetic charge deriving from a sufficiently intense and often repeated event capable of inscribing itself indelibly in the collective memory as a material track.[8]

My perhaps unusual choice of the theoretical framework for discussing the issues of contemporary racism and discrimination was prompted by the particular style of Peele's directing and story-telling. After watching the movie, the images I have just seen reactivated numerous references and memories in my mind of a *non-young-black-man*. All those scenes came directly from the author's personal experience, but through the imaging technique exceed the intimate space: in other words, the engrams of Peele's personal emotions have been turned into dynamograms of discrimination I could relate to. In this movie, nothing happens by accident – we are dealing with a very precise narrative machine in which every element was carefully planned and planted, executing a highly sensitive operation on the viewers' minds. Hence, Warburg.

The following analysis has the aim to lead us through the 'closeups' of individual engrams of *Get Out*, turning them into valuable sources for the discussion of the issues of power relations and oppression exceeding the territory of the USA. As we shall see, the historical models of oppression have never completely disappeared, being simply adapted to the needs of the modern times. In his analysis of European culture through iconography, Warburg's aim was to diagnose a Western man, configuring "a problem that is both historical and ethical."[9] As Giorgio Agamben

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[8] A. Pinotti in: Mick Finch, "Dead and alive: Warburg's Mnemosyne Atlas." *Journal of Visual Art Practice*, 2016, vol.15, no.2-3, pp.289.
[9] Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities – Collected Essays in Philosophy*. Stanford University Press, 2000, pp.92.

points out, Warburg stressed out "the simultaneously 'conservative' and 'progressive' character of our cultural tradition."[10] The Western man is in a permanent battle between the old and the new, while "the stylistic and formal solutions at times adopted by artists appear as ethical decisions of individuals and epochs regarding the inheritance of the past."[11] In this framework, "culture is always seen as a process of *Nachleben* [survival], that is, transmission, reception, and polarization."[12] For Warburg, the artists confront the images inherited from tradition, "with the tremendous energies stored in images, which in themselves had the potential either to make man regress into sterile subjection or to direct him on his path toward salvation and knowledge."[13] Artists, but also historians and scholars, are for him "extremely sensitive seismographs responding to distant earthquakes, or as 'necromancers' who consciously evoke the specters threatening them,"[14] and we shall examine Peele's work within this context.

The key role in the transmission and survival of cultural elements is given to the domain of the visual, to symbols and images, the carriers of not only stylistic organization, but of emotional charge as well. Warburg took inspiration from Richad Semon and his concept of the engram and his theory of memory:

> The engram according to Semon's definition is a trace that has been left in the organic material of the individual neural system, imprinted by an empirical stimulus. The stimulus left an experience which is washed away over time, but can also be imprinted and preserved strongly, depending on the intensity of the stimulus, and leaves a permanent trace as a part of long-term memory. It can be also inherited – that means transported in an organic substance over

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[10] *Ibid*, pp.93.

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] *Ibid*.

generations. That mark can continuously carry over into future generations, depending on its emotional intensity. It can be remembered and also be reactivated. In Semon's terminology, it can be retrieved when the same, similar or an associated stimulus acts again.[15]

In other words, engram is a trace of an event upon living matter, a reservoir of energy that may be reactivated under specific conditions. From his side, Warburg remodeled the concept of an engram into a dynamogram: "The engram is not a permanent trace in the physiological material of the mind, but, in contrast, as a permanent dynamic, it constantly changes its forms, however it preserves simultaneously some earlier structures."[16] For Warburg, the symbol and the image have the same role as the engram in "Semon's "conception of the individual's nervous system; they are the crystallization of an energetic charge and an emotional experience that survive as an inheritance transmitted by social memory."[17] In a new epoch, the transmitted symbols can gain a new meaning in the new context, depending on the needs of the times. In the following discussion, we shall be examining the engrams as imprinted in the cultural memory of the young black men, perhaps coming closer to understanding what the remaining options for individual agency within this historical context are.

The choice of a horror as a genre to tell a political story is always a risky task. According to Philip Brophy, in the world of contemporary cinema, horror is a "strange animal. A camouflaged creature, it has generally been accorded a less than prominent place in the institution of the Cinema; it is a genre which mimics itself mercilessly – because its statement is coded within its very

[15] Isabella Woldt, "The Operating Principle of Picture Series. Aby Warburg's Theory of the Function of Image Memory and the *Renaissance Festival's Pictures*." IKON – Journal of Iconographic Studies, vol.7, 2014, pp.34.

[16] Woldt, *Ibid*.

[17] Agamben, *Ibid*, pp.94.

mimicry."[18] Its main aim is to "generate suspense, shock and horror."[19] It openly and without concealing it, 'plays' with the viewer, who is very well aware of the fictionality of the manipulative material presented; still, this does not reduce the hormonal reaction of the viewer's body. The horror as a genre is made from the accumulation of images and sensations: "The contemporary horror film *knows* that you've seen it before; it knows that you know what is about to happen; and it knows that you know it knows you know. And none of it means a thing, as the cheapest trick in the book will still tense your muscles, quicken your heart and jangle your nerves."[20] As noted by several authors, the focus of contemporary horror film is not so much on the fear of death, "but more precisely on the fear of one's own body, of how one controls and relates to it."[21] On the other hand, this does not indicate "a widespread interest in human physiology but… closing-off or reduction of identity to its corporeal horizons. A concern with the self as body."[22] We shall be returning to the questions of the body, as the movie will force us to; in this introduction, it is important to stress the role given to the horror films in Western culture: "One might say that the true subject of the horror genre is the struggle for recognition of all that our civilization *re*presses or *oppresses*: its reemergence dramatized, as in our nightmares, as an object of horror, a matter for terror."[23]

Terror brings us back to Warburg for whom the main feature of artistic objectifications are the manners that

> indicate how fear as the decisive driving force can be
> overcome through contemplation. Works of art are

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[18] Philip Brophy, "Horrality – The Textuality of Contemporary Horror Films." *Screen*, vol.27, no.1, 1986, pp.3.

[19] *Ibid*, pp.5.

[20] *Ibid*.

[21] *Ibid*, pp.8.

[22] Pete Bos, "Vile Bodies and Bad Medicine." *Screen*, vol.27, no.1, 1986, pp.16.

[23] *Ibid*, pp.18.

> products of these expressive energies; to Warburg they
> are retained as engrams in a collective memory,
> products of a process of balancing on the model of the
> present, which also hold 'energies' for the future and
> are thus never completely done with historical.[24]

In the following analysis, we shall attempt to map the pathos-formulas of racism, or the process of the "transmission of traces of what [Warburg] thought of as traumatic encounters with threatening external forces"[25]: "The 'Pathos Formula' carries with itself two kinds of memory: on the one hand, it carries the memory of the traumatic encounter with the menacing force; on the other, it remembers the defensive, fixating act that the consciousness of the recipient performs in relation to this encounter."[26] For Warburg, the antiquity, the middle ages and the modern world are part of a single continuum, and it is the images that are being transmitted through time: "An idea of the image as a form capable of discharging energies, as a vital form, engendering movement through time; as an indelible inscription within collective memory."[27] We shall be guided by the iconic images of *Get Out* as carriers of layers of history of young black men, of the system that had created them, of the system that still exploits them and not only them, making it possible for all of use to join the struggle. The horrors of this particular existence are here for all of us to see and *Get Out* will make sure we do not close our eyes in front of it that easily. When it comes to racism, it is all about emotions.

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[24] Michael Diers, Thomas Girst and Dorothea von Moltke, "Warburg and the Warburgian Tradition of Cultural History." *New German Critique*, no. 65, Cultural History/Cultural Studies (Spring-Summer, 1995), pp.71-72.

[25] Mick Finch, "Dead and alive: Warburg's Mnemosyne Atlas." *Journal of Visual Art Practice*, vol.15, no.2-3, pp.288.

[26] Elaf in Finch, *Ibid*.

[27] Finch, *Ibid*, pp.288.

I – INTRO: RUN RABBIT RUN – MICHAEL JACKSON IN A DARK ALLEY

The movie opens with a three-minute long introductory scene of a young black man being lost in a posh suburban neighborhood, walking alone late in the evening. On the phone with his girlfriend, he tries to find the way out of this 'hedge maize.' Suddenly, a white car drives by, with a tune "Run Rabbit Run" [28] *playing loud. Without him noticing, an S&M masked person comes out of the car and strangles him, pulling him into the car. The tone of the movie is set.*

> "Michael Jackson is a solitary mutant, precursor of a mixing of the races which will be perfect because universal, of the new post-racial race, so to speak. The children of today have no hangups about the idea of a mixed-race society: such a society is their world and Michael Jackson prefigures what they think of as an ideal future."
>
> Alain Soral[29]

The first scene of the movie shows a young black man in the dark alley and it triggered a surprising memory in my mind. While growing up in the 1980s Yugoslavia, the main channel of the national TV ended every Sunday afternoon show with a particular video clip – Michael Jackson's "Thriller" (1983). As this was the era before the global domination of MTV and widely distributed and available video clips, it was one of the rare opportunities for us kids to enjoy in the current hits of global popular culture. Hence,

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[28] *Run Rabbit Run* (1939), a song written by Noel Gay and Ralph Butler, sung by Flanagan & Allen: "On the farm, every Friday, on the farm, It's rabbit pie day. So, every Friday that ever comes along, I get up early and sing this little song. Run rabbit - run rabbit - Run! Run! Run! Run rabbit - run rabbit - Run! Run! Run! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Goes the farmer's gun. Run, rabbit, run, rabbit, run. Run rabbit - run rabbit - Run! Run! Run! Don't give the farmer his fun! Fun! Fun! He'll get by without his rabbit pie, so run rabbit - run rabbit - Run! Run! Run!

[29] In Jean Baudrillard, *Cool Memories: 1980-1985*. Verso, London & New York, 1990, pp.147.

without me planning it, *Get Out* pushed me into an alley with Michael Jackson once more. Perhaps one of the most important projects and careers to have in mind when discussing modern racial issues, bodily anxieties and visual culture, Michael Jackson might offer us a precious introduction.

"Thriller" was filmed in a crucial moment for Jackson's career, as a strategic move in his larger plan to conquer music industry. His previous album, *Off the Wall*, his first solo-album after leaving the confines of the family band *The Jackson Five* with whom he performed since age five, was one of the most popular records in 1979, but was largely ignored by the music industry. In those days, the divisions between 'the white' and 'the black' music were strongly imposed, "white music represented primarily through rock and pop and black music through soul and R&B (and, soon, rap), were seen as a sort of oil and water."[30] The subgenre of 'black music' was cast out of the mainstream to the margins, and Jackson's next move was devised to challenge this. Hence, his next album, *Thriller* (1982) marked "the third and most recent pop explosion experienced in America and, as such, a singular and rare moment of identity creation and reformation; a powerful eruption of African American culture into the American mainstream."[31] By 1984, "Jackson was the most commercially successful artist in the world. *Thriller* had sold tens of millions of copies and single-handedly revived the music industry, which had been flagging since the later 1970s."[32] As a consequence, he won eight Grammy awards, "the most Grammys won by any artist in one night" whose voters "have historically been extremely reluctant to recognize the achievements of black artists."[33] Jackson's videos shattered the

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[30] Sara Tenenbaum, *I Know I Am Someone: Michael Jackson, Thriller, and American Identity*. M.A. Thesis, The Faculty of the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences of George Washington University, 2011, pp.13.

[31] *Ibid*, pp.2.

[32] Andrew Broertjes, "He's Sending His People Messages out of His Pain: Michael Jackson and the Black Community." *Popular Music and Society*, vol.36, no.5, 2013, pp.680.

[33] Tenenbaum, *Ibid*, pp.70.

color line set by the new music TV station MTV, which "had previously refused to air videos by black artists by saying they were the wrong musical format."[34]

In his analysis of the "Thriller" video, Kobena Mercer defines Jackson's star image as "a 'social hieroglyph'… which demands yet defies decoding."[35] Jackson established himself as a "paragon of racial and sexual ambiguity"[36] in this "playful parody of stereotypes, codes and conventions of the 'horror' genre."[37] The opening scene of the 14-minute video is a parody of a '50s B-horror movie, in which Jackson and his girlfriend reenact a scene that was impossible to film thirty years before: a young black man driving a nice car and spending his evening in the cinema. With this one move, Jackson intervened in the field of canonical images of youth culture, opening up a space for their correction. After warning his date that he is different from other guys, we are confronted with a disturbing "spectacle of the visceral transformation of cute, lovable Michael Jackson into a howlin' wolf of a monster."[38] The audience understood well this "open play with character embodiment that would not have been allowed in the past."[39] With "Thriller," in Tenenbaum's words, "Jackson was able to recast blackness itself as a normatively American and his audience, his fans, took in those images without recognizing them as problematic. The very act of watching "Thriller" becomes an act of identity transformation; a shift in expectation of what is included in 'the norm.'"[40]

According to Mercer, if the transformation into a werewolf

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[34] *Ibid*, pp.2. "*Billie Jean* became the first black video made for a black song put into heavy rotation by MTV despite the fact that it didn't fit the channel's supposed format." *Ibid*, pp.3.

[35] Kobena Mercer, "Monster Metaphors: Notes on Michael Jackson's "Thriller."" *Screen*, vol.27, no.1, 1986; pp.29.

[36] *Ibid*, pp.27

[37] *Ibid*, pp.30.

[38] *Ibid*, pp.33.

[39] Tenenbaum, *Ibid*, pp.67.

[40] *Ibid*.

plays with the stereotypes of "male sexuality as 'naturally' bestial, predatory, aggressive, violent – in a word, 'monstrous,'"[41] his second metamorphosis into a zombie "the undead corpse, does not represent sexuality as much as asexuality or anti-sexuality, suggesting the sense of *neutral eroticism*."[42] Jackson's new, zombie version of himself of "the living dead invoke an existential liminality which corresponds to both the sexual indeterminacy of Jackson's dance and the somewhat morbid lifestyle that reportedly governs his offscreen existence."[43]

The spectacular dance sequence of the zombies is one of the iconic scenes which survived undamaged all those years in my memory. I guess there were only a few of my generation who had seen it and never dreamed or attempted to recreate its spectacle of rebellion and liberation. The zombies are dancing and there is no one who could stop or annihilate them. At this point, I suggest that we make another stop, another digression, and briefly examine the ideological meaning of the zombies, which will later be valuable for our analysis of *Get Out* as well. As it turns out, zombies have a unique position "in the pantheon of movie monsters – a creature born directly out of folklore, new to the twentieth century, and fundamentally American in its origins."[44] According to cultural theorists, zombies are signs of "cultural anxieties"[45] and their popularity follows the curves of fears projected in the US public discourse. The term zombie became part of the American culture since the occupation of Haiti by the US in the early twentieth century, and ethnographically was used to refer to "the victim of voodoo magic or hypnosis – "a soulless corpse said to have been revived by witchcraft" – or metaphorically, describing "a dull,

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[41] *Ibid*, pp.39.
[42] *Ibid*, pp.40 [emphasis in the original].
[43] *Ibid.*
[44] Kyle William Bishop, *American Zombie Gothic: The Rise and Fall (and Rise) of the Walking Dead in Popular Culture*. McFarland & Company, 2010, pp.5.
[45] *Ibid*, pp.9.

apathetic, or slow-witted person.""[46] The zombie in pop culture is a fundamentally American creation, which "conjures up images of unnatural creatures that have risen from the dead in search of human flesh"[47] and is unique for skipping literary emanation, "passing directly from folklore to the screen."[48] The early zombie movies were inherently racist and showed native voodoo priests enslaving white heroines, terrifying "Western viewers with the thing they likely dreaded most at that time: slave uprisings and reverse colonization."[49] They were infectious and cannibalistic and expressed the anxiety of the ruling elites of the loss of freedom and autonomy.

In essence, "zombie narratives manifest the predominant cultural anxieties of their times, anxieties usually repressed or ignored by the mainstream media."[50] The main anxieties and horrors "include 'the fear of foreign otherness and monstrous invasion,' 'the technological explosion,' 'the rise of feminism, gay liberation, and African-American civil rights,' and 'the heightened attack against Christian ideology and hierarchy as that which should 'naturally' define values and ethics in culture.'"[51] In contrast to most classic film monsters, "zombies are not necessarily evil, destructive, or threatening."[52] Namely, the defining factor of the zombie monster "is not that it is dead but that it is mindless."[53] With brains but no minds, they embody a total absence of subjectivity, even more, "the negative definition of subjectivity. The zombie has no consciousness, no free will, no autonomy and, in general, no

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[46] *Ibid*, pp.12.
[47] *Ibid.*
[48] *Ibid*, pp.13.
[49] *Ibid.*
[50] *Ibid*, pp.26.
[51] *Ibid.*
[52] Justin Vaccaro, "Modernity's Automatization of Man: Biopower and the Early Zombie Film." *Scope: An Online Journal of Film and Television Studies*, Issue 22, February 2012, pp.2.
[53] *Ibid*.

affect."[54] It is not the fear of death underlying the core fear from zombification, but the fear of the subject losing its subjectivity.

The early films of the 1930s and '40s encouraged "its viewers' anxieties concerning black cultures. In the end, none of the early zombie movies manages to rise above racial paranoia."[55] The classic zombie story ("the apocalyptic invasion of our world by hordes of cannibalistic, contagious, and animated corpses"[56]) does not only reflect the imminent threat of a violent death, but it also takes place in a post-apocalyptic setting, in "the collapse of societal infrastructures, the resurgence of survivalist fantasies, and the fear of other surviving humans."[57] The zombie movies of the 1950s were not dealing with "contagious infection or the eating of human flesh but rather with voodoo, hypnotism, and scientific experimentation," with "folklore, ethnography, and imperialist paranoia," where "an evil threat – this time usually a mad scientist or alien race (read: Communist) – turns human corpses into a slave army designed to invade and conquer."[58] The change occurred in the 1960s and 1970s when zombie horrors were actually "an allegorical condemnation of the atrocities of Vietnam, violent racism, and the opposition to the civil rights movement."[59]

During the 1980s and '90s a great stagnation happened in the production of the zombie movies, waiting for the 'renaissance' that

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[54] *Ibid*.

[55] Bishop, *Ibid*, pp.33.

[56] *Ibid*, pp.16.

[57] *Ibid.*

[58] *Ibid.*

[59] *Ibid*, pp.14. For instance, "*Night of the Living Dead* (1968) protested the war by graphically confronting audiences with the horrors of death and dismemberment and by openly criticizing those who use violence to solve their problems. The politically subversive film captured a cult following and went on to make over $30 million worldwide." *Ibid.* Also, Tom Savini, the lead actor in *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) stated that much of his work for the movie "was like a series of portraits of what [he] had seen for real in Vietnam." *Ibid*, pp.22.

begun in the post-9/11 America. Under the new conditions of inner anxieties and wide-spread fear, "the primary metaphor in the post–9/11 zombie world is of course terrorism itself."[60] This new scenario is based on the fear of anyone potentially becoming a suicide bomber and becoming "infected (i.e., conditioned) at any time, everyone is a potential threat; paranoia, therefore, becomes a crucial tool for survival."[61] In those apocalyptic scenarios, "the end of the world means the end of capitalism, where everything is free for taking."[62] In other words, "in the new zombie economy, everything is already free,"[63] a phantasy we are obviously to be afraid of.

According to some, "the zombie worked as an allegorical figure, functioning as an oppressive ideological apparatus in Haiti and other colonial nations by instilling both black and white populations with fears regarding enslavement and the loss of individual sovereignty."[64] This "creature born of slavery, oppression, and capitalist hegemony" was created as "a vehicle for Western subjects, those partaking in bourgeois subjectivity, to figuratively stage fears of their own extinction in and through modernity."[65] In essence, there was "little possibility of a white person becoming a slave, but he could be turned into a zombie; for the zombie as monster is basically an ontological proposition, not a socio-historical one."[66]

In the history of zombie representation, Michael Jackson's intervention with "Thriller" was interpreted as an act of humanizing the living dead, "once the walking dead became the dancing dead, much of the 'bite' left the genre, and people began

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[60] *Ibid*, pp.29.
[61] *Ibid.*
[62] *Ibid*, pp.23.
[63] *Ibid*, pp.24.
[64] *Ibid*, pp.32.
[65] Vaccaro, *Ibid*, pp.2.
[66] *Ibid*, pp.4.

to see the zombie as a 'living room-friendly ghoul.'"[67] Hence what was he trying to humanize? Perhaps the image of a freak he was about to become. Namely, the prevailing opinion is that Michael Jackson was accepted as "some kind of bizarre, raceless, sexless, man-child freak,"[68] while "the rules that have unfairly applied to every other black man just wouldn't stick to Michael" as he "has found a loophole in the racial contract, one that allowed him to switch among various categories of identity at his convenience."[69] At the end of his life and career, he was seen as "an amalgamation of contradictory signifiers, both aesthetic and ideological"[70] who had "perpetually straddled the lines between black and white, between man and child, between masculinity and femininity."[71]

When talking about Jackson's radical fluidity, Raphael Raphael reminds us to keep in mind the difference about his "especially fluid star text, not the real person."[72] According to this, the radically unstable Jackson should be seen in the light of performance politics, where his fluidity "is reflective of Bakhtin's grotesque body and the ambivalent political power Bakhtin assigns it, constantly in transformation, threatening divisions between bodies (and categories), an embodied sign of revolution."[73] That way, Jackson contradicts the usual tactics of the industry demanding stable star text that "helps organize the market and assure circulation of product."[74] Raphael locates the origins of

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[67] Bishop, *Ibid*, pp.181.
[68] Racquel J. Gates, "Reclaiming the Freak: Michael Jackson and the Spectacle of Identity." *The Velvet Light Trap*, no.65, spring 2010, pp.3.
[69] *Ibid*, pp.4
[70] Brian Rossiter, ""They Don't Care About Us": Michael Jackson's Black Nationalism." *Popular Music and Society*, vol.35, no.2, 2012, pp.204.
[71] *Ibid*, pp.205.
[72] Raphael Raphael, "Michael Jackson: Crisis, Resistance, and International Freakdom." In: *Transnational Stardom: International Celebrity in Film and Popular Culture*. Ed. By Russell Meeuf and Raphael Raphael. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, pp.259.
[73] *Ibid*.
[74] *Ibid*.

Jackson's star text in the material history of the freakshow and the visual politics of race in the United States in the 1960s, suggesting that he "should indeed be considered a freak, but with all the ambivalent cultural power the topos of the freak warrants."[75]

Jackson's carefully projected and planned star text, for which he was personally in charge of, was preoccupied with turning the perception of his body into freakdom, and there is enough evidence to prove this. Namely, upon starting a solo career, he "circulated copies of the autobiography of P. T. Barnum (the "Father of the American Freakshow") to his management. Jackson is said to have announced, "[t]his is going to be my bible […] I want my whole career to be the greatest show on earth.""[76] From his side, capitalizing on America's obsession with race, gender, and disability, Barnum "played an essential role in the development of modern global celebrity."[77] Interestingly enough, the first hoax upon which all his career was based upon was a creation of "a moral panic in the United States by suggesting that he had discovered a weed that could turn black people white."[78] His key promotional strategy was to "circulate contradictory information about a freak performer in the press, publicly deny it as ridiculous, and then profit from the added publicity,"[79] a strategy Jackson heavily employed as well. According to Raphael, the strategy of performing a freak should prompt us to see Jackson as an icon of political dissent who is nevertheless "often dismissed as apolitical sign, associated perhaps with a naïve global utopianism, best reflected in the "We Are the World" relief effort."[80]

Jackson's strategy was focused on his corporeality, starting with the health narratives and issues about race and sexuality, and questions of individual agency in all those domains. Although after

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[75] *Ibid*, pp.258.
[76] *Ibid.*
[77] *Ibid.*
[78] *Ibid.*
[79] *Ibid*.
[80] *Ibid.*

a critical examination "the freak body historically often reified 'official' cultural scripts about race, gender, and ability, the freak also interrupted them, imagining new identities, and as icon of resistance, invited new ways to view the (physical and political) body."[81] The contradiction which was at the heart of the freakshow offers us two levels in which to interpret Jackson's body strategies:

> On the one hand, the freak's arrested spectacle of otherness reified the modern subject, an embodied cautionary tale of the dangers of dissent. On the other, the freak's unruly body, a hyperbolized spectacle of race, gender, and disability, invited spectators (often immigrants with tenuous claims to 'normal' citizenship themselves) to see – and celebrate – other possibilities of corporeality, and by inference, to envision different social and political orders.[82]

When it comes to the issues of race, Jackson confronted "frequent charges of gradual deracialization."[83] His strategy not to share the fact of his depigmentation due to vitiligo[84] until late in his career left the projection screen blank for the outer world to project its own fears and images, hence the possibility for us to claim today that "while outwardly he went from being black to white, inwardly he was going from white to black."[85]

By employing this strategy, he not only provoked the white community, but deeply challenged the attempts of the black nationalism to present itself as a unified and homogeneous opposition against a dominant white culture, asserting

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[81] *Ibid.*

[82] *Ibid*, pp.262-263.

[83] Rossiter, *Ibid*, pp.204.

[84] "He confided to Oprah Winfrey in 1993 that the change in his skin color was due to vitiligo, a condition that causes de-pigmentation of patches of skin. This claim was corroborated after his death by his dermatologist and the autopsy." David Brackett, *Ibid*, pp.180.

[85] Broertjes, *Ibid*, pp.689.

"heterosexual capitalist patriarchy as the primary vehicle for black empowerment."[86] Hence, seen as a whole, Jackson's career "operated… as a mask or screen upon which various fears and anxieties of black leaders and the black community were projected."[87] In the early days, the statement of Louis Farrakhan, the leader of the religious group Nation of Islam, was widely circulated in which he said about Jackson: "This Jheri-Kurl, female-acting, sissified-acting expression, it is not wholesome for our young boys nor our young girls."[88] The idea that Jackson was distancing himself from the black community created feelings of anxiety in the group, "particularly in regards to the plastic surgery procedures he had undertaken that had stripped his face of its more 'African' features. The black community drew back around him, and he became more authentically black, when he was arrested or persecuted."[89]

The difference between identity and identification, the manners in which an individual defines and the manners in which the environment perceives a person is of vital importance here. Hence, "the role of identity and the ability to transform, transfigure, and transcend within one's identification" is to be seen as central to Jackson's critical race representation."[90] On one hand, Jackson's "elastic identity in performance challenged global norms of how power works through parody"[91] while by "witnessing his many metamorphoses, audiences confronted the psychic pain of social constructions and the physical effects of injustice."[92] Upon his death, the recognition of his politics came from the black community with the Reverend Al Sharpton arguing that Jackson

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[86] Rossiter, *Ibid*, pp.217.
[87] Broertjes, *Ibid*, pp.678.
[88] *Ibid*, pp.690.
[89] *Ibid*.
[90] Dawn-Elissa Fischer, "Wannabe Startin' Something: Michael Jackson's Critical Race Representation." *Popular Music and Society*, 2011, vol.23, no.1, pp.98.
[91] *Ibid*, pp.104.
[92] *Ibid*, pp.102.

did have a major global impact:

> He created a comfort level… later it wasn't strange to watch Oprah on television, it wasn't strange to watch Tiger Woods golf, those young kids grew up from teenage comfortable fans of Michael to being forty years old and being comfortable to vote for a person of color to be the president of the United States of America.[93] [94]

Nevertheless, besides the positive impact that Jackson had on "a popular recognition of intersectional identity and cultural politics in transnational space,"[95] his messages with the narrative of reconstructing human worth and self-esteem were "ironically brought… by the imperialism and globalization that the artists and their audiences often seek to criticize,"[96] a problem that will become more evident in the years after the initial world-wide optimism regarding globalization process passed. If I am to recall the context in which I was more or less part of this process, in David Brackett's words, "I grew up listening to Michael Jackson in a pop musical landscape in which genre and race were unmistakably connected, in which musical choices from the perspective of both production and consumption had consequences and correspondence in social relations."[97] The constructed division on white and black music as something distinct will not withstand historical analysis, since the "categories of music and people are

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[93] Sharpton in Broertjes, *Ibid*, pp.682.
[94] For instance, "Jackson was especially embraced on the continent of Africa": "In a period of peak local crisis in South Africa, as widespread boycotts throughout the country threatened to destroy Apartheid's decades-long hold on the nation, Jackson's pop song ["Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough"] was quickly co-opted by the resistance movement. In a matter of weeks, it had spread through the country to become an unofficial rallying cry at antiapartheid rallies." Raphael, *Ibid,* pp.264-265.
[95] Fischer, *Ibid*, pp.100.
[96] *Ibid*, pp.104.
[97] Brackett, *Ibid*, pp.170.

neither true nor false, but rather ideological."[98] Back in those days, the example we were all set to follow – of making the world a better place by making a change in ourselves – unfortunately ignored "the futility of individual action in a world where such actions are constrained by institutional and discursive forces beyond the power of any single social actor to change him – or herself or, indeed, the world."[99] Thirty years later, it became clear that on a political level, "this emphasis, in fact, has the paradoxical effect of reinforcing individualistic ideals that work against concerted social action that might intervene at institutional levels,"[100] leaving many in the state of paralysis as to what is to be done next.

Or, turning it around, although Jackson's spectacle might be seen as a naïve global utopianism of "one big, happy global family/marketplace,"[101] and this spectacle of "race, gender, and disability has served the needs of 'official' global capital," on the other hand it "made rigid roles of identity more vulnerable to change. Because of this disruptive potential, the Jackson star text has offered at least a symbolic site of imagined resistance for marginalized audiences."[102] The transgressions Jackson made were "on long-standing taboos and systemic practices meant to keep entire groups of Americans from claiming full cultural citizenship"[103] and in order for his constantly metamorphosing body to be contained, Jackson had to be arrested. As suggested by Mercer, referring to Barthes and his examination of the appeal of film stars in "The Face of Garbo," Jackson's face should be seen as a mask: as an aesthetic surface "on which a society writes large its own preoccupations."[104]

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[98] *Ibid*, pp.171.
[99] *Ibid*, pp.178.
[100] *Ibid*.
[101] Raphael, pp.267.
[102] *Ibid*, pp.260.
[103] Tenenbaum, *Ibid*, pp.6.
[104] Mercer, *Ibid*, pp.41.

II – VISIT TO THE FAMILY: WELCOME TO THE ORDER OF THE COAGULA

> "It's close to midnight and somethin' evil's lurkin' in the dark…
> You try to scream, but terror takes the sound before you make it
> You start to freeze, as horror looks you right between the eyes
> You are paralyzed."
> Michael Jackson, *Thriller*

One of the important elements in the movie *Get Out*, especially in the discussions on power and body politics, are the professions of Rose's parents Chris is about to meet. Mother-the-therapist, Father-the-neurosurgeon, and Brother-the-medical-student, all contain the coordinates of the system in which interventions on the human body had been historically legalized, as well as being the favorite tropes of the horror genre – the anxieties about Western medical system. The Armitages run their practice within the confinements of their own house, and this architecture of power inevitably becomes something we have to pay attention to. In his 1973 lectures on psychiatric power at the Collège de France, Michel Foucault mentions the architectural setting of a castle as a model for the psychiatric asylum: those former seats of sovereign power were transformed to accommodate the needs of a new era, now containing radially dispersed networks of power: "In the asylum, as everywhere else, power is never something that someone possesses, any more than it is something that emanates from someone."[105] Everyone present in the asylum-castle emanates certain level of power, from the doctors, as the power from above, to the servants, as the power from below.[106] We are dealing with "a

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[105] Michel Foucault: *Psychiatric Power. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1973–74*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, pp.4.
[106] "He must really only pretend to serve them… In a way, the servants will thus set up the patients, and observe them at the level of their daily life and from the side of their exercise of will and their desires; and they will report anything worth noting to the supervisor, who will report it to the doctor." *Ibid*, pp.5.

tactical arrangement in which different individuals occupy a definite place and ensure a number of precise functions,"[107] a situation we can most certainly claim to be found in the lavish residence of the Armitages. As it turns out, we do not find only one villain in the house: it is everyone and everyone emanates power in their own domain, from house servants to children and parents.

Situated in a remote forest next to a lake somewhere in Alabama, this medical couple is practicing their trade for the chosen clients without any external intrusion. Mother-the-therapist is performing "moral orthopedics,"[108] to use Foucault's term, by use of hypnosis and psychotherapy, and is supported by a state of the arts operating room of her husband. No wonder Chris feels threatened as soon as he enters the house, this place of a "meticulous, calculated power:"[109] "What is organized in the asylum is actually a battlefield. […] It is the mad person who is to be brought under control."[110] From their side, the (black) servants in the house pretend to be at service to the young black man, making sure his telephone does not get charged, or scaring him enough in the middle of the night so he does not even think about leaving the house again. In an unusual definition of the mad person given by Fodéré and quoted by Foucault, it is "someone who thinks he is 'superior to everyone else,'"[111] a condition Mother-the-therapist will use all her tricks to fix.

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[107] *Ibid*, pp.6.
[108] *Ibid*, pp.8.
[109] *Ibid*, pp.14.
[110] *Ibid*, pp.7.
[111] *Ibid*.

FAMILY PSYCHIATRY

The role of family in the history of psychiatric practice has great but varied importance; nevertheless, Foucault advises us not to reduce the complex mechanism of power relations within the asylum and psychiatric practice to either the family function or the organization of the State apparatus.[112] Instead, the family is to be seen as a rare site in contemporary society where the power of sovereignty is still to be found, in which "the father, as bearer of the name, and insofar as he exercises power in his name, is the most intense pole of individualization," where "there is constant reference to a type of bond, of commitment, and of dependence established once and for all in the form of marriage or birth."[113] As we see in the movie, there is no way out of this perfect family, of this "essential component… of the disciplinary system."[114] For the ones growing up in a dysfunctional or no family at all, as in Chris's case, there will be an elaborate set of disciplining groups and places instituted, attempting to replace the disciplining model of the family.

According to Foucault, the family has a double role: "Of pinning individuals to disciplinary systems, and of linking up disciplinary systems and circulating individuals from one to the other"[115] as soon as the member leaves its 'protective' domain.[116] Within this construction of a society, the role of disciplining the ones who could not be disciplined was given to what Foucault names the "Psy-function": "the psychiatric, psychopathological, psycho-sociological, psycho-criminological, and psychoanalytic function," which "makes its appearance in this organization of disciplinary substitutes for the family with a familial reference."[117] In time, the Psy-function has been extended to all disciplinary systems, such as school, army, factories, etc.

On the other hand, the role of the family will have a crucial importance in the practice and narrative of psychoanalysis, where "the family is immediately identified and indicated as, if not exactly the cause of insanity, at least its occasion."[118] In the early

days of psychiatric treatments, the families had the agency to decide between normal and abnormal, when disciplinary power asked "the family to hand over its abnormal, irregular individuals, etcetera, and making a profit from this, which enters into the general system of profit and can be called, if you like, the economic benefit of irregularity."[119] The promise of the psychiatric treatment was the following: "We will give back to you someone who will really conform and be adjusted and adapted to your system of power."[120] In the modern era, the family will import the apparatuses of psychiatric control,

> The control of posture, of gestures, of the way to behave, the control of sexuality, with instruments for preventing masturbation, etcetera, all penetrate the family through a disciplinarization which develops during the nineteenth century and the effect of which is that, through this disciplinarization, the child's sexuality finally becomes an object of knowledge within the family itself.[121]

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[112] "It is not the family, neither is it the State apparatus, and I think it would be equally false to say, as it often is, that asylum practice, psychiatric power, does no more than reproduce the family to the advantage of, or on the demand of, a form of State control organized by a State apparatus." *Ibid*, pp.16.

[113] *Ibid*, pp.80.

[114] *Ibid.*

[115] *Ibid*, pp.82.

[116] "When an individual escaped from the sovereignty of the family, he was put in a psychiatric hospital where it was a matter of training him in the apprenticeship of pure and simple discipline; psychiatry gradually puts itself forward as the institutional enterprise of discipline that will make possible the individual's refamilialization." *Ibid*, pp.85.

[117] *Ibid.*

[118] *Ibid*, pp.99.

[119] *Ibid*, pp.115.

[120] *Ibid*, pp.113.

[121] *Ibid*, pp.125.

Within this construction, one is "never too young to be mad."[122] The childhood will also become the center, "the target of psychiatric intervention indirectly, insofar as what one asks the mad adult about is, precisely, his childhood: let your childhood memories come, and through this you will be psychiatrized."[123] This will immediately be the interest of Mother-the-therapist as soon as she gets the opportunity to talk with Chris in private, performing the task "of situating very precisely the point where the wild force of the madness unleashes its insurrection."[124]

THE PSYCHIATRIC POWER

In the analysis of the questions of power relations, Foucault stresses the importance of analyzing the power game as it occurs in the psychiatric scene due to the peculiarities of its functioning. Namely, according to him, the founding scene of modern psychiatry happened at the beginning of the nineteenth century at Bicêtre, in which Pinel removed "the chains binding the raving lunatics to the floor of their dungeon, and these lunatics, who were restrained out of fear that they would give vent to their frenzy if released, express their gratitude to Pinel as soon as they are freed from their bonds and thereby embark on the path of cure."[125] Nevertheless, there was now a need to construct a new schema of power distribution and control, strong enough to replace the chains, "a discreet, distributed power… a power which functions through networks and the visibility of which is only found in the obedience and submission of those on whom it is silently exercised."[126] In the ensuing years, according to Foucault, this "proto-psychiatric scene, transformed by moral treatment, is further greatly transformed by a fundamental episode in the history of psychiatry, by both the

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[122] *Ibid*.
[123] *Ibid.*
[124] *Ibid*, pp.8.
[125] *Ibid*, pp.19.
[126] *Ibid*, pp.22.

discovery and practice of hypnosis and the analysis of hysterical phenomena."[127]

During her session, what Mother-the-therapist needs to do is create the invisible chains in which she is to lock Chris in, and she does that by forcing him to relive under hypnosis the primordial scene of his trauma, the moment of his mother's death. The unfortunate woman was left to die as a wounded animal after a hit and run car accident, hence Chris still feels guilty for not searching for her and attempting to save her life. Nevertheless, the guilt here can only be on the side of the perpetuator, a privileged driver who did not stop to help after hitting her, and not on the side of an innocent child waiting for his mother to return from work. Hence, during her psychiatric session, instead of liberating him from this incorrect interiorized guilt, Mother-the-therapist will strengthen it and institute someone else's guilt as a point for the origin of Chris' trauma. As a consequence, the aim of the session turns out to be the construction of madness where there was none before. This procedure reminds us uncannily of the following words by G. Legman, as quoted by Franz Fanon in his *Black Skin, White Masks*, about the practice of throwing the blame on the victim as part of the American heritage:

> The Americans are the only modem nation, except for the Boers, in living memory who have totally eliminated the native population from the territory where they have settled. Only America, then, could have the need to appease the national conscience by forging the myth of the 'Bad Injun' so as to later introduce the historical figure of the noble Redskin unsuccessfully defending his territory against the invaders armed with Bibles and rifles; the punishment we deserve can be averted only by denying responsibility for the wrong and throwing the blame

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[127] *Ibid*, pp.31.

on the victim.[128]

Returning to the psychoanalytic session, as Foucault rightfully notices, the important strategy in psychiatric practice is the autobiographical account, introduced in the mid-nineteenth century, and which "came to be an essential component, with several uses, in all those processes of taking charge of individuals and disciplining them."[129] If he wants to be cured, the patient needs to establish biographical reality. Hence the first point of psychiatric practice is "the practice or ritual of questioning and the extortion of confession, which is the most important and most constant process, and which ultimately has not changed much,"[130] while the second point, the second technique with a cyclical fortune, but "historically very important was the procedure of magnetism and hypnosis,"[131] to which we shall return.

The procedure of questioning has a very clear role at a disciplinary level – it fixes the individual "to the norm of his own identity," it pins the individual "to his social identity and to the madness ascribed to him by his own milieu."[132] The psychiatric power seeks to provoke a moment for the truth of the illness to appear, which happens at the moment of the crisis: "A truth that occurs as an event; the truth-event."[133] Brought to the surface not by a method, but by a strategy, the relationship is warlike: "It is a relationship of domination and victory, and so not a relationship of knowledge, but of power."[134] It is not enough for the interrogated subject to recognize the existence of the delirious center, but he

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[128] Franz Fanon, *White Skin, Black Masks.* Grove Press, New York, 2008, pp.125.

[129] Foucault, *Ibid*, pp.158.

[130] *Ibid*, pp.234.

[131] To this, Foucault adds the third main building element of psychiatric practice, the use of drugs, "a well-known element about which the history of psychiatry has been significantly quiet." *Ibid*.

[132] *Ibid.*

[133] *Ibid*, pp.237.

[134] *Ibid.*

must actualize it within the interview. Either in the form of a confession, or as a provoked 'hysterical crisis':

> The subject must be forced into a sort of tight corner, a point of extreme contraction at which he is constrained to say "I am mad" and really play out his madness. At that point, pinned in that extreme corner of the interrogation, he can no longer escape his own symptoms; he can no longer thread his way between them.[135]

What this session with Mother-the-therapist (unconsciously) points to are the procedures which Foucault noticed in the early practices of Pinel and Mason Cox, the procedures that presuppose "that the kernel of madness is a false belief, an illusion or an error. They also presuppose… that for the illness to disappear it is enough to dispel the error."[136] Although Chris is not openly proclaimed as mad but instead as a body on which an intervention is needed due to his smoking addiction, the psychoanalytic procedure will turn the power game against him, turning him into a mad man ready to collaborate. In order for this to happen, "the doctor will manipulate reality in such a way that the error becomes true,"[137] making reality unreal.

It could be valuable for our discussion to make a brief stop here and notice one important detail, namely the use of tobacco consumption as an ideological tool in the power game. In the past few decades, tobacco smoking in the Western culture has also become a tool for class differentiation, hence all young black men in the film smoking. Their smoking habit, on the other hand, annoys the ones on power: the power structures need their healthy bodies for future exploitation; it is not that they worry about life expectancy of the young men, but of the future vessels into which

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[135] *Ibid*, pp.274.
[136] Foucault, *Ibid*, pp.130.
[137] *Ibid*, pp.131.

their brains and minds are to be moved. Hence, there is a big probability that every young black man Rose brought to meet her parents was also a smoker, making it possible for the same precise scenario to be executed each time. During their first night in the house, thinking everyone was asleep, the young black men would sneak out and go outside for a smoke. Grandfather-the-runner would then scare them off, running into them from darkness, forcing them to return to the safety of the house, without even lighting a cigarette. Their 'weakness' turned as a weapon against them, a familiar political strategy of domination. Already feeling guilty for getting caught in the act of smoking in the gray zone of morality and accepted behavior, they will be set for Mother-the-therapist to perform her intervention. After this, the young men won't be smoking any longer, but the site of the trauma and someone else's guilt will be reinstated in their memory, able to stir emotions so strong that, when the final operation of 'zombification' happens, they will prefer this new arrangement of confinement to a horrifying reality of being a young black man in America.

The issue of smoking and Nazi Germany inevitably enters the narrative through the character of the grandfather, the founder of the clan, who was defeated by Jesse Owens in the finals of the qualifications for the Berlin Olympics in 1936. Thanks to the medical miracles of his son, he was transferred into a new body of a young black man, obviously fully enjoying to run (in) his new 'vehicle.' The rhetoric of Nazi war on tobacco and smoking is a well-known historical fact and it was supported by an elaborate system of participants: "By racial hygienists fearing the corruption of the German germ plasm, by industrial hygienists fearing a reduction of work capacity, by nurses and midwives fearing harm to the 'maternal organism.'"[138] Tobacco was said to be "a corrupting force in a rotting civilization that has become lazy;" "He [Hitler] also claimed that Germany might never have achieved its

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[138] Robert Proctor, "The Nazi War on Tobacco: Ideology, Evidence, and Possible Cancer Consequences," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, Vol. 71, No.3, 1997, pp.441.

present glory if he had continued to smoke."[139] As it seems, the Armitages have joined the long line of racial purists in the new era, where a cigarette definitely means something else.

The scene in which Chris becomes enchained in his trauma during the hypnotic session introduces a crucial concept of the movie, that of the Sunken Place, which has become iconic as soon as the film was released.[140] In the movie, "the Sunken Place is a fugue state Chris and other unfortunate black people fall into once they're in the clutches of a rich, white, and… apparently liberal family, the Armitages."[141] It became a very productive concept in academic circles as well, where "it serves as a sleepy counterpoint to the hyperawareness of 'woke' social criticism, or as a more forgivable, understandable, sympathetic version of the Uncle Tom racial trope."[142] The images of Chris's imaginary body, of his mirror image, floating in the void of the Sunken Place, with tears falling on his face while sitting in the armchair, speak "allegorically to so many issues blacks in the United States in particular have grappled with: assimilation, incarceration, slavery and silencing,"[143] becoming *the* visual representation of black pain and struggle. In Franz Fanon's words, "not responsible for my acts, at the crossroads between Nothingness and Infinity, I began to weep."[144]

The key element in this scene is Chris's paralysis: by

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[139] *Ibid*, pp.472.

[140] More on this see: Alex Rayner, "Trapped in the Sunken Place: How *Get Out's* Purgatory Engulfed Popular Culture." *The Guardian,* https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/mar/17/trapped-in-the-sunken-place-how-get-outs-purgatory-engulfed-pop-culture <visited March 18, 2018>

[141] *Ibid.*

[142] *Ibid*. For instance, the Department of African American Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles devoted to the Sunken Place, racism and black horror movies a separate academic course.

[143] Tananarive Due in Alex Rayner, *Ibid.*

[144] Franz Fanon, *Ibid,* pp.119

reactivating the memory of a situation when he actually was not able to do much – sitting quietly in front of a TV and waiting for his mother to return home – Mother-the-therapist will use it as a trigger to block his sense of identity.[145] In a given moment, the paralysis will be reactivated again, blocking any possibility of him to fight back. Nevertheless, when it comes to paralysis, it turns out that the paralysis has become a strategy of survival in the American black community in the past few years. In one of the popular US TV shows, *Grey's Anatomy*, in an episode devoted to current police violence against the young black men, a couple of surgeons has 'the talk' with their ten-years-old son. Namely, it is not *the* talk about sexuality one usually sees on American TV, but an advice to their son to act paralyzed if ever stopped by a police patrol. The boy is not only to fully comply to all police requests, but to indefinitely freeze every movement of his muscles to prevent raising suspicion over his actions and being immediately shot. A well-intended advice which, unfortunately, did not help many of the cases of killed young black men we had read about in the news in the past few years.

The discovery of general paralysis in 1822 turns out to be one of the crucial moments in the history of psychiatric practice. According to Foucault, it served as its materialistic guarantee, with the problems of the psyche now being supported by a "real anatomical-pathological or physiological-pathological discourse."[146] [147] From that moment on, the psychiatry was able to claim the following:

The question of truth will never be posed between

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[145] In Sylvère Lotringer's words, "paralysis is the panicky plea for identity." Sylvère Lotringer, "Forget Baudrillard." In: Jean Baudrillard, *Forget Foucault*. Semiotext(e), 2007, pp.78.

[146] Foucault, *Ibid*, pp.133.

[147] "General paralysis was an absolutely good illness, better, more complete, and giving a stronger foundation to all these phenomena in that it was not yet known that general paralysis had a syphilitic origin." *Ibid*, pp.306.

madness and me for the very simple reason that I, psychiatry, am already a science. And if, as science, I have the right to question what I say, if it is true that I may make mistakes, it is in any case up to me, and to me alone, as science, to decide if what I say is true or to correct the mistake. I am the possessor, if not of truth in its content, at least of all the criteria of truth. Furthermore, because, as scientific knowledge, I thereby possess the criteria of verification and truth, I can attach myself to reality and its power and impose on these demented and disturbed bodies the surplus-power that I give to reality.[148]

The physical symptoms necessary for the doctors to exist have been found and, forced to fall deeply into the Sunken Place, the patient will soon begin to believe he was the mad one. The promise of the future treatment needed to free him from his madness will have a disciplinary role: in Foucault's words, "to stop being mad is to agree to be obedient."[149] The legitimacy of a psychiatrist power is never to be questioned.

THE HYPNOTIC CURE

According to Foucault, the introduction of magnetism in psychiatric hospitals (around 1820 to 1825 at Salpêtrière, France) should be seen in terms of strengthening the effects of power of the doctors: "It was precisely to reinforce further the effect of power that the doctor wanted to attach to himself; it was to give doctors a hold, and a total, absolute hold, over the patient."[150] Nevertheless, the practice of magnetism also entailed 'intuitiveness' as an agency on the patient's side, or the ability of the subject to know his/her own body and illness, hence it was soon replaced by hypnotism, a

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[148] *Ibid*, pp.134.
[149] *Ibid*, pp.165.
[150] *Ibid*, pp.284.

practice invented by a Scottish surgeon James Braid (1795–1860). In Braid's definition of hypnotism, all effects of the treatment happened due to doctor's will solely, "only the doctor's assertion, only his prestige, only the power he exercises over the patient without any intermediary, without any material basis or the passage of fluid, will succeed in producing the specific effects of hypnosis."[151] The doctors who previously rejected magnetism were now accepting this new technique, after "Broca's performance of a surgical operation on someone in a hypnotic state."[152] The patient's will was now completely neutralized, leaving "the field absolutely open to the doctor's pure will."[153] Hence, the new generation of hypnotists developed a concept of intellectual and moral orthopedics, a disciplinary technique that works like a sedative, "just like… drugs."[154]

In this period, the first great achievement of hypnosis was seen in giving the power to the doctor to direct someone else's behavior, something its inventors hoped will one day be "introduced into educational and penitentiary establishments."[155] The second benefit was seen in the power of hypnosis to nullify the symptoms of an illness. As its final achievement, it was the power of the hypnotist to get "a hold on the patient's body at the level of the analysis and modification of functions: he can produce a muscular contraction or paralysis; he can excite or nullify sensibility on the body's surface… he can even modify automatic functions like circulation and breathing."[156] Finally, the psychiatrists gained a real hold on the patient's body "that had eluded it since it became known that pathological anatomy could never account for the functioning and mechanisms of madness."[157]

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[151] *Ibid*, pp.286.
[152] *Ibid.*
[153] *Ibid*.
[154] *Ibid.*
[155] *Ibid*, pp.287.
[156] *Ibid*.
[157] *Ibid*.

After this initial major optimism among the medical practitioners, an important episode spoiled their celebration. Namely, the history of hypnosis is strongly linked to the invention and treatment of hysteria which, according to Foucault, is not to be seen as a great illness of the nineteenth century but "a great simulator's insurrection that spread through the whole of the asylum world in the nineteenth century."[158] It was "a process by which patients tried to evade psychiatric power; it was a phenomenon of struggle, and not a pathological phenomenon."[159] Namely, after a celebrated clinical neurologist Jean Martin Charcot (1825-1893) became Chief of Medicine at the Salpêtrière women's asylum in 1862, he begun an active study of hypnosis on his hysterical female patients. This "Napoleon of Neurosis"[160] performed in public at least once a week on one of his patients, often with his "most important and infamous subject, Blanche Wittman, sometimes referred to as a 'prima donna' of hysterics."[161] At the time, hysteria was defined as "a neurological disorder brought about by a physical or psychic trauma in those individuals who inherited a predisposition to the disease."[162] Charcot went so far as to make a controversial statement that "both hysterics and hypnotizable subjects were susceptible to suggestion because hypnotism was a manifestation of hysteria."[163] The body in question was female.

The challenge to the distinguished doctor and his theory of both hysteria and hypnosis came from the Nancy School, where Hippolyte Bernheim (1840-1919) tested in placebo-controlled experiments the human potential for suggestibility. The Salpêtrière

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[158] *Ibid*, pp.138.
[159] *Ibid*, pp.137.
[160] Judith Pintar and Steven Jay Lynn, *Hypnosis - A Brief History*. Blackwell Publishing, 2008, pp.79.
[161] "The sight of a hypnotized woman eating charcoal she believed to be chocolate, rocking a top hat following the suggestion that it was a baby, and barking on all fours on the floor like a dog.*" Ibid*, pp.80.
[162] *Ibid*.
[163] *Ibid*.

position, of hypnosis being defined as an abnormal state associated with hysteria, was opposed by Bernheim who denied this association and claimed that "the hypnotic state was not pathological and that suggestibility was a normal human capacity."[164] The main issue here was in determining whether "the hysterical subjects featured in Charcot's weekly demonstrations were faking their performances outright, or if they were unconsciously fulfilling the expectations of their doctors and peers,"[165] a fact unclear up to our times. In other words, "if the stages of hypnosis were simply products of suggestion, then all measures of hypnosis must be products of suggestion, and if this is so, then how can it ever be determined if someone is hypnotized or not?"[166] By the end of the nineteenth century, "*Grand Hypnotisme* was no more, and Charcot's approach had been displaced by a 'hypnotherapeutic' movement which asserted that hypnosis was a method of curing disease through psychological means."[167] After realizing that people were just as suggestible wide awake as in a hypnotic trance, Bernheim proclaimed at the conference in Moscow in 1897, "*Il n'y a pas d'hypnotisme* – there is no such thing as hypnotism."[168] The second person said to be responsible for the demise of hypnosis at the turn of the century was Sigmund Freud, who after initially making hypnosis a central aspect of his clinical techniques, soon rejected it "in favor of his own psychotherapeutic techniques, particularly free association."[169] Freud's abandonment of hypnosis kept it out of mainstream practice for half a century, with "the dramatic resurgence of mainstream interest in hypnosis that occurred during the second half of the twentieth century"[170] due to the "successful therapeutic application of hypnosis by military physicians and psychotherapists during the two World

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[164] *Ibid*, pp.81-82.
[165] *Ibid*, pp.82.
[166] *Ibid*, pp.83.
[167] *Ibid*.
[168] *Ibid*, pp.84.
[169] *Ibid*, pp.86.
[170] *Ibid*, pp.87.

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Wars."[171]

      "The great maneuvers of hysteria"[172] which unfolded at Salpêtrière, as Foucault points out, coincided with the appearance of the new category of patients, the insured patients, in "the time of accidents at work and on the railway, of accident and health insurance systems."[173] Suffering from the similar symptoms as the hysterics under hypnosis, such as paralysis of a muscle, inability to speak, trembling, etc., the new category of patients prompted the reformulation of the problem that "a trauma is something that provokes a localized and permanent hypnotic state."[174] As a consequence, hypnotism was to be defined as a trauma,

> But in the form of a complete, brief, transitory shock, which will be suspended solely by the doctor's will, but which will envelop the individual's general behavior, so that within this state of hypnosis, which is a sort of generalized and provisional trauma, the doctor's will, his words, will be able to implant ideas and images in the subject which thus have the same role, the same function, and the same effect of injunction… (of) non-hypnotic traumas.[175]

In short, "trauma is what provokes hypnosis, and hypnosis is a sort

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[171] *Ibid*, pp.106. "After 1900, scientific interest in the "uncanny" phenomenon of hypnosis subsided, due to the emergence of psychoanalysis and a renewed focus on physiology within the medical field. In the course of World War I, however, hypnosis and suggestion resurfaced in connection with the treatment of "war neuroses" and shell shock." Stefan Andriopoulos, "Spellbound in Darkness: Hypnosis as an Allegory of Early Cinema." *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory*, 2002, vol.77, no.2, pp.104.

[172] Foucault, *Ibid*, pp.308.

[173] *Ibid*, pp.313.

[174] *Ibid*, pp.317.

[175] *Ibid.*

of general reactivation of the trauma through the doctor's will,"[176] hence the need for the doctors to embark on the search for the trauma itself. In order to be certain that "the hysteric really is a hysteric and that all her symptoms… really are pathological one will have to discover the etiology, to find the trauma."[177]

The search for the trauma will lead to patients' childhood, as they will be asked to recount their whole life, "so as to find again that kind of fundamental and essential event that will persist and is always present in the hysterical syndrome."[178] According to some, the reason for Freud to be disappointed in hypnosis was because it is haunted by the same tension between power and deception, like any other science, since "it is in the nature of sciences to avoid displaying power in the raw, but rather always to temper it with deception."[179]

Police personnel once believed that under hypnosis one tells the truth, "only to discover that this just as easily produced 'false witnesses.' (…) The patient resists the problematic of truth that the therapist wants to impose upon him, and hypnosis, which appears to make him submissive, is incapable of overcoming this resistance."[180] Hence, in order to escape his imprisonment, Chris will have to fake his paralysis, recalling the insurrection of the hysterics and their intimate fight against the psychiatric power. Returning to the official reason for him to be hypnotized, his tobacco addiction, it might be interesting to check the statistical numbers of the efficiency of this treatment. As it turns out, although advertised strongly by medical experts, hypnosis seems to be quite unreliable as the success rates range "from as high as more than 80 percent to as low as 14 percent," or the outcomes "that may be

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[176] *Ibid*, pp.318.
[177] *Ibid*.
[178] *Ibid*.
[179] Isabelle Stengers and Roxanne Lapidus, "The Deceptions of Power: Psychoanalysis and Hypnosis." *SubStance,* vol.19, no.2/3, issue 62/63, 1990, pp.82.
[180] *Ibid*, pp.83.

somewhat, but not greatly, superior to counseling alone or attention or other behavioral methods."[181] What any former smoker knows well is that with the removal of this habit, of this ritual from their daily lives, the occasion for the moment of reflection in an otherwise busy work life is gone as well. The former smoker indeed becomes a more productive worker from the perspective of the managerial power, but his possibility for a critical reflection on the work performed will be removed too. On the other side, the power to heal is always in patient's hands.

THE ZOMBIES OF THE ORDER OF THE COAGULA

There is a strong structural affinity between early cinema and hypnotism, where "filmic representations of hypnosis function as allegories of early cinema itself,"[182] nevertheless the defenders of hypnotism claim that this is "probably the most (mis)represented of all 'psychiatric treatments' on film."[183] In the majority of more than 230 films utilizing hypnosis, "when a hypnotist appears on screen, expect evil."[184] For more than a century, "celluloid mesmerists have swung watches, twirled spiral disks, and transfixed the unsuspecting with their piercing gaze. Maidens surrendered their virtue and good men staggered away, glassy-eyed, to steal and kill."[185] On the other hand, "numerous texts describe the movie audience as the victim of criminal posthypnotic suggestion. The spectator is controlled by the movie's suggestive powers, even after leaving the theater and without being aware of

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[181] Gary Elkins and Michelle Perfect, "Hypnosis for Health-compromising Behaviors." In: *The Oxford Handbook of Hypnosis. Theory, Research, and Practice.* Ed.by Michael R. Nash, Amanda J. Barnier. Oxford University Press, 2008, pp.570.

[182] Andriopoulos, *Ibid*, pp.102.

[183] Peter Byrne, "Look into My Eyes – Psychiatry in the Movies." *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 2009, vol.194, no. 2, pp.116.

[184] Deidre Barrett, "Hypnosis in Film and Television." *American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis*, 2006, no.49, vol.1, pp.13.

[185] *Ibid*.

this irresistible influence."[186]

In his own practice, doctor Bernheim used verbal suggestion-hallucinations to "'populate' the imagination of the hypnotized person as 'phantoms and chimaeras,'"[187] simulating the artificial worlds created by the movies. He not only employed visual terms borrowed from technologies of projection to represent the mental processes of hypnosis, but also experimented "with the hypnotic production of visual hallucinations perceived by his somnambulist mediums, as if they were watching a film."[188] The hypnotized ones "succumb to the 'vividness' of the hypnotically created images, which they see with their own eyes, in the full sense of the word."[189] They experience the scene evoked by the power of imagination, without the body taking part in it: the hypnotized one "views the suggested scenes as a second 'Ego' while sitting in his chair motionless."[190]

Within the history of cinema and its depiction of hypnosis, horror movies hold a prominent place. Namely, in the period between 1953-1968, Hollywood industry faced a constant and sustained decline in movie attendance, and the new important revenue was found in the horror and the cinema of attractions due to their capability "of eliciting an immediate psychological response from the spectator."[191] The reason why horror as a genre

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[186] Andriopoulos, *Ibid*, pp.112.

[187] *Ibid*, pp.104.

[188] *Ibid*, pp.111.

[189] *Ibid*.

[190] *Ibid*. This fact prompted some theorists to claim that actually "medical theories of hypnotism develop a theory of film *avant la lettre* and simultaneously anticipate and render possible the invention of cinema." *Ibid*. Even more, the French theoretician Bellour postulated a "universal, seemingly timeless relationship between film and hypnosis by describing filmic representations of hypnosis as "*manifestations* of a *fundamental* relationship between the cinematographic and the hypnotic apparatus." *Ibid*, pp.109.

[191] Kevin Heffernan, "The Hypnosis Horror Films of the 1950s: Genre

had and still has a low-cultural status is due to this "ascendancy of the cinema of attractions at the expense of the cinema of narrative integration": "The hypnotist huckster was not a welcome figure on the American cultural scene."[192] Interestingly, during this period, the advertising industry begun to practice "cynical manipulation of consumers through techniques learned from psychology and psychiatry. It was 'depth psychology,' the study of preconscious and unconscious fears and desires, that provided the scientific basis for motivation analysis."[193] The fear of hypnosis and the dissolution of personality was exploited in films through the character of the evil psychiatrist, while "the horrors of mind control and the dissolution of personality are strikingly similar to the tropes of hypnosis and thrall that characterized both advertising's trade discourse and the warnings about that discourse."[194]

The key element of the procedure invented by the Armitages family and their white suprematist cult The Order of the Coagula, following the line set by the horror movies since Frankenstein and his "workshop of filthy creation,"[195] is the procedure that actually turns young black men into special kind of zombies. From the perspective of the young black men, their identity will be paralyzed, their subjectivity will be lost in their bodies forced to host a new one. As suggested by several authors, the contemporary obsession with zombies should be interpreted within the "wider discursive formations that Michel Foucault has identified as the

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Text and Industrial Context." *Journal of Film and Video,* vol.54, no.2/3, 2002, pp.57.
[192] *Ibid*, pp.62.
[193] "According to Packard, by the early 1950s, advertising agencies and marketing firms had begun to retain large numbers of clinical and academic psychologists as consultants in their efforts to develop ad campaigns that bypassed the rational and critical faculties of consumers and zeroed in on their hidden, even unknown, fears and desires." *Ibid*, pp.62.
[194] *Ibid*, pp.66.
[195] Pete Bos, "Vile Bodies and Bad Medicine," *Ibid*, pp.15.

basis of a new economy of power in society:"[196] a political technology of the body, or biopolitics. It is the idea that our bodies can be mismanaged and interfered with, the vision of social dystopia that "requires only a small shift in our credibility for the surgeon to become the slasher."[197]

In our age of biopower, "humans are reduced to bare biological life, life that can be operated on, controlled, and exploited."[198] We all have the potential of becoming zombies. In Foucault's words, "what is essential in all power is that ultimately its point of application is always the body. All power is physical, and there is a direct connection between the body and political power."[199] According to the theoreticians of zombie films, they articulate in a fantastic form exactly this "crisis brought on by a shift of politics and power from being organized around 'subjects' (e.g. of the crown or collective sovereign) and territories to bodies and populations."[200] This "microphysics of bodies"[201] is centered on the body as a machine and its disciplining; "The zombie is a body, a life animated by power, not by a subject."[202] Although appearing to be some premodern phenomenon from Haiti's mythology, zombie is a wholly modern phenomenon:

> Zombies are the result of power's imbrication with modern science as it takes man as its object of study, opening him up to new applications and techniques of power. In this sense, science both provides insights into bodies, and thus how they can be exploited, and also extends the 'body' by objectifying more and more of the subject.[203]

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[196] *Ibid*, pp.19.
[197] *Ibid*, pp.21.
[198] Justin Vaccaro, *Ibid*, pp.1.
[199] Foucault, *Ibid*, pp.14.
[200] Vaccaro, *Ibid*, pp.3.
[201] Foucault, *Ibid*.
[202] Vaccaro, *Ibid*, pp.3.
[203] *Ibid*, pp.4.

Hence, zombies represent "small-scale models of power,"[204] the automata, the antinomy of the bourgeois epoch "between what Foucault called the 'docile body' – one both analyzable and manipulable, and thus, one that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved."[205] The zombie should be perceived as a "figure for the instrumentalizing tendency in the West of which the factory worker and the soldier are the signal examples."[206] Those ideal soldiers of modernity have the ability to "shut down their instinct for self-preservation"[207] and become "automatons, tireless, feelingless human machines" [208] in the disciplining hands of regulatory power. In this process, psychoanalysis as a science widens the scope, "rationalizes the irrational, systematizes it and makes it subject not simply to interpretation (of dreams, fantasies, behaviors, etc.) but also to understanding and control, a docile psyche."[209] In other words, it "opened the psyche up as a field of application for experts to analyze and manipulate."[210] This way, the conception of an empirical individual became possible: "Always subject to control and manipulation by forces outside of itself (or the Ego) such as drives, traumas, family members, and most importantly, psychoanalysts."[211] In Peter Bos's words, zombies depict the individual in the world without interiority and intimacy,

> the overexposure and transparence of the world which traverses him without obstacle. He can no longer produce the limits of his own being, can no longer play nor stage himself, can no longer produce himself as mirror. He is now only a pure screen, a switching

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[204] Foucault in Vaccaro, *Ibid*, pp.6
[205] Vaccaro, *Ibid*.
[206] *Ibid*.
[207] *Ibid*, pp.7
[208] *Ibid*, pp.9.
[209] *Ibid*, pp.11.
[210] *Ibid*, pp.12.
[211] *Ibid*.

center for all the networks of influence.[212]

And it is this ideal of a body as a perfect slave that the Order of the Coagula will be set on producing, realizing the final frontiers of the master-slave fantasy. All possible frictions, all sudden resistances of the host will be quickly resolved through the new psychoanalytic session of moral orthopedics.

SURGEON'S TRAUMA

The operation performed by Father-the-neurosurgeon could be seen as a strong visual translation of what Foucault defined as "a final relay, a particular modality by which political power, power in general, finally reaches the level of bodies and gets hold of them,… "the soft fibers of the brain.""[213] Through this mechanism, the disciplinary power of our society has a unique and specific modality of what "could be called the synaptic contact of bodies-power."[214] Nevertheless, he also reminds us of the fact that disciplinary power is a historical phenomenon: "It is not born suddenly, has not always existed, and is formed and follows a diagonal trajectory, as it were, through Western society,"[215] opening the doors for agency and intervention. Taken from religious communities and transferred to the lay ones, besides "colonization of youth"[216] in educational and military institutions, a different colonization took place – of peoples all over the world:

> It seems that disciplinarization took place fairly unobtrusively and marginally to start with, and, interestingly, as a counterpoint to slavery. In fact, it was the Jesuits in South America who opposed slavery

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[212] Peter Bos, *Ibid*, pp.23.
[213] Foucault, *Ibid*, pp.40.
[214] *Ibid*.
[215] *Ibid*.
[216] *Ibid*, pp.56.

for theological and religious reasons, as well as for economic reasons, and who countered the use of this probably immediate, brutal and, in terms of the consumption of human lives, extremely costly and poorly organized practice of slavery, with a different type of distribution, control and exploitation by a disciplinary system.[217]

Hence, an alternative to slavery – disciplinarization.

When it comes to the history of surgery, in her analysis of Walter Benjamin's Artwork essay, Susan Buck-Morss reminds us of one of the modern issues rarely mentioned – the trauma the surgeons had to deal with while working on the battlefield, as well as with the wounded factory workers, where "doctors were uniformly horrified by the grisly body count of the industrial revolution. The rates of injuries due to factory and railroad accidents in the nineteenth century made surgical wards look like field hospitals."[218] In this new economy, "the surgeon whose task it was, literally, to piece together the causalities of industrialism achieved a new social prominence,"[219] with the doctors becoming "prototypical of a new elite of technical experts"[220] in the mid-nineteenth century. Due to the traumatic experience of performing surgery on the screaming and jolting bodies, "it was not uncommon in the nineteenth century for surgeons to become drug addicts."[221] Hence the importance and impact the discovery of anaesthesia had was not only to relieve the patient from pain – importantly enough, "a deliberate effort to desensitize oneself from the experience of the pain of another was no longer necessary"[222] from the surgeon: "Whereas surgeons earlier had to train themselves to repress

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[217] *Ibid*, pp.69.
[218] Susan Buck-Morss, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered." *October*, vol. 62, 1992, pp.27.
[219] *Ibid.*
[220] *Ibid*.
[221] *Ibid*, pp.21.
[222] *Ibid*, pp.27-28.

empathic identification with the suffering patient, now they had only to confront an inert, insensate mass that they could tinker with without emotional involvement."[223]

As it turns out, the earlier generation of surgeons had an important role in the procedure during the arrival of slaves to the New World: in the slave barracks, *barracoons*, "the surgeon's classificatory, quantifying, and authorizing gaze sought to single out and render disposable those deemed unsuitable, while imposing a certain visibility by way of the brand on the enslaved:"[224]

> And when the Europeans are to receive them, they are brought out into a large plain, where the surgeons examine every part of every one of them, to the smallest member, men and women being all stark naked. Such as are allowed good and sound, are set on one side, and the others by themselves; which slaves so rejected are there called Mackrons, being above thirty-five years of age, or defective in their limbs, eyes or teeth: or grown grey, or that have venereal disease, or any other infection.[225]

According to Foucault, the third type of colonization took shape in the classical age: "The internal colonization and confinement of vagrants, beggars, nomads, delinquents, prostitutes, etc."[226] The aim of all those procedures was to bring about "the maximum possible use of individuals. They make all of them usable."[227] The problem with the disciplinary system based on classification and rules of hierarchy is that it will sooner or later come up against the ones who cannot be classified, "those who escape supervision, those who cannot enter the system of

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[223] *Ibid*, pp.28.
[224] Simone Browne, *Dark Matters. On the Surveillance of Blackness*. Duke University Press, 2015, pp.95.
[225] *Ibid*, pp.94.
[226] Foucault, *Ibid*, pp.70.
[227] *Ibid*, pp.71.

distribution, in short, the residual, the irreducible, the unclassifiable, the inassimilable. This will be the stumbling block in the physics of disciplinary power."[228] Hence it is not the breaking of the law that defines delinquents, but the fact of them being "an inassimilable, irreducible group" that can "only appear when it is picked out in relation to a police discipline."[229] Within this construction, the delinquents are seen as

> the residues of society, colonized peoples as the residues of history, and the mad as the residues of humanity in general, all included together in the same category, all the individuals – delinquents, peoples to be colonized, or the mad – who can only be reconverted, civilized and subjected to orthopedic treatment if they are offered a family model.[230]

As we see, the esteemed surgeons of the New World managed to display the same control of themselves and distance towards the pain of the new slaves, as the harbingers of medical advancement. Nevertheless, according to Buck-Morss, these developments strongly affected the social imaginary in which new theories, such as the ones by Herbert Spencer and Emile Durkheim, "perceived society as an organism, literally a 'body' politics, in which the social practices of institutions (rather than, as in premodern Europe, the social ranks of individuals) performed the various organ functions."[231] The "techno-body of society… imagined to be as insensate to pain as the individual body under general anaesthetics, so that any number of operations could be performed upon the social body without needing to concern oneself lest the patient – society itself – 'utter piteous cries and moans.'"[232] Nevertheless, the most important effect this process had was on perception: "A tripartite splitting of experience into agency (the

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[228] *Ibid*, pp.53.

[229] *Ibid*, pp.54.

[230] *Ibid*, pp.109.

[231] Buck-Morss, pp.29.

[232] *Ibid*, pp.30.

operating surgeon), the object as hyle (the docile body of the patient), and the observer (who perceives and acknowledges the accomplished result)."[233] This "crisis in cognitive experience caused by the sensory alienation"[234] was a prerequisite, as Walter Benjamin attempted to warn us, for the humanity to start viewing its own destruction with enjoyment. What he also noticed was that with modernity, the effect of anaesthetizacion, or the experience of intoxication, was "not limited to drug-induced, biochemical transformations. Beginning in the nineteenth century, a narcotic was made out of reality itself."[235] The phantasmagoria of everyday life – the artificial lights of the cities, the seductive display of everyday objects that create a need to possess them, the screens into which modern man wishes to disappear, etc. – they all have the power to isolate individual bodies from the harsh reality of modern existence. It was in this context that fascist propaganda gave "the masses a double role, to be observer as well as the inert mass being formed and shaped,"[236] while the seeds for the reemergence of fascism are to be found in the sensory alienation introduced in modernity as a sign of normality. The surgeons of today will go one step further – the plastic surgeries are here to perform the final intervention on our bodies, bodies that uncannily all look the same but also prepare us for the next transition – into silicon (sex) robots.

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[233] *Ibid*.
[234] *Ibid*, pp.37.
[235] *Ibid*, pp.22.
[236] *Ibid*, pp.38.

III – JOIN THE PARTY OR: *DO YOU FIND THAT BEING AFRICAN AMERICAN HAS MORE ADVANTAGE OR DISADVANTAGE IN A MODERN WORLD?*

> "I can still hear Césare saying: "When I switch on my radio
> and hear that black men are being lynched in America,
> I say that they have lied to us: Hitler isn't dead.""
> Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

We shall now turn our gaze to the events happening at the Armitages' party, organized for their close circle of friends, as it later turns out, all members of the Order of The Coagula. There won't be any conversation Chris would be subjected to that would not refer to his 'blackness.' In Franz Fanon's words, "at the first white gaze, he feels the weight of his melanin."[237] A series of conversations Peele took from his own life experience create a very claustrophobic environment Chris will attempt to escape from. Nevertheless, his escape will be carefully planned too, hence there will be no way out of the horrors of the Armitages' home. Namely, the guests initiating conversations with him will all play ignorant even innocent in their racist assumptions, simultaneously displaying the power they possess. It will become clear only later that all this could be interpreted as being staged for him to seem as a 'normal' racist encounter with the members of the white privileged class, forcing him to temporarily leave the party so that they could play their bingo game – in which he, or more precisely, his body, is a price to win.

SPORT AND SEX: "THE HANDSOME NEGRO SAYS, 'FUCK YOU, MADAME'"

The initiators of the first conversation will be interested in his golfing skills, as one of the guests – a former professional golf player – proudly mentions his acquaintance with Tiger Woods. Already at the Armitages' dinner the previous evening Chris was

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[237] Fanon, *Ibid*, pp.128.

forced to explain his non-involvement with the sports as Brother-the-medical-student attempts to start a fight with him. According to this future medical professional, thanks to his 'genetic makeup,' and with some training, Chris could be turned into a 'f…… beast.' They will discuss different strategic possibilities various marshal art disciplines offer, but Chris will strongly reject all provocation that could lead to physical confrontation. When it comes to sports, even in Franz Fanon's times, in mid-twentieth century, the expression of existence that became "singularly eroticized"[238] was that of the black athlete. In recent analyses, the conclusion has been made that black male athlete is ""debased and reduced to the status of animal-like savagery" and "at the same time imbued with certain hyper-masculine qualities of virility, strength, power and aggression.""[239] When it comes to the representation of black masculinity, "the black body may connote naturalness, vitality, strength, eroticism and exoticism yet there is a consistent and systematic denial of these qualities as anything more than 'mere animal capacity.'"[240] While the white body is presented as "pure, rational and contained, qualities the black male body can never hope to achieve,"[241] the black body, "though impressive in its raw power, is by nature bestial and destructive, capable only of unthinking aggression."[242] Those stereotypes are both patronizing and demeaning, but the alien and unassimilable black body does become incorporated in white-dominated societies through popular culture, "primarily through the forums of sport and entertainment."[243] The great irony of slavery, as Daniel O'Brien shows, was that the "resilient black male body most desirable in economic terms was also the most feared as potentially

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[238] *Ibid*, pp.136.

[239] Ben Carrington in Jared Sexton, *Black Masculinity and the Cinema of Policing*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, pp.102.

[240] Daniel O'Brien, *Black Masculinity on Film: Native Sons and White Lies*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, pp.4.

[241] *Ibid*.

[242] *Ibid*.

[243] *Ibid*.

dangerous."[244]

Living in a society that "draws it strength by maintaining this complex, in a society that proclaims the superiority of one race over another,"[245] according to Fanon, the black man finds himself in a neurotic position overcame by a desire to be white. Raised within the racist cultural assumptions of the colonial system, black children "can partly resolve the tension between contempt for blackness and their own dark skins by coming to think of themselves, in some sense, as white:"[246] "Out of the blackest part of my soul, through the zone of hachures, surges up this desire to be suddenly *white*."[247]

In the context of French colonialism,[248] Fanon writes about the significance which the relationship between a black man, "spiced with a certain taste for arrogant revenge"[249] and a white woman had when seen as part of those aspirations to be recognized as a white man:

> But… who better than the white woman to bring this about? By loving me, she proves to me that I am worthy of a white love. I am loved like a white man.
> I am a white man.
> Her love opens the illustrious path that leads to total fulfilment…
> I espouse white culture, white beauty, white whiteness.
> Between these white breasts that my wandering hands fondle, white civilization and worthiness become

[244] *Ibid*, pp.13.

[245] Fanon*, Ibid*, pp.80.

[246] Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Foreword" in Fanon, *Ibid*, pp.VII.

[247] Fanon, *Ibid*, pp.45.

[248] "Be glad you're French, you lucky Blacks, even it is a bit tough, for in Americas, your counterparts are more unfortunate than you are." *Ibid*, pp.72.

[249] *Ibid*, pp.51.

mine.[250]

The theme of race and sexual phantasies leads us to the second conversation Chris was subjected to, when one of the posh ladies asks Rose, "Is it true? Is it better?" referring to the stereotype of sexual virility inscribed onto the black male bodies. In Fanon words, "the black man… is viewed as a penis symbol,"[251] the image of "Rodin's *Thinker* in erection – now there's a shocking image. One cannot decently have a hard-on everywhere."[252] And we can only think about the scandal Chris's reply might have had created if he used Fanon's words to answer her: "Look how handsome that Negro is." "The handsome Negro says, 'Fuck you,' madame."[253]

In his writings, Fanon explored the psychological damage colonialism and racism caused in both colonial peoples and in the colonizers, and he also elaborated a strong "critique of ethnopsychiatry… and of the Eurocentrism of psychoanalysis."[254] Since psychoanalysis "sets out to understand a given behavior within a specific group represented by the family,"[255] the task of the analyst is to find the analogy of an adult's neurosis as a repetition or a copy of conflicts born within the family constellations. Fanon stresses the fact that black children have a different context to deal with: "A normal black child, having grown up with a normal family, will become abnormal at the slightest contact with the white world."[256] In a society in which "the white family is the educating and training ground for entry into society"[257] there is a tendency to forget the fact that "neurosis is not a basic component of human reality. Whether you like it or not the Oedipus complex is far from

[250] *Ibid*, pp.45.

[251] *Ibid*, pp.137.

[252] *Ibid*, pp.143.

[253] *Ibid*, pp.94.

[254] Appiah, *Ibid*.

[255] Fanon, *Ibid*, pp.120.

[256] *Ibid*.

[257] *Ibid*, pp.127.

being a black complex."[258]

Nevertheless, there is a tendency to diagnose a black man as suffering from the "abandonment neurosis"[259] in his relationship with a white woman. This "lack of self-esteem as an object worthy of love"[260] due to the amount of melanin in his epidermis, will have serious consequences: "This lack of affective self-esteem always leads the abandonment neurotic to an extremely painful and obsessional feeling of exclusion, to never fitting in, and to feeling out of place."[261] In the language of the abandonment neurotic, being 'the Other' means "to always feel in an uncomfortable position, to be on one's guard, to be prepared to be rejected and … unconsciously do everything that's needed to bring about the anticipated catastrophe."[262] Hence, all the conversations Chris was forced to participate in had the role of producing a profound feeling of worthlessness, and although being a talented and successful photographer, the constant identification of him as being primarily black prompted him to try to escape and hide in the corner of 'his' room.

His attempt to have some privacy failed with the intrusion of the power from below – the faithful black maid who will, in another iconic scene, while simultaneously laughing and crying, admit that she indeed had unplugged his phone from the charger while cleaning. The character of the maid who, although black, does not hide her negative emotions regarding the fact of him being there with Rose, recalling a similar character in the *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967) – a maid who is even more opposed to the interracial relationship of her young mistress than her parents. In the Hollywood history, the 'mammy' is always depicted as "the faithful, obedient domestic servant… caring for the family in which

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[258] *Ibid*, pp.130.
[259] Germaine Guex in Fanon, *Ibid*, pp.54.
[260] *Ibid*, pp.57.
[261] *Ibid*.
[262] *Ibid*.

she is employed, often to the sacrifice of her own."[263] Her representation as "content, deferential, forgiving, nurturing and loyal to the family" could be interpreted as a way to "rationalize the economic exploitation and sexual subjugation of black domestic workers and of those who labor in low-paying conditions in the service sector."[264] Nevertheless, although strange gestures of the Armitages' maid could be interpreted as hostile in the given context, especially after the revelation that her body hosts the grandmother of the Armitages family, they were also the way for her old, lost subjectivity to try to force Chris to leave the house as soon as possible, something he fails to recognize on time.

THE BLACK DANDY

Chris will be extremely excited to spot another young black man among the guests, hoping that the conversation with him might bring some relief from all the tension he had to deal with. Nevertheless, the other guy will behave as zombified as both Armitages' black servants, raising suspicion in Chris even more. He will introduce him to his wealthy wife in her seventies and will abruptly end the conversation with Chris. The outfit of the young man could be interpreted as a reference to a black dandy, a famous character from the black minstrel from a century ago, taking us to the next important topic to address. Namely, blackface minstrelsy – black songs and dances performed by the white entertainers – "was the defining popular entertainment form of the nineteenth century in North America and Britain."[265] According to Harriet J. Manning, the politics of the early minstrel was very clear, branding black people as inferiors, while simultaneously expropriating and exploiting their culture. By fixating "particular attributes and physical characteristics and gestures onto blacks from the white

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[263] Simone Brown, *Ibid*, pp.58.
[264] *Ibid*.
[265] Harriet J. Manning, *Michael Jackson and the Blackface Mask*. Ashgate E-book, 2013, pp.1.

'outside,' minstrelsy worked… to keep blacks under tight control," that way "successfully confirmed and sustained the unequal distribution of power between races."[266] According to Daniel O'Brien, "any study of black male representation, regardless of medium, must acknowledge and address its earliest manifestation in American popular culture as blackface minstrelsy, probably the most contentious form of racialised performance."[267] This "quintessential expression of white male racist power and potency"[268] had as its main function to define and control the meanings of black identity and its depiction.

The classic minstrel show was a highly profitable commercial form. This "white theatrical parody of blacks" reduced "black people to stage-types and objects of ridicule. Beneath black masks or with faces smeared with burnt cork, white male actors parodied the music and dance that slaves had brought to the New World to form the basis of minstrelsy's comic skits, sketches and songs."[269] Jim Crow, a southern slave-type was the most common caricature of the minstrel show, who "despite his arduous life [as] the slave was always happy,"[270] with no social graces and simple and spontaneous art. The slave was "a lustful creature who indulged in wild and unconventional sexual exploits in keeping with his animality; unrefined, violent and drunk."[271] His counterpart, the dandy, "ridiculed blackness in another way" by parodying "free northern blacks' attempts at social betterment; the dandy was effeminate, refined and craved luxury."[272] The dandy was "a sociable man and attracted women, not in the slave's predatory way but through his charm and appearance."[273]

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[266] *Ibid*, pp.8.
[267] O'Brien, *Ibid*, pp.7.
[268] *Ibid*.
[269] *Ibid*, pp.19.
[270] *Ibid*, pp.20
[271] *Ibid*, pp.22.
[272] *Ibid*.
[273] *Ibid*, pp.24.

In the second phase of the development of the black minstrel, when the black performers where allowed on stage, they "had no choice but to reinforce"[274] the stereotypes. Nevertheless, some of the theoreticians see in their performances of racial fantasies also a creation of "a covert arena for black rebellion,"[275] representing "racial desire as much as it did dread and that it was this that initially fueled it."[276] This "arena within which the indulgence of sexual or otherwise prohibited material, feelings and fantasies could be enjoyed… in the process, formed moments of black power."[277] Blackface minstrel is seen in theory as multi-dimensional and oppositional in its meaning, prompting some to claim that it did not signal "so much racial disconnection as alliance," embodying "not just the permeability of the color line… but its actual negation."[278] It has been argued recently that "in sum, among predominantly lower-class whites and disdained blacks… the blackface minstrelsy in fact critiqued dominant racist ideology,"[279] being used as a class tactic: "Blacks and lower-class whites united to stage social protest. Through images of blackness, this new cross-racial alliance attacked majority values and critiqued society's quickly rigidifying class structure."[280]

Nevertheless, even though we could accept the notion that "while a culture was being contained, a culture was being contaminated,"[281] as well as the thesis about the permeability of the color line, it "was permeable in only one direction: … while minstrelsy allowed whites to play with blackness (and their own whiteness in the process), it failed to permit blacks the same luxury."[282] The minstrel show "controlled blackness by strict

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[274] *Ibid*.

[275] *Ibid*, pp.9.

[276] Lott and Lhamon in *Ibid*, pp.10.

[277] *Ibid*, pp.11.

[278] *Ibid*.

[279] *Ibid*, pp.12.

[280] *Ibid*.

[281] *Ibid*, pp.13.

[282] *Ibid*, pp.14.

definition into caricatures to be ridiculed"[283] and "it also worked to assuage a white unease over the same, for slavery very overtly undermined the creed on which America had hitherto prided itself: that every individual had the right to equality, advancement and upward mobility."[284] As a sort of a try-out for the Armitages' operation of permanent habitation, "minstrelsy provided an acceptable cover to try on black bodies."[285]

Interestingly enough, "by the early twentieth century, most blackface performers were Jewish. It has been argued that minstrelsy facilitated the integration of 'ethnic' European immigrants into a racialised social order and national identity that was fundamentally white supremacist."[286] Although the blackface mask was taken off the stage a century ago, it continued to appear, this time in the new art form – the movies: "The first multi-reel film, *Birth of the Nation* (1915), and the first sound movie, *The Jazz Singer* (1927), had as their narratives whites performing in blackface."[287] Even more, "Hollywood's biggest stars of its 'golden years' – including Judy Garland, Mickey Rooney, Betty Grable and Bing Crosby – all 'blacked up' in blackface specials or novelty numbers at some stage in their careers."[288] The blackface mask was finally withdrawn after the Second World War and the awakening of black militancy and mass protests.

Nevertheless, the destiny of black performers in media did not differ much in the post-war era, and "white appropriations of black cultural forms since this time have routinely denied blacks themselves both the largest financial rewards available and ownership of and credit for their widest disseminations."[289] Although black culture continued to be an important inspiration for

[283] *Ibid*, pp.28.
[284] *Ibid*, pp.29.
[285] *Ibid*, pp.29.
[286] Daniel O'Brien, *Ibid*, pp.16.
[287] Manning, *Ibid*, pp.52.
[288] *Ibid*, pp.53.
[289] *Ibid*.

the white entertainers of Hollywood, "their public recognition of this remained rare if not entirely absent."[290] The black marginalization continued during a constant "white corporate takeover."[291] It is even possible to claim "that all white-controlled screen depictions of black characters are in essence reconfigured forms of blackface, regardless of racially 'authentic' casting."[292] In over 120 years of the history of cinema, "black performers employed by a white-run industry are still regularly denied the range and depth afforded their white counterparts, a situation exacerbated by the dearth of black roles, or rather roles considered 'appropriate' for non-white actors."[293]

According to Jarred Sexton, all popular representations of black masculinity should be analyzed in the context of the ongoing disciplinarization, where "black masculine authority have become increasingly important to the cultural legitimization of executive power within the national security state and its leading role in the maintenance of an antiblack social order forged in the epoch of modern racial slavery."[294] [295] Film and television are to be regarded as aspects of the ideological state apparatus:

> For the reassertion of patriarchal values so vital to the maintenance of an embattled American global

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[290] *Ibid*, pp.57.

[291] *Ibid*, pp.59.

[292] O'Brien, *Ibid,* pp.19.

[293] *Ibid*, pp.20.

[294] Jared Sexton, *Ibid*, pp.vii.

[295] For instance, one of the most acclaimed actors, Denzel Washington "has been cast as an officer of the law sixteen times and, in related fashion, appeared as a current or former military officer another eight. To date, he has appeared in uniform in roughly half of the forty-odd films he has completed since his 1981 debut in Michael Schultz's *Carbon Copy*. As noted, nearly every noteworthy black male actor of the post-civil rights era has made this professional rite of passage as Officer, Detective, Sergeant, Lieutenant, or Chief. All have played roles as either a cop or a soldier." *Ibid*, pp.7.

hegemony – militarily, economically, politically – requires the simultaneous preservation of an antiblack matrix of value deeply rooted in American history and a cultural myth of racial equality and liberal democracy supposed to distinguish the USA from the rest of the world.[296]

THE BLACK EYE

As Foucault had pointed out, the disciplinary power has a "panoptic character,"[297] where anyone can occupy the place of power "and power is not the property of anyone since everyone can enter the tower and supervise the way in which power is exercised, so that power is constantly subject to control,"[298] paradoxically making the exercise of power 'democratized.' Important fact to have in mind is that panopticon actually means two things: "It means that everything is seen all the time, but it also means that the power exercised is only ever an optical effect,"[299] leading us to the next conversation Chris will be having, the one with a distinguished blind art gallerist, who will openly share his admiration of Chris' photographic work, or more precisely, of his 'eye.'

As it turns out, the history behind a black person's eye is nothing but charged, with the act of looking having an important place as part of political agency. Namely, while black people used to be ""brutally punished for looking, for appearing to observe the whites they were serving, as only a subject can observe or see," the violent ways in which blacks were denied the right to look back had produced, in bel hooks' words, "an overwhelming longing to look, a rebellious desire, an oppositional gaze:" "By courageously looking, we defiantly declared: 'Not only will I stare. I want my

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[296] *Ibid*, pp.viii.
[297] Foucault, *Ibid*, pp.52.
[298] *Ibid*, pp.77.
[299] *Ibid*.

look to change reality.'""[300] This 'eyeballing disposition' of a stare disrupts racializing surveillance, as in the society in which we live today "the seeing eye is white,"[301] something Chris persistently tests by the use of his camera: one of his 'escape' strategies at the party was to take photos of the guests and his surroundings. In the bingo game, it is the bling gallerist who will win by bidding the most, being the lucky one to continue his existence in Chris' body, exploiting the eye he admired so greatly. The question remains if the new eyes would change the way he sees the world, the sensitivity Chris' work shows from the perspective of his own existence. Since for Fanon, "the *eye* is not only a mirror, but a correcting mirror. The *eye* must enable us to correct cultural mistakes. I do not say the eyes; I say the *eye* - and we know what the eye reflects: not the calcarine fissure, but the even glow that wells up out of van Gogh's reds..."[302]

When it comes to the question of the role of photography in the black history, some voices see in it a strong liberating and democratizing potential, believing that the public would act in defense of black civil rights when confronted with the evidence of antiblack violence. Nevertheless, Autumn Womack disagrees with this "confidence in visual technology's capacity to incite political transformation, even as 'the overwhelming evidence of history' instructs us that visual media has never been able to undermine the workings of antiblack violence."[303] Instead, the task should be to "imagine and envision the forms of black subjectivity that disrupt the photographic frame"[304] and focus on examining the manners in which "particular media and mediums enable or foreclose the long history of structural oppression."[305] Hence Chris's 'innocent' photographs of the party will turn out to be his main evidence once

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[300] bel hooks in Simone Brown, *Ibid*, pp.58.
[301] Fiske in Simone Brown, *Ibid.*, pp.17.
[302] Fanon, *Ibid*, pp.178.
[303] Autumn Womack, "Visuality, Surveillance, and The Afterlife of Slavery." *American Literary History*, vol.29, no.1, 2017, pp.2
[304] *Ibid*, pp.5.
[305] *Ibid*, pp.9.

the crimes had been revealed, used to identify all perpetuators, all members of the secret order. Nevertheless, the belief that the system will do everything to protect the oppressed ones is nothing but naïve, as the recent laws requiring police officers in the US to wear body cameras are balanced out with the "frequent failures of those cameras to either remain attached to the body or record the scenario at all."[306]

THE OBAMA EFFECT

Let us now examine the second part of the title of this section – the question "Do you find that being African American has more advantage or disadvantage in a modern world?" posed to Chris by a Japanese guest at the party, which can only sound ironic having in mind the current state of things in the US. It also brings up the words of Immanuel Wallerstein and his analysis of racism and ethnicity, in which he reminds us of the decision of the South African state to "designate visiting Japanese businessmen not as Asians (which local Chinese are considered to be) but rather as 'honorary White.'"[307] He sees this decision as an illustration of the fact that "race and therefore racism, is <u>the</u> expression, the promoter and the consequence of the geographical concentrations associated with the axial division of labor."[308] Historically changeable application of race to different categories of people can also be found in the fact that "prior to 1940s, it was still very common to hear members of 'new immigrant' groups such as Italian, Irish, and Polish referred to as different *races*, distinct from the dominant race of Anglo-Saxons."[309] Wallerstein reminds us of the fact that "the number of categories, indeed the fact of any categorization, is a

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[306] *Ibid*, pp.12.
[307] Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Construction of Peoplehood: Racism, Nationalism, Ethnicity." In: Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*. London, New York: Verso, 1991, pp.80.
[308] *Ibid*.
[309] David Brackett, *Ibid,* pp.173.

social decision. What we observe is that, as the polarization increased, the number of categories became fewer and fewer."[310]

The posed question by the 'honorary White' guest must be examined in the political context in which *Get Out* was written and filmed, namely the second term of the presidency of Barack Obama, when the 'whiter' part of the world assumed not only that racism was thing of the past, but that the beneficial consequences of his presidency were directly felt by the African-American community. Father-the-neurosurgeon openly shows his support of Obama, stating that he would have voted the third time for his most favorite president if there was a chance, a fact that does not interfere with the criminality of the operations he is subjecting his black victims to (ironically, his interventions could even be interpreted as having too much love for the black bodies). Unfortunately, as the facts show, Obama's presidency was used by the disciplinary power to tighten things even more for the African-American community, but for all other oppressed bodies as well, through the new laws that support privacy invasion, new surveillance systems, and additional limitations to personal freedoms.[311] In other words, "the Obama Administration, rather than fulfilling the promise of freedom, presents us with the paradoxical achievements of the perfect slave."[312] Hence, one of

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[310] Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Construction of Peoplehood: Racism, Nationalism, Ethnicity." In: Balibar and Wallerstein, *Ibid*, pp.80.

[311] "The official response of the first black male president to the openly racist murder of a black male teenager was to redouble ex officio efforts among the rest of society to convince black male teenagers that they are educable and employable and therefore valued by the rest of society; as if the spectacular violence of a vigilante assault were a symptom of the victim's education level or employment status – a slave's prayer if ever there was one." Sexton, *Ibid*, pp.xi.

[312] "It was also the season that witnessed the not-guilty verdict – widely expected, though no less enraging – in the trial of neighborhood watchman George Zimmerman for the 2012 murder of Trayvon Martin, a black male teenager, in Sanford, Florida. Less publicized was the contemporaneous trial of Officer Joseph Weekley in Michigan for the death of Aiyana Stanley-Jones, a seven-year-old black girl who was shot dead as she lay

the answers to the 'honorary White's' question could be the following:

> The Malcolm X Grassroots Movement (MXGM) reported in 2012 that, on average, someone directly employed or indirectly protected by the federal, state, or local government kills a black person in the United States nearly every day. We have since learned, thanks to international investigative journalism, that the number represents a gross undercount. (…) Black folks are "BEING KILLED FOR EXISTING." Not for walking or driving or breaking the law; not for failing to work productively or for lacking proper documents; not for inhabiting valued land or possessing scarce resources; not for subscribing to a political ideology or adhering to a religious faith; not for doing any particular thing or being any particular place; but, rather, for being *at all*.[313]

Adding to this, "gross health inequality, for instance, annually kills more black people than are lost to homicide in an entire decade."[314] They "continue to be policed at an alarming percentage, disproportionately incarcerated, disenfranchised by partial voting rights, and face institutional and systemic barriers that at times deny equal access to employment, job promotion, and formal education."[315] Since the arrival of the first African slaves to America in 1619, the issue of control has been a permanent problem to be solved. For instance, in the *Willie Lynch Writings: Let's Make a Slave* written in 1712, one can find the instructions for the slave owner on how to "break Black male slaves from their

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sleeping on her grandmother's couch during a midnight raid conducted by the Detroit Police Department's Special Response Team in 2010." *Ibid*, pp.2.

[313] *Ibid*, pp.3.

[314] *Ibid*, footnote 1.

[315] William T. Hoston, *Black Masculinity in the Obama Era. Outliers of Society.* Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, pp.3.

natural state of masculinity. This was done to sustain mental and physical control over Black male slaves, ultimately reducing them to a mere shell of themselves."[316] If installed correctly, the method guaranteed to "control the slaves for at least 300 years."[317] Nevertheless, the facts show that there are more black men "now facing jail than enslaved in 1850."[318]

Hence, one of the most defining moments for black Americans in the current century, the 2008 presidential election of Obama, proved to be more controversial than previously anticipated. Namely, "many Black males were distressed by Obama's election and others did not believe he was 'Black enough' to hold such a position in Black history."[319] The 'Obama Effect' has not had the expected positive influence and the general feeling of 'invisibility' turned out to be the prevailing one in the African American community.[320] On one side, Obama was perceived as not sharing "a heritage with the majority of black Americans, who are descendants of plantation slaves,"[321] while on the other, the one-drop rule applied in the US past according to which "a single drop of 'Black blood' classified someone as Black" meant that he was to be considered a black American. When it comes to the question of what it means to be considered black in today's America, Obama himself defined in one of the interviews the choice young black men believed to have today when it comes to options in life –

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[316] *Ibid*, pp.4.

[317] *Ibid*.

[318] *Ibid*, pp.5.

[319] *Ibid*, pp.6. "His biracial heritage that includes an African father from Kenya and a White mother from Kansas made many in the Black community skeptical of his allegiance and commitment to representing Black interests." *Ibid*, pp.12.

[320] This seems to be recalling Fanon's description from almost a century ago, "A feeling of inferiority? No, a feeling of not existing. Sin is black as virtue is white. All those white men, fingering their guns, can't be wrong. I am guilty. I don't know what of, but I know I know I'm a wretch." Fanon, *Ibid*, pp.118.

[321] *Ibid*, pp.13.

ending up "in jail or dead."[322] Growing up in a school system that does not teach their own history,[323] mostly in households without biological fathers, "gang membership represents a sense of family:"[324] "They grow up in environments that discourage their ambitions, make their goals seem unrealistic, and highlight the struggle of overcoming their circumstances."[325]

As it turns out, many believe that the election of Obama made racism worse: "In spite of the welcome positive image of President Obama as a model of racial progress, participants [of the research] agreed that there appears to be a heightened level of covert discrimination and racism toward them since his election."[326] The outrageous killings of young black men by "the hands of overzealous law enforcement figures in positions of authority or power"[327] added the feeling of being a moving target in White America to the list of the 'advantages' they have to deal with. To add to this, "the promised redistribution of material goods and services in reparation for several centuries of enslavement was also postponed indefinitely."[328] Although one can claim that "US capitalism is racial capitalism,"[329] the key point to keep in mind here are the following words of Franz Fanon: "The black problem is not just about Blacks living among Whites, but about the black man exploited, enslaved, and despised by a colonialist and capitalist society that happens to be white."[330] That is why Father-the-neurosurgeon wishes he could have voted for Obama for the third time.

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[322] *Ibid*, pp.85.
[323] "[Schools] teach us nothing but how to be slaves and hard workers for white people." *Ibid*, pp.20.
[324] *Ibid*, pp.84.
[325] *Ibid*, pp.117.
[326] *Ibid*, pp.125.
[327] *Ibid*., pp.129.
[328] Sexton, *Ibid*, pp.1.
[329] Robinson in Sexton, *Ibid*, pp.90.
[330] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, pp.178.

What is this 'modern world' our dear 'honorary White' mentions in his question? In his analysis of capitalism and racism, Immanuel Wallerstein underlines the paradox in the main definition of the modern world – "the universal brotherhood of man"[331] – which contains a phrase "masculine in gender, thereby implicitly excluding or relegating to a secondary sphere all who are female,"[332] hence the issues of race cannot be resolved without resolving the issues of gender as well. The modern world is nowadays reduced to the image of the capitalist world-economy, "built on the endless accumulation of capital."[333] The main mechanism making this possible is "the commodification of everything. These commodities flow in a world market in the form of goods, of capital and of labour-power. Presumably, the freer the flow, the greater the degree of commodification."[334] Anything that might restrain the flow must be eliminated, while it is as a system based on the ideology that stimulates individual talents and meritocracy. Although we are made to believe the opposite, according to Wallerstein, meritocracy is "politically one of the least stable systems. And it is precisely because of this political fragility that racism and sexism enter the picture."[335]

Within the context of the system that permanently expands itself, racism is more than disdain and fear of someone based by genetic criteria. In fact, according to this, xenophobia should be seen as a contradiction in the capitalist system, since "in all prior historical systems [it] had one primary behavioral consequence: the ejection of the 'barbarian' from the physical locus of the community."[336] While gaining the 'purity' of environment through this 'ejection,' something is inevitably lost: the labor-power, and

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[331] Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Ideological Tensions of Capitalism: Universalism versus Racism and Sexism." In: Balibar and Wallerstein, *Ibid*, pp.29.
[332] *Ibid.*
[333] *Ibid*, pp.31.
[334] *Ibid*.
[335] *Ibid*, pp.32.
[336] *Ibid*, pp.33.

capitalism needs all the labor-power it can find. Hence, total ejection out of the system is pointless. With the aim of maximizing the accumulation of capital, the costs of production must be minimized as well as the costs of political disruption. Hence, "racism is the magic formula that reconciles these objectives."[337] In the historical context, some groups break apart and new ones are born, "but there are always some who are 'niggers.' If there are no Blacks or too few to play the role, one can invent 'White niggers.'"[338] Unfortunately, as we have seen, this is still not a fact that could make US African-American community feel better. According to Wallerstein, "racism is meant to keep people inside the work system, not eject them from it"[339] and large population in the US will be giving its contribution through the lucrative incarceration system, the exploitation most of the world outside the fence will see as justifiable.

In his discussion on neo-racism, Etienne Balibar defines racism as "a true 'total social phenomenon'"[340] which combines practices, discourses and representations "articulated around stigmata of otherness" in a "network of affective stereotypes which enables us to give an account of the formation of a racist community."[341] In the context of the present-day Europe and European Union, we are witnessing "the functioning of the category of immigration as a substitute for the notion of race" where the "'sociological' signifier definitively replaced the 'biological' one as the key representation of hatred and fear of the other."[342] This new type of racism is "racism without races,"[343] racism of the era of so-called decolonization. Its dominant theme is not biological heredity, but "the insurmountability of cultural

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[337] *Ibid*.

[338] *Ibid*, pp.34.

[339] *Ibid*.

[340] Etienne Balibar, "Is There a 'Neo-Racism'?" In: Balibar and Wallerstein, *Ibid*, pp.17.

[341] *Ibid*, pp.18.

[342] *Ibid*, pp.21.

[343] *Ibid*.

differences; the harmfulness of abolishing frontiers, the incompatibility of life-styles and traditions."[344] The 'superior' cultures of Western Europe are there to educate the human race while assimilating dominated populations and ranking them "in terms of their greater or lesser aptitude for – or resistance to assimilation."[345] They all promote "'individual' enterprise, social and political individualism,"[346] interestingly, "directly coinciding at points with the political objectives of an aggressive neo-liberalism."[347]

This inevitably leads us back to Fanon whose similarity to "Marx goes up to the point where both consider revolution as the natural outcome of the dialectical process occurring within the capitalist system. The capitalist system, according to both theorists, contains the seeds of its own destruction."[348] By locating racism as the founding element of capitalism, the new space for anti-capitalist strategies open. In John Carlos Rowe's words, "Slavery was not an oversight of the Founding Fathers, subsequently corrected in that second revolution, the U.S. Civil War and abolition; slavery remains an integral part of a capitalist system dependent on racial, sexual, and class hierarchies to maintain its power."[349] In the following chapter, we'll be interested in the escape strategies as proposed by *Get Out*.

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[344] *Ibid*.
[345] *Ibid*, pp.24.
[346] *Ibid*.
[347] *Ibid*, pp.26.
[348] Dennis Forsythe, "Franz Fanon: Black Theoretician." *The Black Scholar*, March 1970, pp.4.
[349] In Jared Sexton, *Ibid*, pp.90, footnote 2.

IV – GETTING OUT: ON VIOLENCE AND EXIT STRATEGIES

"My shout rings out more violently:
I am a nigger, I am a nigger, I am a nigger.
And it's my brother living his neurosis
to the extreme who finds himself paralyzed:
The Negro: I can't ma'am.
Lizzie: Why not?
The Negro: I can't shoot white folks.
Lizzie: Really! They have no qualms doing it!
The Negro: They are white folks, ma'am."
Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

An important element in the transplantation as performed by Dr Armitages is the compliance of the host body: namely, for a successful transfer, both participants have to agree on it – in the case of the host black body, it will happen in the form of a paralysis under hypnosis, but it will still count. After learning about this, while incarcerated in the basement, Chris develops a strategy of his escape. Namely, in order to prevent the occurrence of the hypnotic trance in which he will be forced to agree to all terms of this inhuman contract, he needs to block out the main sensory input – the sound. He will find a solution by using the cotton from the armchair to create earplugs; a symbol with such a strong reference to the history of slavery and cotton exploitation that no explanation seems needed. After managing to stay 'sane' and fake his hypnotic trance, he will use all available objects around him to fight against the Armitages, being forced to kill each one of them in order to stay alive.

By employing the tactical thinking of martial arts, he will need to predict every next move of his capturers in order to outmaneuver them. The grand finale is a scene with Rose who comes out of the house with the shotgun and begins to shoot from the porch – another iconic reference to American history. After being chased by Grandfather-the-runner, Chris remembers the

shock tactics that caused a seizure in the black dandy at the party from the phone camera flash when he took a photo of him. As it turns out, the flash had the power to temporarily reactivate the host's mind in the zombified body, and it will have the same effect on the Grandfather-the-runner: he will shoot Rose instead of Chris and commit suicide. Nevertheless, Rose will still be alive in the moment a police car approaches the house and will use her last card, pretending to be an innocent victim. A game she would have had undoubtedly won, with all the blame automatically being put on the only young black man at the crime scene; nevertheless, it turns out to be Chris's best friend, the TSA officer, who arrives to the scene to save him. The game seems definitely over.

We could say that this last part of the movie, Chris's escape, is the 'real' horror, with all the violence, blood, knives, smashed heads we are force to see. It is also here that we witness the strongest expression of his individual agency. In order to free himself, the patient had to get rid of his doctors, the slave had to kill his masters. When discussing the problem of liberation under French colonialism, Franz Fanon underlines the fact that the act of liberation of the black man came from the outside: "As master, the white man told the black man: "You are now free." But the black man does not know the price of freedom because he has never fought for it. From time to time he fights for liberty and justice, but it's always for a white liberty and a white justice, in other words, for values secreted by his masters."[350] Nevertheless, in comparison to the black Frenchman, he sees a positive difference in the example of the black Americans who "are living a different drama. In the United States the black man fights and is fought against. There are laws that gradually disappear from the constitution. There are other laws that prohibit certain forms of discrimination. And we are told that none of this is given free."[351] An important difference between Marx and Fanon is exactly in the issue of violence: "While Marx admits the possibility of a non-violent

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[350] Fanon, *Ibid*, pp.195.
[351] *Ibid*, pp.196.

revolution in the cases of Britain and the United States, Fanon does not admit this possibility."[352] As it turned out, "Che Guevara and Mao T'se Tung both accept this view (or fact) that "only armed struggle will bring about the defeat of the occupying nation. […] History shows that no colonialist nation is willing to withdraw without having exhausted all its possibilities of maintaining itself.""[353]

This type of the struggle means employing guerilla strategies, creative tactics Chris was more than able to invent on the spot. If he had waited for his parents-in-law to rediscover their humanity, his escape attempt would end in a much different way. Historically, as we are reminded by both Fanon and Wallerstein, this feeling of entrapment the enslaved and oppressed have been forced into "causes anger, anger at the whites for their attitudes, anger at oneself for being despicable and for allowing oneself to be despised."[354] As a final argument, Fanon stresses the beneficial psychological effect this type of violence has on the individual level: "At the level of individuals, violence disintoxicates. It frees the colonial victim from his inferiority complex, from his attitudes of inaction and despair. It makes him fearless, restores his self-respect."[355] The unique feeling of being really alive, "his explosion – killing – verified that he was alive, present, here: "I didn't know I was really alive in this world until I felt things hard enough to kill for them.""[356]

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[352] Forsythe, *Ibid,* pp.8.

[353] *Ibid*, pp.9.

[354] Immanuel Wallerstein, "Franz Fanon: Reason and Violence." *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, vol.15, 1970, pp.224.

[355] Fanon in Wallerstein, *Ibid*, pp.226.

[356] Fanon in Kara Keeling, ""In the Interval": Franz Fanon and the "Problems" of Visual Representation." *Qui Parle*, vol.13, no.2, 2003, pp.104.

FANON'S VIOLENCE

Considering our main analysis, it is important to stress out the importance Fanon gave to culture, and especially to film as a main cultural form for the production and circulation of the representation of the 'Black imago.' His opinion was that a simple reformation of the ways in which black people are represented, such as a promotion of more positive images, "merely makes the Black feel better about himself,"[357] but it does not resolve the conflict created due to the violent event of colonization and enslavement. With every appearance of this division the violence becomes conserved. Within this construction, "even the Black's most pronounced reaction to his oppression, exploitation, and dehumanization, his explosion, already has been accounted for within the cycle's mechanisms. The Black's explosion… is anticipated and, hence, contained within the cycle."[358] By merely reacting to the world's anticipation, the hellish cycle continues, the young black man is not set free: "Instead, it fulfills and initiates the infernal circle in which the world waits for the Black's explosion."[359] He is still a toy in the white man's hands.

Instead, Fanon advises us to demand visual representation that will articulate an understanding of the temporality of colonial existence: "Metaphorically speaking, the Black's cage is itself temporal: the past traumas of colonization and slavery continue to affect and shape the present at the expense of the Black's future liberation."[360] His well-known statement, "I cannot go to a film without seeing myself. I wait for me. In the interval, just before the film starts, I wait for me,"[361] signals the decisive role "in finessing, challenging, or quite (im)possibly *exploding* colonial reality's cycle of anticipation and violence"[362] he ascribed to film. Fanon

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[357] *Ibid*, pp.102.

[358] *Ibid*, pp.104.

[359] *Ibid*, pp.105.

[360] *Ibid*, pp.103.

[361] *Ibid*, pp.107.

[362] *Ibid*.

demands the explosion of the colonial mode of representation of otherness, by revealing its mechanism, "describing how they support and perpetuate inhuman relations – and by insisting on the existence within colonial reality of a temporal structure in which the impossible possibility – justice, perhaps – is yet to come."[363] In Balibar's words, "For the destruction of the racist complex presupposes not only the revolt of its victims, but the transformation of the racists themselves and, consequently, the internal decomposition of the community created by racism."[364] Without racists, there is no racism. Hence the option for a sequel announced as a possibility by Peele himself: Chris might have been saved by his best friend, but in the hands of a TSA officer, he might not be truly liberated yet.

THE COMEDY WITH THE TSA

The character of Chris's best friend Rod, the officer of TSA (The United States Transportation Security Administration) has not only a crucial role in 'getting him out' of the Armitages property, but also represents a comic influx in the narrative, leading us to conclude that it is not the horror part of the story we should take with us, but the irony of existence when it comes to young black men in the present-day US. The TSA is a federal agency created in 2001 as a response to 9/11: "First an agency under the operation of the Department of Transportation and then moved to the Department of Homeland Security in 2003, the TSA now oversees security operations in mass transit systems including rail, aviation, seaports, pipelines, and other modes of transportation."[365] Even though "the black and sassy TSA agent might be a signifier of state power, that power is merely perceived."[366] As it turns out, it is one

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[363] *Ibid*, pp.110.
[364] Etienne Balibar, "Is There a 'Neo-Racism'?" In: Balibar and Wallerstein, *Ibid*, pp.18.
[365] Brown, *Ibid*, pp.147.
[366] *Ibid*, pp.152.

of the most precarious professions, being subjected to unfairly discipline, highly exploited, and with the highest rate on-the-job injuries.[367]

Although depicted as a comic character in the movie with an elaborate collection of conspiracy theories, there is no joke with the TSA officers – anyone who has travelled in the US remembers the warning sign posted at every airport: "Making jokes or statements regarding bombs and/or threats during the screening process may be grounds for both civil and criminal penalties and could cause you to miss your flight." In Lauren L. Martin's words, "the regulation of joking enforces, and thereby normalizes, a particular relationship between speaker, sign, and referent. As such, language remains a privileged register through which subjects are interpellated by security regimes."[368] It is this particular understanding of the role of language that will save Chris. Rod might have helped him due to their friendship but, ironically, the application of the TSA methods will bring him to a different understanding of the situation in which his friend finds himself.

In the post 9/11 America, "the collection of biometric data, the tracking of transaction data, and newly linked state intelligence and crime databases mark a change in the spatiality of immigration and border enforcement, producing a border that is 'everywhere

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[367] "In a 2004 survey of TSA screeners regarding job satisfaction, 73 percent disagreed that "disciplinary actions are applied fairly to employees" and 59 percent reported that they were considering leaving the TSA. Of the over seventeen thousand screeners who responded to the survey, 59 percent disagreed that TSA employees are "protected from health and safety hazards on the job." With the repetitive lifting of passengers' heavy carry-on bags to perform luggage searches and the possibility of being hurt by sharp objects during these searches, on- the- job injuries for TSA screeners were among the highest of any federal employees in 2004, with a rate of 36 percent." *Ibid*.
[368] Lauren L. Martin, "Bombs, bodies, and biopolitics: securitizing the subject at the airport security checkpoint." *Social & Cultural Geography*, vol.11, no.1, 2010, pp.21.

and nowhere.'"[369] Behind the TSA actions stands the theory of dealing with Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS), signaling the constant instability and changeability of the 'objects'[370] they are instituted to both examine and protect: "Transportation, TSA, and terrorists operate as networks and, in so doing, display the characteristics of CAS."[371] Their concept of layered security, an application of various methods to identify a threat in a random manner signals "the assumption that surveillance techniques fail,"[372] hence all their activities will be focused on discovering the holes in the surveillance systems.

One of the main questions to be asked related to the 'bomb joke' warnings is why is such a seemingly insignificant detail given so much importance? In other words, "why bother prohibiting something that is easily resolved through physical evidence? What makes irony, sarcasm, or humor about bombs so dangerous?"[373] In Martin's words, the bomb joke should be understood "as a declaration, not to the presence of a weapon as TSA's instrumental interpretation would imply, but of the passenger's cooperation with TSA."[374] By uttering those words, "our travelers imitate a terrorist attack, evoking the same affective response as an attack, regardless of whether or not the threat is real. […] The bomb joke works like a false alarm, but an alarm all the same."[375] Underneath this reasoning is the fact of the TSA belief where everyone is a possible

[369] *Ibid*, pp.18.

[370] "Not only have jokes about bombs been banned from security operations, but security officers also opt to keep a professional distance from their "customers." As one security officer told us, security staff try not to engage emotionally with passengers, opting instead to "treat them like objects." Matthias Leese and Anja Koenigseder, "Humor at the Airport? Visualization, Exposure, and Laughter in the "War on Terror."" *International Political Sociology* no.9, 2015, pp.45.

[371] Martin, *Ibid*, pp.22.

[372] *Ibid*, pp.23.

[373] *Ibid*, pp.26.

[374] *Ibid*, pp.28.

[375] *Ibid*.

terrorist, the fundamental "contingency of the subject,"[376] while "joking confuses the relationship between the body, intention, and future action on which security practice relies."[377] The ongoing 'war on terror' must remain serious, and the 'bomb joke' is most certainly diminishing this. In a similar manner, Rod will take seriously everything he hears from Chris as a support for his own grand white conspiracy theory, something the (three black) police officers will laugh at when he contacts them for help.

The recent addition to the specializations of the TSA officers were the Behavior Detention Officers (BFOs), "TSA employees specially trained to read physiological evidence of fear in the unintentional movements of passengers' bodies,"[378] or behavioral profiling.[379] At the airport, it is one's body that functions "as one's passport."[380] Nevertheless, the new development means reading faces not as marks of identity, but to detect their emotions and intentions through the program known as Screening Passengers by Observation Techniques (SPOT). Everyone can be betrayed by their body.[381] As a result of a decades-long fruitful collaboration between the American Psychological Association,[382] "agents are

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[376] *Ibid*, pp.29.

[377] *Ibid*.

[378] *Ibid*, pp.25.

[379] "Highly criticized systems such as the Computer Assisted Passenger Prescreening System (CAPPS and CAPPS II) developed by the Transport Security Administration (TSA) created profiles of potential behavioral and personal indicators – a model of what someone likely to commit terrorist activity would act like and be like." Peter Adey, "Facing airport security: affect, biopolitics, and the preemptive securitisation of the mobile body." *Environment and Planning: Society and Space* vol.27, 2009, pp.278.

[380] *Ibid*, pp.277.

[381] "Cynthia Weber describes as a wider "moral geography of terror" to "securitize the unconscious" – a preemptive justice of sorts, "through which all acts and now thoughts and prethoughts must be first securitized and then and only then formally judged."" *Ibid*, pp.275-6.

[382] "Working closely with the American Psychological Association, the partnership between the Department for Homeland Security, psychology

trained to look for how feelings surface in minute and instantaneous gestures drawn on suspect's faces such as pursed lips, raised eyebrows, and many more, especially those emotions people try to conceal."[383] And it is exactly this reading of the micro-expressions, "body movements that occur when one tries to hide an emotion"[384] that will serve as a signal to both Chris and Rod that something is not 'right' with all the black persons Chris is encountering. Although their words state something else, the zombified bodies are failing their owners. As we learn, SPOT is advertised as a way to supersede the racial and cultural imprints on bodies, and look for the "biological indicators of fear, anxiety, and conflict which are instinctive and uncontrollable:" "Described as emotion 'leakages', "guilt, fear of being caught, and disgust" are emotions which the body cannot contain."[385] For our own safety, we are to be protected from the threat posed by the indeterminacy of our bodies. It is from the zombies in each one of us the TSA is protecting us from. Each one of us might turn into something threatening, and the detection officers have the ability to use special machines as well as verbal interrogation to locate the problem.[386]

Nevertheless, one should bear in mind the fact that "just because we are told that behavioral detection apparently overcomes racial profiling does not mean that it does."[387] As many research

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professionals, and academics demonstrates an ongoing complicity of psychology with various processes of militarisation and securitisation. Practices ranging from torture, interrogation, to strategic bombing have been informed by this expertise." *Ibid*, pp.280, footnote 7.

[383] *Ibid*, pp.280.

[384] *Ibid*.

[385] *Ibid*, pp.284.

[386] "The SDS-VR-1000 uses other kinds of monitoring by, most notably, asking for verbal responses to its questions. The questions posed usually encompass particular words that are intended to agitate the guilty respondents and activate certain bodily responses. SDS has developed a word library which it believes only terrorists will respond to. These include words that name specialised materials relevant to terrorist activities such as the making of a bomb." *Ibid*, pp.287.

[387] *Ibid*, pp.291.

has shown, "women, minorities, and the poor tend to be subjected to greater transportation burdens than their male, White, and relatively affluent counterparts."[388] Also, "black women who were U.S. citizens had the highest likelihood of being strip-searched and were 9 times more likely than White women who were U.S. citizens to be x-rayed after being frisked or patted down."[389] One of the famous cases, the incident involving a public person, was of Beyoncé's sister Solange Knowles, whose hair was searched after going through the security checkpoint at an airport in 2012. Other similar cases report on numerous searches of people's Afros "reportedly for explosives."[390] Actually, a connection between modern surveillance systems is strongly related to slave trade, with several recent theorists correcting this history by offering evidence of slavery's constitutive force in contemporary biometrics discourse and TSA politics. Nevertheless, already Fanon gave a brief overview of embodied psychic effects of surveillance in the context of racial segregation in the US as including "nervous tensions, insomnia, fatigue, accidents, lightheadedness, and less control over reflexes. Nightmares too."[391] Hence, according to Simone Brown, instead of seeing surveillance "as something inaugurated by new technologies… to see it as ongoing is to insist that we factor in how racism and antiblackness undergird and sustain the intersecting surveillances of our present order."[392] As it turns out, "surveillance is nothing new to black folks. It is the fact of antiblackness."[393]

Namely, the main aim during the time of slavery was to secure that no slave escaped, and there was even a condition, an illness named drapetomania, the "diagnoses of the slave's desire for freedom as the so-called sickness of the runaway."[394] Brown

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[388] Leese and Koenigseder, *Ibid*, pp.44.
[389] Simone Brown, *Ibid*, pp.132.
[390] *Ibid*.
[391] *Ibid*, pp.6.
[392] *Ibid*, pp.8-9.
[393] *Ibid*, pp.10.
[394] *Ibid*, pp.111.

asks us to discard the view according to which slave ships are the invention of the past, but instead see them "as an operation of the power of modernity, and as part of the violent regulation of blackness."[395] An important episode occurred during the travel of the English social reformer Jeremy Bentham from England to Russia in August 1785, and it is while in Russia that he conceived the idea of the panopticon in a series of letters. While trying to reach Constantinople, he joined the ship with "24 passengers on the deck, all Turks; besides 18 young Negresses (slaves) under the hatches."[396] The symbolism of this scene prompts Brown to offer a new reading of the modern surveillance systems as the ones hiding black slaves under the hatches: the slave ships were a "slow-motion death" but also a "mobile, seagoing prison at a time when the modern prison had not yet been established on land."[397]

In the slave system, black children, women, and men were subjected to very elaborate administrative procedures, undoubtedly violent as well: "Branding irons fashioned out of silver wire, ships' registers in which African lives were recorded as units of cargo, or listed alongside livestock on slave auction notices, and census categories, estate records, and plantation inventories that catalogued enslaved people as merchandise."[398] Any examination of historical records reveal a carefully planned operation, where the disciplinary power over slaves operated in a managerial manner "by way of set rules, instructions, routines, inspection, hierarchical observation, the timetable, and the examination."[399] In a similar manner, an elaborate system of tracking down the fugitives was developed as well, "the 'information technologies' of the written slave pass, wanted posters and advertisements for runaway slaves and servants, and organized slave patrols as key features of this system."[400]

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[395] *Ibid*, pp.24.
[396] *Ibid*, pp.31.
[397] *Ibid*, pp.48.
[398] Marcus Rediker in *Ibid*, pp.42.
[399] Browne, *Ibid*, pp.51.
[400] *Ibid*, pp.52.

One of the constant tropes of racism is the issue of the invisibility of black bodies to the watching white eye, hence the example of the "Law for Regulating Negro & Indian Slaves in the Nighttime" brought in the New York City in 1713, where every person designated as such above the age of fourteen is not allowed to walk the streets in the evening "without a lanthorn and a lighted candle."[401] If that occurred, "any slave convicted of being unlit after dark was sentenced to a public whipping."[402] A few decades later, in 1744, there occurred an alleged conspiracy that was "ruining… the traditional English cup of tea."[403] Due to the bad water in the city, slaves would have had to be sent to the best springs outside the city to bring the water needed for a proper cup of tea. They have been accused of a conspiracy against their masters, for it was when they "went for tea water that they held their caballs and consultations, and therefor they have a law now that no negroe shall be seen upon the streets without a lanthorn after dark."[404] At about the same time, the boycott of the sugar and tea was one of the main protest methods among the abolitionists in the UK, hence we have to notice a strong symbolism the sound of a teaspoon stirring the (imaginary) sugar in a cup of tea has as a main element in the hypnotic induction by Mother-the-therapist: the sound of a teaspoon is there to reactivate the memory of a former slave and force him to regress to this state once more. Although the Armitages have since moved from the old colonial tradition of serving tea and now offer ice tea to their guests instead, it uncannily and unexpectedly brings us to this historical episode when "the black body, technologically enhanced by way of a simple device made for a visual surplus where technology met surveillance, made the business of tea a white enterprise and encoded white supremacy, as well as black luminosity, in law."[405]

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[401] *Ibid*, pp.78.
[402] *Ibid*.
[403] *Ibid*, pp.79.
[404] *Ibid*.
[405] *Ibid*.

The violence of the white cumulative gaze, as Brown shows, continued in the post-slavery era. As it turns out, the new technologies of today still have a problem with classification, for instance classifying "Africans as males and Mongoloid as females." So black women are presumably male, and Asian men are classified as female."[406] [407] Nevertheless, this 'black spot' of the new technological devices can also be used as a strategy of sousveillance, a concept introduced by Steve Mann to name "an active inversion of the power relations that surveillance entails."[408] In this context, 'dark sousveillance' designates "a way to situate the tactics employed to render one's self out of sight, and strategies used in the flight to freedom from slavery as necessarily ones of undersight."[409] One of the strategies of sousveillance in recent years has been the use of handheld or wearable cameras to document the situations of police violence in the context where police violence "is not read as violence."[410] At the same time, we are already internalizing a new, some would name it post-Panopticon model, as the Panopticon "cannot offer a complete account of, for example, surveillance and exercises of power within social media and cell phone usage, or by way of digital information databases and data aggregators."[411] Instead, "post-Panoptical subjects reliably watch over themselves,"[412] being more afraid that no one is watching what they do in a variety of social media on their disposal.

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[406] *Ibid*, pp.111.

[407] Another example is the testing out of the Hewlett Packard MediaSmart computer when Cryer and Zamen "recorded what happened when 'Black Desi' and 'White Wanda' used the computer's webcam. Cryer narrates the pair's video, at one point saying, "I think my blackness is interfering with the computer's ability to follow me," referring to the webcam's apparent inability to pan, tilt, zoom, follow, or detect any of Cryer's gestures." *Ibid*, pp.161.

[408] *Ibid*, pp.19.

[409] *Ibid*, pp.21.

[410] *Ibid*, pp.20.

[411] *Ibid*, pp.39.

[412] *Ibid*.

An important element in Chris's strategy of liberation we should notice is undoubtedly the shock provoked by the flash of his smartphone, *the* surveillance apparatus of our era, which, if used as an apparatus of sousveillance can overturn the structure of power relations. What kind of a mechanism the flash represents? In order to answer this question, we might turn to Walter Benjamin and his neurological understanding of modern experience, centered on shock. According to him, "the battlefield experience of shock 'has become the norm' in modern life" where the "consciousness is a shield protecting the organism against stimuli – 'excessive energies' – from without, by preventing their retention, their impress as memory."[413] Under these conditions, "response to stimuli without thinking has become necessary for survival."[414] We are cultured and disciplined in such a way to believe we are completely separated from our environment, with our skin being the very border of the encounter. Nevertheless, as Buck-Morss reminds us, our nervous system is in fact synaesthetic, constantly leaking in and out. From early age, in the environment of extreme shock, we are trained to block the "technological stimuli in order to protect both the body from the trauma of accident and the psyche from the trauma of perceptual shock. As a result, the system reverses its role. Its goal is to numb the organism, to deaden the senses, to repress memory."[415] Hence, "the cognitive system of synaesthetics has become, rather, one of anaesthetics. […] It is no longer a question of educating the crude ear to hear music, but of giving it back hearing. It is no longer a question of training the eye to see beauty, but of restoring 'perceptibility.'"[416]

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[413] Susan Buck Morss, *Ibid*, pp.16.

[414] *Ibid*. "Perceptions that once occasioned conscious reflection are now the source of shock-impulses that consciousness must parry. In industrial production no less than modern warfare, in street crowds and erotic encounters, in amusement parks and gambling casinos, shock is the very essence of modern experience." *Ibid*.

[415] *Ibid*, pp.18.

[416] *Ibid*.

It is exactly this operation that is undertaken by the lightning of the flash: its main target is the eye of the host body that still has its functionality but has become numb to the perception of reality. Or, in Buck-Morss's words, "the technical apparatus of the camera, incapable of 'returning our gaze,' catches the deadness of the eyes that confront the machine-eyes that 'have lost their ability to look.' Of course, the eyes still see. Bombarded with fragmentary impressions they see too much – and register nothing." This dialectical reversal, "whereby aesthetics changes from a cognitive mode of being 'in touch' with reality to a way of blocking out reality, destroys the human organism's power to respond politically even when self-preservation is at stake."[417] The consequences are not only individual, but political as well: "Someone who is 'past experiencing' is "no longer capable of telling ... proven friend ... from mortal enemy.""[418] The capacity of our senses reduced, the deepness of memory shortened, the experience of reality impoverished: for Benjamin, the ability to 'penetrate' the human being is not only to be found in the profession of a surgeon, but of a cameraman as well. As it turns out, the mere awakening of the eye of the host was enough to destroy the supremacist master from within. The suicide of the zombie was the only solution left. And it is the promise of safety and protection from reality by the ones on power we should be wary off.

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[417] *Ibid.*
[418] *Ibid.*

V – BLACK PANTHERS

When discussing issues of young black existence in the year 2018, we cannot avoid the mentioning of a recent Hollywood blockbuster – *The Black Panther* (2018) by Marvel studios. A result of an impressive economic investment, this 3D spectacle falls short once we scratch the surface in attempt to understand its main ideological framework. Although strongly promoted by the most prominent members and activists of the African-American community in the US, its message will hurt anyone who had ever had any relation with or sympathy for the Black Panthers. In short, behind this visual seduction of the (imaginary) African culture, the message is clear: the anti-capitalist world revolution is doomed to fail and we should all give our support to the institutions of the system such as the CIA and the UN. A detail worth mentioning is the fact that the only character giving support to the outcast prince attempting to raise an international armed revolution in defense of black people's rights was played by Daniel Kaluuya, the lead actor from *Get Out*. Hence, this intertextual detail takes us a step further – into a closer look of the heritage of the Black Panther Party. Unfortunately, this hidden history of which all African-Americans should be proud of was erased by *The Black Panther* movie through the admiration and nostalgic longing for a super-rich African state ready to collaborate with neo-liberal rulers of the world.

Founded in 1966 in Oakland, California, by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, later simply the Black Panther Party (BPP) was a response to a severe escalation of police brutality and violence in African-American communities. The Panthers "represented the militant spirit of urban Black youth who refused to be broken by the policeman's baton, refused to defer to the authority of a racist state apparatus, and refused the fundamentally skewed logic of American capitalism."[419] The backlash of the power structures was extreme

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[419] Barbara Ransby, "Foreword", in: Philip S. Foner ed., *The Black Panthers Speak*, Haymarket Books, 2014, pp.x.

and the BPP was to pay a terrible price for the attempt to change the state of things. Black Panthers were marked by the FBI director J. Edgar Hoover as "the greatest threat to the internal security of the country,"[420] and a "'black extremist organization' consisting mostly of 'hoodlum-type revolutionaries' who stockpile weapons, espouse Marxist-Leninist doctrines, and terrorize black communities."[421] A powerful program COINTELPRO ('Counter Intelligence Program'), initially developed in the 1950s to undermine the US Communist Party, was used against Black Liberation Movement:[422] "Subversive infiltrations, illegal prison sentences, murders – all means were employed to drive home the point that the public waving of guns at the US power structure would not be tolerated."[423] The results were soon evident and by the 1970 most of the BPP leaders were jailed and members wounded or killed. In other words, democracy in its fullest. The impressive resources were also invested in the state propaganda of vilification of the Panthers, hence the result is that today "to the average white American the Black Panther Party conjures up the picture of an anarchistic band of gun-toting, white-hating thugs."[424]

The danger was indeed great – but of a liberation of the oppressed minorities, as this was the first and still the last example of an openly revolutionary party to gain such an amount of support

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[420] *Ibid,* pp.xi.

[421] Philip S. Foner, "Introduction," *Ibid*, pp.xxii.

[422] "The FBI wanted to transform the 'metamorphosis of the community' that began not so much with the Civil Rights Movement as with the armed defence of the community pioneered in the South by Robert Williams and the Deacons for Defence and theorized in Negroes with Guns. How the authorities in the United States ever expected the black men that they trained to be Marines, like Williams, to leave the army and meekly return to the humiliations of Jim Crow is beyond belief." Howard Caygill, "Philosophy and the Black Panthers." *Radical Philosophy*, no.179, May/June 2013, pp.8.

[423] Pascale Gaitet, "Jean Genet's American Dream: The Black Panthers." Literature & History, Vol 1, Issue 1, 1992, pp.60.

[424] Foner, *Ibid*.

in the black communities, and all that in only several years of its existence. Newton and Seale were students at the time who got inspired by Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, primarily "by the black psychiatrist's thesis that revolutionary violence was necessary in order for the oppressed to get the oppressors' boot off their neck and that it was essential in order to achieve the transformation or rebirth of the black personality."[425] The dignity was meant to be restored through an armed struggle, or the armed self-defense, against the corrupt and hostile police. Very soon, the party created "a system of armed patrol cars, completely legal, carrying both guns and lawbooks. The Panthers trailed police cars through the slums of Oakland with guns and a lawbook, to halt police brutality."[426] They combined "revolutionary vision with grass-roots practicality"[427] and Newton and Seale bought their first guns by selling "copies of Mao's *Red Book* which they had bought for 30c. each at the China Bookstore in San Francisco for $1 on the Berkeley campus."[428] The result was that police brutality begun to taper off.

The philosophy and politics behind the BPP were strongly rooted in Marxism, Maoism and anti-capitalism, promoting the unity of the oppressed and rejecting anti-Communism: "The Party was protesting rent eviction, informing welfare recipients of their legal rights, teaching classes in Black History, and demanding and winning school traffic lights."[429] They started successful community programs such as the Oakland Community School, The Free Breakfast for Children program, and People's Free Medical Clinics, "undergirded by an analysis of the racialized nature of Western capitalism and imperialism."[430] This creation of alternative institutions was perceived as a greatest threat to state control, hence the campaign of hysteria was initiated on a nationwide scale, with

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[425] *Ibid*, pp.xxviii.
[426] *Ibid*, pp.xxix.
[427] Gaitet, *Ibid*, pp.53.
[428] *Ibid*, pp.54-55.
[429] Foner, *Ibid*, pp.xxxi.
[430] Ransby, *Ibid*, pp.xiv.

the "most white Americans recoiled in fear and horror at the sight of armed blacks."[431]

On international level, the BPP was part of the Third World internationalism, standing in solidarity with new nations of the former colonies, "with the expectation that many of those countries, from Cuba to Algeria to Vietnam, were headed toward a more humane alternative to capitalism."[432] In terms of the struggle against sexism, "despite some pretty inexcusable sexism by individual leaders, there was a persistent push within the organization for women's leadership, sexual freedom, and independence from the conservative confines of traditional heterosexual family structures."[433] They instituted collective childrearing practices, community nurseries, and schools as alternatives to patriarchal model of nuclear families. The philosophy behind Newton's writings, named by some as a "military Kantianism,"[434] was based on thanato-politics and the idea of the immortal revolution, as well as on "Mao's strategy of the prolonged war of resistance."[435] By making clear the difference between the revolution and resistance, Newton propagated the notion of resistance which "occupies an extended time horizon, unlike a revolutionary bid for power which thrives on the acceleration of time."[436] Hence, this long-term thinking initiated different programs designed to build the capacity of the oppressed communities to resist, "not in responding to discrete acts of oppression but as constituting the visible presence of a capacity to resist present and future threats and attacks."[437] The BPP defined the blacks in the US as an internally colonized population, "a stolen people held in a colonial status on stolen land,"[438] "constantly

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[431] Foner, *Ibid*, pp.xxxiii.

[432] Ransby, *Ibid*, pp.xiv.

[433] *Ibid*, xv.

[434] Caygill, *Ibid*, pp.9.

[435] *Ibid*, pp.10.

[436] *Ibid*.

[437] *Ibid*.

[438] Brady Thomas Heiner, "Foucault and the Black Panthers." *City*, Vol.11,

threatened, impoverished and criminalized by the occupying forces of American governmental authority,"[439] hence their strategy must essentially be an anti-colonial war.[440] Their view on the conditions of their existence was that the economic enslavement of black people was a foundation of American sovereignty, while slavery was never truly abolished, only transformed in altered forms. The declaration of their rights meant the declaration of war, in response to the ongoing racist war by the White supremacist government. In the process, they defined power as "the ability to define phenomena," or the use of words in a way "not only to make Blacks more proud but to make whites question and even reject concepts they had always unthinkingly accepted."[441]

THE PROBLEM WITH THE SPECTACLE: JEAN GENET AND THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY

> "Blacks in America have no more roots in the society in which they live than I had in the one into which I was born. White society rejects us, them and myself. I was and I have positioned myself as an outcast, as they do. The difference is that I was alone and without hope. They, on the other hand, are together and have the hope of a revolution."
> Jean Genet

One of the strategies used against the Black Panthers by the FBI in the media was to turn the spectacle of their politics against them,

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No. 3, December 2007, pp.323.

[439] *Ibid*, pp.322.

[440] "In the early years of the Party's existence, this philosophy fueled an agenda of black nationalism – a political philosophy whose genealogical lineage extends back from Frantz Fanon and the pre-pilgrimage works of Malcolm X… As early as 1967, however, the Party had embraced a veritably internationalist… perspective which emphasized broad-based coalition-building and viewed the liberation of the black colony in a functional relationship with revolution in the USA as a whole." *Ibid*.

[441] *Ibid*, pp.13.

creating "a spectacular portrait of the revolutionary as pantomime villain" and "resistance in depth into a revolutionary pantomime of gestural violence": "Huey Newton and Bobby Seale with guns and leather jackets in 1966; Huey posed by Eldridge Cleaver with gun and spear in an image he despised; Huey taking his shirt off when leaving prison in 1970."[442] The strong supporter and promoter of the BPP activities internationally was Jean Genet, one of the most famous literary figures in France, who warned them of the dangers and risks of spectacle as a tactic of resistance. The spectacle was the strategy with which the Panthers could 'terrorize' their white masters, as "the product of despair… But the spectacle is only spectacle, and it may lead to mere figment, to no more than a colorful carnival; and this is the risk that the Panthers ran."[443] Therefore he urged them to refocus and "return to engagement in depth in the 'metamorphosis of the black community.'"[444] Nevertheless, according to Caygill, we should not see the tactics of BPP as "the poetry of the spectacle; it was the multidimensional expression of an emergent capacity to resist,"[445] a key concept of the BPP struggle.

Jean Genet was contacted by the Black Panthers in Paris in early 1970, in the moment when their leadership was decimated and funds severely exhausted, and he decided to travel to the USA the very next day.[446] He was refused a visa due to his previous political activism and entered the US illegally. Next two months, he lived with the Panthers and toured with them to the most important university campuses and other places where they would not have access otherwise. Surprised by the fact that "no American

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[442] Caygill, *Ibid*, pp.8.

[443] *Ibid*.

[444] *Ibid*.

[445] *Ibid*.

[446] "His subsequent public statements in support of the Panthers are collected in his book *The Declared Enemy: Texts and Interviews*, but it is in his last book, *Prisoner of Love* (1986), that he proposed a methodology for understanding their struggle, one that links it with the Palestinian resistance, in which he also directly participated." Caygill, pp.7.

writer has provided aid to the country's only credible revolutionary party,"[447] Genet spoke on behalf of the BPP, inviting "young whites to support the Panthers, whom he considered the victims of unwarranted official repression and the vanguard of a Marxist revolution that would soon bring down a corrupt America."[448] The author of two plays written as a support to the colonized in Africa, *The Blacks* (1959) and *The Screens* (1966), Genet declared himself to be "a black whose skin happens to be white."[449] His mission was preaching to the future white elite, believing they were the ones who could change things. A strong supporter of Marxism, Genet fought strongly against the existing US institutions (the police, the church, labor unions) "as agents of repression."[450] His vision of America was not a positive one:

> A nightmare of racism pervading not only white politics, but, 'scattered, diffused ... grim, underhanded, hypocritical, arrogant,' the white imagination; a nightmare of white imperialism, a repressive police state founded on a legal system designed to protect capitalist expansion while actively repressing the black population.[451]

According to Genet, the US was an extension of the Victorian England ruled by fear, where "everyone is afraid of everyone else."[452] He believed it would disappear soon as "all civilizations based on contempt must necessarily disappear."[453]

As a strong supporter of the PLO and the struggle for the Palestinian state, Genet did not hide a strong and appealing erotic

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[447] Gaitet, *Ibid*, pp.50.
[448] Robert Sandarg, "Jean Genet and the Black Panther Party." *Journal of Black Studies*, vol.16, no.3, 1986, pp.269.
[449] *Ibid*, pp.270.
[450] *Ibid*, pp.278.
[451] Gaitet, *Ibid*, pp.48.
[452] Sandarg, Ibid, pp.278.
[453] *Ibid.*

charge in both the PLO and the Panthers, made up of "magnetized bodies magnetizing each other."[454] He defined eroticism and joy as "a necessary component of revolutionary endeavors" which are "so strong, and at the same time so obvious and so discreet that I never desired any one person: I was nothing but desire for the group and my desire was fulfilled by the fact that the group existed."[455] According to him, the obvious phallocentrism promoted by the BPP had a strong political goal:

> In early 1970, the Party had the suppleness and rigidity suggestive of a male organ – to elections they preferred its erection. If sexual images recur, it is because they impose themselves, and that the Party's sexual signification – erectile – seems quite evident. It is not that it consisted of young men who fucked their women night and day but rather that each of their ideas, even if it appeared basic, was a spirited rape that endangered a very old, faded, effaced but tenacious Victorian morality.[456]

Genet gave a strong support to the Panthers' rejection of non-violent methods (as advocated by Martin Luther King, for instance) which in the existing conditions "would have been a 'moral dilettantism,' and criminal."[457] He shared their acceptance of Malcolm X's legacy, according to which "one could not fight racism without fighting capitalism"[458] since "black capitalists are oppressors too."[459]

The seriousness of the Panthers struggle was reflected in their readiness to sacrifice their lives for their cause and the image they promoted was the construction of subjectivity that "propagate

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[454] Gaitet, *Ibid*, pp.57.

[455] *Ibid*, pp.56.

[456] *Ibid*, pp.56-57.

[457] *Ibid*, pp.52.

[458] *Ibid*, pp.53.

[459] *Ibid*, pp.52.

the self, after death, into history."[460] Genet's concept of 'an illumination of existence' referred to the successful metamorphosis of the invisibles to visible, achieved through the theatricality of the bodies as performed by the Panthers, simultaneously invading the 'white consciousness':

> The illumination – "by crackling, by sparkling, and finally by making not only visible but also luminous the Black question" – was successful, effected real change, for the whites were affected by it. They saw the theatre, the silk and the velvet and the rhetoric; they also saw the terrifying eloquence, and they were terrified.[461]

Genet underlined both the poetic and the political dimension of the Panther's combination of two previously separate symbols – 'the blacks' and 'the reds': "Because they are "blacks for sure but reds as well... the optical nerve of the blond American freaks out; it no longer knows what color it must seize.""[462] Indeed, the poetry was one of the key elements in the BPP newspaper "geared to a particular segment of the Black community: young Black men."[463] The goal was to raise awareness of the current issues in the black community but also to inspire them to join the struggle, "to instigate, consider, and accept social change."[464] In comparison to their predecessors of the Harlem Renaissance from the 1930s and '40s, who "adhered to traditional poetics and sought integration into American society,"[465] the 1960's artists were "at war with America"[466] and, in free verse, "signified, insulted, and sought

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[460] *Ibid*, pp.59.

[461] *Ibid*, pp.60.

[462] Sandarg, *Ibid*, pp.280.

[463] Regina Jennings, "Poetry of the Black Panther Party: Metaphors of Militancy." *Journal of Black Studies*, vol.29, no.1, 1998, pp.108.

[464] *Ibid*, pp.107.

[465] *Ibid*.

[466] *Ibid*, pp.106.

compensation for historical injustices."[467] They wrote 'soldier poems' as part of their counterattack on the representatives of the law. In Jones and Neal's words:

> We want "poems that kill."
> Assassin poems, Poems that shoot
> guns. Poems that wrestle cops into alleys
> and take their weapons.[468]

The themes of rage, redefinition, and war, with a strong celebration of Afrocentrism and African past as a new starting point for the writing of the black history, prompted the change of the language lexicon which was "traditionally racist."[469] In this old dictionary, "Black men were not allowed to be 'men' in the sense of heading households and making decisions. Black men were 'boys' in the ideology of the power structure."[470] Hence the pride in the redefinition of the term 'man' which was slowly turned into a superhuman being by applying the ideology of male Black power, this way creating "the new mythology of the 1960s activists."[471] The term was used by both male and female Panthers, who all worked equally hard in the movement, hence the term 'man' started to indicate "a behavior more than gender identification."[472]

For Foucault, a 'man' is a construction of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as an

> After-image of this oscillation between the juridical individual, which really was the instrument by which, in its discourse, the bourgeoisie claimed power, and the disciplinary individual, which is the result of the technology employed by this same bourgeoisie to

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[467] *Ibid*, pp.107.

[468] Jones and Neal, 1968, in *Ibid*.

[469] Jennings, *Ibid*, pp.115.

[470] *Ibid*, pp.121.

[471] *Ibid*, pp.123.

[472] *Ibid*, pp.126.

constitute the individual in the field of productive and political forces.[473]

The fundamental property of disciplinary power is to fabricate subjected bodies: "It pins the subject-function exactly to the body. It fabricates and distributes subjected bodies; it is individualizing [only in that] the individual is nothing other than the subjected body."[474] As long as the power remains a procedure of individualization, the individual will be the effect of power. For Fanon, the only solution for the breaking of the vicious circle of ontology of white man vs. black man is in the fundamental restructuring of the world, by "restoring to the other his human reality, different from his natural reality, by way of mediation and recognition. The other, however, must perform a similar operation."[475] For this to occur, the first thing to be attacked is the intellectual alienation created by the bourgeois society:

> And for me bourgeois society is any society that becomes ossified in a predetermined mold, stilling any development, progress, or discovery. For me bourgeois society is a closed society where it's not good to be alive, where the air is rotten and ideas and people are putrefying. And I believe that a man who takes a stand against this living death is in a way a revolutionary.[476]

For Fanon, "the black man is not. No more than the white man. Both have to move away from the inhuman voices of their respective ancestors so that a genuine communication can be born."[477] Newton, like Fanon before him, "saw a new kind of human emerging from the prolonged and bitter struggles of

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[473] Foucault, *Ibid*, pp.58.
[474] *Ibid*, pp.55.
[475] Franz Fanon, *Ibid*, pp.192.
[476] *Ibid*, pp.199.
[477] *Ibid*, pp.206.

resistance,"[478] In the words of a young poet Elaine Brown, in her *A Black Panther Song*:

> Have you ever stood
> In the darkness of night
> screaming silently you're a man
> Have you ever hoped
> That a time would come
> When your voice could be heard
> In the noonday sun?
> Have you waited so long
> Till your unheard song
> Has stripped away your very soul
> well then believe it my friends
> That the silence will end
> We'll just have to get guns
> and be men.[479]

It is in this context of the new ontology that we should interpret the following words by Fanon, as well as the struggle of the Black Panthers: "Running the risk of angering my black brothers, I shall say that a Black is not a man. There is a zone of nonbeing, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an incline stripped bare of every essential from which a genuine new departure can emerge."[480]

FOUCAULT'S SIN

The aim of our analysis was to confront the individual engrams of racism as contained in the images of *Get Out* with theoretical concepts helpful for our better understanding of both, the images as well as the theory. As it became clear, the concepts and issues

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[478] Caygill, *Ibid*, pp.13.
[479] *The Black Panthers Speak*, pp.31.
[480] Fanon, *Ibid*, pp.XII.

formulated in the last phase of Michel Foucault's work turned out to be the most relevant ones: somehow, in no moment did it feel forced to place them next to the issues of racism and black resistance. Nevertheless, the fact of these elements working so well together might not be a coincidence at all; namely, there seems to exist a less-known and less-visible history of a personal relationship between the Black Panther Party and Foucault. In his analysis, Brady Thomas Heiner even argues that main theoretical shift in Foucault's late writings would not have happened without the encounter with the black struggle: "Foucault's shift from archaeological inquiry to genealogical critique is motivated more fundamentally by his encounter with American-style racism and class struggle, and by his engagement with the political philosophies and documented struggles of the Black Panther Party."[481] Only after this encounter did Foucault "began to theorize power relations in any kind of explicit way" as well as "to formulate the genealogical method of critique."[482]

The philosophy and struggle of the BPP were brought to Foucault by Jean Genet with whom he began to meet frequently after establishing the GIP (the Prison Information Group) in 1971: "Mutually attracted for political reasons, they came together out of a shared concern for the imprisoned members of the Black Panther Party."[483] According to Genet, the American prisons were the places where racism reaches "its cruelest pitch, intensifying every second, preying upon body and soul; it is in this place that racism becomes a kind of concentration of racism,"[484] and it was the issue of prison abolition that was at the heart of decolonization struggles as formulated by the philosophers of the BPP such as Angela Y. Davis and George Jackson.[485] In their writings, Davis and Jackson

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[481] Heiner, *Ibid*, pp.314.

[482] *Ibid*, pp.317.

[483] *Ibid*, pp.318.

[484] *Ibid*.

[485] "Angela Y. Davis studied political philosophy with Marxist scholars Theodore Adorno and Herbert Marcuse during the 1960s, was a member of the US Communist Party (in which she served as Vice Presidential

exposed the process of the criminalization of radical political activism as well as the politicization of crime, revealing the dual, "racially motivated function of political weapon of the State and 'surplus' labor detention center for American capital."[486] Through direct contact, GIP was thoroughly introduced to all main ideas of the BPP, and the third issue of GIP pamphlet was devoted to the life and assassination of Black Panther Party Field Marshall George Jackson by San Quentin prison guards on 21 August 1971.[487]

According to the editors of a recent anthology on GIP, the US black liberation movement did have a formative effect and their ideas were "appropriated and rearticulated by Foucault."[488] Next to the assassination of Jackson, the second formative event for GIP was the prisoners' revolt at the Attica State Correctional Facility in New York in September 1971.[489] Although organized around very concrete issues and demands such as the "access to proper medical care, adequate visiting conditions, an end to political and racial persecution and punishment, and the legal prosecution of correctional officers for acts of cruel and unusual punishment,"[490] a powerful state retaliation ended this protest in bloodshed.[491] In his

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candidate in 1980 and 1984) and organized with the Black Panther Party." *Ibid*, pp.319.

[486] *Ibid*.

[487] "The BPP's influence on the GIP was such that the GIP decided to make contact with the Panthers. In June of 1971, GIP activist Catherine von Bülow went to California and met with Angela Y. Davis and George Jackson, each of whom was imprisoned at the time. She brought many documents back from her meetings, which she, Foucault and Genet studied in depth." *Ibid*, pp.320.

[488] *Ibid*, pp.332.

[489] "Over 1200 prisoners took control of Attica prison on 9 September 1971, in an occupation that endured for 5 days. Referring to themselves as the Attica Liberation Faction, they held 42 prison officials hostage, issued a list of 27 demands." *Ibid*, pp.333.

[490] *Ibid*.

[491] "74 New York State Governor Nelson Rockefeller ordered some 600 State Troopers and National Guards to storm the prison; shooting 150 people, killing 29 prisoners and 10 hostages; they then proceeded to

anonymously written texts for the GIP, Foucault proclaimed the US prisoners' struggle as "part of the general struggle against racism and fascism."[492] The strategic decision of Jackson to militarize prisons from the inside as the carriers of the decolonization process of the black community finds a strong reference in Foucault's conceptualization of tactics against governmental authority. In other words, by "organizing and educating from within the prison, [Jackson] attempted to transform the prison… into a tool for revolutionary mobilization."[493] A detailed overview of points of inspiration and appropriation of BPP political philosophies by Foucault is given by Heiner, and their first inclusion in his work happened in the 1976 lectures series at the Collège de France where he for the first time discusses the concept of biopower. These lectures, "a genealogical analysis of what Foucault calls 'the discourse of race struggle,' a discourse that he traces back to the 17th century,"[494] also carry a self-reflective critique of genealogical discourse and "demonstrate that Foucault initially developed his theory of biopolitics in the context of an analysis of 'the discourse of race struggle' and a critique of State racism."[495]

The thesis that late Foucault's work would not exist if it weren't for this encounter with the BPP philosophy and activism is perhaps hard to sustain from today's perspective; nevertheless, the question remains why Foucault stayed silent in his writings about the US racism. A question he is the only one who could answer, and we can only attempt to understand it in the framework of his own method of separating his activism from the philosophical work. His mostly anonymous activism in the struggle for women and gay rights, prisoners' abolition and similar issues, seems to stress out the belief that direct activism was the most productive mean to

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torture 1289 prisoners." *Ibid*.

[492] *Ibid*, pp.334.

[493] *Ibid*, pp.331.

[494] *Ibid*, pp.335.

[495] "In the latter Foucault erases every reference to race and racism, replacing them instead with the concepts of sex and the so-called 'deployment of sexuality.'" *Ibid*, pp.336.

achieve political goals. His theoretical work was a place in which he examined the same problems by revealing deep structures of thinking behind the actions of the ones on power. Hence, Foucault's project of understanding present through the genealogy of structures and ideas stemming from the past was a task of his philosophy; his anonymous pamphlets were there to raise sensibility and invite his contemporaries to action, who had to have freedom to decide which side in a permanent war they were to take. Accepting the notion that perhaps "by failing to mention the American context, Foucault symptomatically denies the actually existing race struggle that in fact motivated his method to begin with,"[496] we can only be responsible for our own actions and crimes in our own methods. In his writings, Foucault never pretended to write as an advocate for the others; instead he showed us the ways in which we are to fight for the position from which to speak for ourselves. Nevertheless, the historical relationship between Foucault and the Black Panthers is one to be repeatedly examined and the results of it should serve as an inspiration for our future actions, exceeding the mere statement of the 'epistemic injustice' Foucault's ethnocentrism and failure to quote the Panthers might have caused.

BLACK AND WHITE PANTHER

Instead of a conclusion, let us recall one of the rare references to the BPP in pop culture, in this case performed by Michael Jackson in a postlude to the video for the song "Black or White" (1991), directed by John Landis, the same director who filmed Jackson's "Thriller" video in 1983. Jackson's now iconic 'panther dance' "generated immediate uproar."[497] After the optimistic images of his take on the fluidity of identity and ethnic dance sequences in "Black or White," Jackson's solitary and angry panther performance with no music played with the cultural stereotypes

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[496] *Ibid*.
[497] Raphael, *Ibid*, pp.31.

still projected on the young black male body: "Not quite human, not fully animal, Jackson exhibits all the bestial traits expected of him as a black man: unpredictable, violent, criminal and over-sexed. Jackson runs amok: he sabotages property, shouts, screams and 'roars.'"[498] He violently grabs "his crotch… but he also gyrates at the pelvis, contorts his face into grimaces of sexual gratification, rubs his chest in a highly erotic and masturbatory manner and zips up his pants."[499] With a clear reference to the history of blackface minstrels, "like the slave caricature of minstrelsy, Jackson has no moral or social conscience."[500] As if driven by a savage energy, "armed with the territorial instincts of the male cat, he is literally a man possessed,"[501] and the reaction of the US audience was severe.

Jackson's panther dance was attacked by both public and media "for being the indulgence of gratuitous violence and implied masturbatory sex"[502] or "simply inexplicable."[503] It had to be censored and the current version is a re-cut of the original one: "In an effort to make the violence more intelligible, racist graffiti was digitally added onto the automobile and hotel windows that Jackson destroys."[504] The US public pretended not to see his invocation of the Black Panther Party history, hence his rage and "full-frontal attack on racial ignorance"[505] seemed unclear. Nevertheless, the violence at the end of "Black of White" was a reaction to a recent Rodney King's beating by several police officers during his arrest, filmed by a civilian from a nearby

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[498] *Ibid*, pp.33.

[499] *Ibid*.

[500] *Ibid.* "However, coupled with this is Jackson's body's almost ubiquitous angularity, stiff poise and posture; his body's 'non-fluidity.' This pairing – graceful on the one hand yet almost awkward and upright on the other – was the same that traditional minstrels used to great effect in parody of the 'natural' movements of black people." *Ibid*, pp.33-34.

[501] *Ibid*, pp.38.

[502] *Ibid.*

[503] *Ibid*, pp.39.

[504] *Ibid*.

[505] *Ibid*, pp.40.

balcony. The incident started a wave of uprisings and protests, and, according to Raphael, in Jackson's case, "The obvious danger of representations of a black panther initiating violence in an urban landscape helps explain why great effort was taken to contain the sequence's potential danger."[506] He was accused of going too far.

After some wishful thinking about the world as a place where all peoples and nations happily coexist in "Black or White," Jackson's panther dance should be read as influx of reality, the reality in which the old projections and caging of black masculinity prevail. In Andreane Clay's words, "In this cultural landscape, the ideology of 'boys will be boys' is replaced with (Black) boys will be, at the very least, violent, if not vicious (sexual) predators, who will either physically or socially die by the time they are twenty-one."[507] This particular test Jackson performed on his audience showed that stereotypes of blackness have barely changed since the classic minstrel show: "The panther dance's censorship reveals how black self-representation remains limited, how black subjectivity still cannot be comfortably expressed or received among popular audiences."[508] The response was still driven by white hegemonic needs linked to the feelings of racial fear and guilt.

Jackson's body was not the only territory he charted for deracialization – this is also reflected in his choice of music genre in which to perform: he was a key figure in establishing 'pop' as a musical category, "itself an amalgam of black and white music that was not assimilative but transracial in an industry that had traditionally segregated musical styles according to race."[509] The disturbance of traditional racial fantasies came from the images of this "black man turning white,"[510] further pointing to a permanent anxiety of a culture now unable to categorize him. In Homi

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[506] *Ibid*, pp.268.
[507] In Raphael, *Ibid*, pp.43.
[508] *Ibid*.
[509] *Ibid*, pp.45, footnote 45.
[510] *Ibid*, pp.46.

Bhabha's words, we are dealing here with a "paranoid threat from the hybrid"[511] that destabilizes the boundaries of authority and strict divisions of operating power. As pointed by Raphael, what usually stays undetected is the fact that Jackson's vitiligo-driven face through time did not become white, "but porcelain, his nose not just narrow but partly built from a prosthetic so that neither feature was a simulation or 'true' reproduction of whiteness at all."[512] Instead of trying to become white, it is most likely that he was trying to "flee race as biological fact."[513] We are also reminded of Jean Baudrillard's words who saw Jackson as "better equipped than Christ 'to reign over the world and reconcile its contradictions [to] … deliver us from race and sex.'"[514] By nullifying blackness as biological fact, he automatically nullified "default whiteness"[515] as well.

In an interesting take, Raphael invites us to read Jackson's last arrest in 2003 as an attempt to "'fix' or arrest Jackson's dangerously fluid meaning once and for all"[516] within the political context of the moment. Namely, as many social theorists have shown, the symbolic importance of ambivalent bodies "is most pronounced when existing power structures appear to be under threat."[517] The images of Jackson's arrest for accusations of abuse against a 13-year-old was covered as a top national news story in the period of the greatest threat to the 'War on Terror' in early 2003. In the months that preceded, the world had witnessed probably the largest global antiwar protest in thousands of cities, all protesting against the US attack on Iraq.[518] On the day when George W. Bush

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[511] *Ibid*.

[512] *Ibid*, pp.47.

[513] *Ibid*.

[514] Baudrillard in Raphael, *Ibid*, pp.48.

[515] Raphael, *Ibid.*

[516] *Ibid*, pp.270.

[517] *Ibid*.

[518] "Just the portion occurring in Rome with 3 million was recognized by Guinness Book of World Records as the single largest anti-war protest in history." *Ibid*.

was to meet with Tony Blair in London, some of the largest protests in Britain's history welcomed him with "the felling of a giant plaster statue of Bush."[519] Instead of these images, the dominant US media broadcasted the spectacle of Jackson's humiliating arrest. Jackson's star sign was finally fixed as pathological: "At precisely the same moment resistance itself was largely pathologized and marginalized. So, it was in such a moment that this constantly changing body, perhaps the ur-text of Otherness, was politically contained."[520] The freak was to be no more, and in the times that followed, the division of the world on binary certainties and the protection of their borders was turned into the highest moral achievement.

Unfortunately, as our analysis has shown, all this is not behind us: instead, thanks to the benefits of globalization and social media, we are now all Americanized. And the task of each one of us will be to see on which side of the master-slave division line we find ourselves. As we have learned, in Jordan Peele's words, "the Sunken Place is something that exists not just for black people… but for any marginalized group that gets told not to say what they're experiencing. It's the system. It's all these cogs in the wheel that sort of keep us where we are… The Sunken Place is the silencing."[521] We can only wait with anticipation the follow up to the issues raised in *Get Out*, in this seismogram of racism and oppression. The worst thing that could happen to us is ending up as a joke in Peele's next comedy. Nevertheless, we should bear in mind it is just our fragile self that is being tested.

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[519] *Ibid*, pp.271.
[520] *Ibid*.
[521] Peele in Rayner, *Ibid*.

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