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# The racist bodily imaginary: The image of the body-in-pieces in (post)apartheid culture

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**Abstract** This paper outlines a reoccurring motif within the racist imaginary of (post)apartheid culture: the black body-in-pieces. This disturbing visual idiom is approached from three conceptual perspectives. By linking ideas prevalent in Frantz Fanon's description of colonial racism with psychoanalytic concepts such as Lacan's notion of the *corps morcelé*, the paper offers, firstly, an account of the black body-in-pieces as fantasmatic preoccupation of the (post)apartheid imaginary. The role of such images is approached, secondly, through the lens of affect theory which eschews a representational 'reading' of such images in favour of attention to their asignifying intensities and the role they play in effectively *constituting* such bodies. Lastly, Judith Butler's discussion of war photography and the conditions of grievability introduces an ethical dimension to the discussion and helps draw attention to the unsavory relations of enjoyment occasioned by such images.

**Keywords:** Apartheid, body-in-pieces; fantasy; images, grievability; photography; racism

## "The horrible pornography of death"

This paper focusses on a reoccurring motif within (post)apartheid culture. The motif in question, which occurs with disturbing regularity, and which I treat as the correlate of a social fantasy,<sup>1</sup> is that of the (black) body-in-pieces. There are a great many variations on this theme - or more appropriately perhaps, this *fixation* - within the (post)apartheid social imaginary. It is a key figure in racist humour (for examples see

Godwin, 1996; Kilpatrick, 2010); in visual arts (Hill, 2005); in narrative retellings of apartheid experience (Hook, 2013); and in news-media (Krog, Mpolweni & Ratele, 2009) and photojournalism. I will limit myself here to the last sub-category of this general schema.

Greg Marinovich and Joao Silva's *The Bang-Bang Club* (2000) tells the story of a handful of Johannesburg-based photographers who risked their lives in capturing many of the most brutal scenes of township violence that occurred in the dying days of apartheid. Not all of these images were of bodily destruction, but many - and certainly the most iconic - were. This visual record of South Africa's 'hidden war' amounts to a litany of acts of (black) bodily destruction. There are photographs of immolation; of men being hacked or beaten to death; of stabbings and mob violence; of mutilated corpses being carelessly loaded into trucks.

Remarkably, for such a small group, two members of the 'Bang-Bang Club' were awarded Pulitzer Prizes. Greg Marinovich won the Prize for Spot News in 1990 for a sequence of images depicting the murder of Lindsay Tshabalala, a suspected *Inkatha* supporter who was stabbed and subsequently burnt alive. More notoriously, Kevin Carter won in 1994, for a picture taken in Southern Sudan of a vulture that appeared to be stalking an emaciated, starving child. The fact that both images - which went on to receive worldwide press circulation - involved black bodies in states of immanent and/or horrific death seems telling. It indicates that the visual trope of the black body in states of destruction is not confined to (post)apartheid culture alone, but represents a point of fascination for a far broader global culture. This is not to imply that audiences were not appalled by such images (they were, as the backlash against Carter (Marinovich & Silva, 2000) for not doing more to secure the child's safety made clear). It is simply to call attention to the fact that these were viable news-media images, photographs that, essentially, could *be shown*, and that in fact warranted acclaim.

The same of course does not hold in the case of white (or European/US American) bodies in similar states of destruction. This point is made in Judith Butler's (2009) discussion of the US news-media embargo on showing the bodies - even *the coffins* - of American soldiers during the Iraq war. The injunction underlying the embargo is clear enough: one does not circulate photographs of the destroyed bodies of those with whom a dominant group identifies. In such instances a prohibition on representation seems a necessary condition of respect. By contrast, and certainly within the (post)apartheid context, "instances of the desecration of the black body have yet to evoke

significant expressions of outrage...from the culture of “whiteness” (Ndebele, 2009, p. 10). “The white body is inviolable”, argues Ndebele, “and that inviolability is in direct proportion to the global vulnerability of the black body” (p. 17).

I am arguing then that many of the images of the ‘Bang-Bang Club’ effectively *pictured* a fantasy, the (post)apartheid social fantasy of the destroyed black body. I am not suggesting that these images were somehow motivated by the unconscious racism of the photographers, or that there was any attempt on their part to extend apartheid’s ideological agenda. (In other instances, similar images certainly were deployed for ideological reasons by the apartheid state.<sup>2</sup> Images of multiple injured or dead black bodies; the shooting of black protestors, or the unleashing of police dogs upon them; so-called ‘black on black violence’; the savagery of necklace murders - all of these were staples of apartheid news broadcasts which emphatically reiterated the schema of the *abject* black body). Quite the contrary, I pick these images precisely because of the *anti-apartheid* loyalties of the photographers. The pathos of their situation was that the very images they had hoped would threaten apartheid were often put to the use of implicitly justifying the system. As the film (2010) version of the *Bang-Bang Club* makes abundantly clear, these photographers were aware that the “horrible pornography of death” (Marinovich & Silva, 2000, p. 241) they were involved in had a role in mode of racist objectification. The importance of this example is that it shows the durability of an enduring social fantasy which persists despite the contrary political allegiances of the subjects involved in its picturing.

Not only do such ‘schemas’ of social fantasy outstrip the conscious agency of its subjects, they also exhibit an uncanny ideological tenacity, returning after the apparent end of a given historical era. Take for example the terrible image of Ernesto Alfabeto Nhamuave, a migrant worker from Mozambique, who was set alight and burnt to death in Ramaphosa township in 2008. For many, this macabre scene of the victimized Nhamuave, on his hands and knees, being consumed by flames, was the signature image of the outbreak of xenophobic violence that swept across South Africa in 2008. It evoked, in a case of the apparent circularity of history, images of the ‘necklacing’ murders of the 1990’s which flooded the apartheid newsmedia.

In her sensitive engagement with this image and Adze Ugah’s documentary *The Burning Man* (2008), which focuses on the life and death of Nhamuave, Strauss (2011) debates a series of ethical issues

pertaining to the iconisation of anonymous pain. The image, she concedes, could be linked to a tradition of “visualizing atrocity epitomised, during the apartheid era, in images of the victims [of violence] in the townships” (p. 117). Newspaper images, she continues, “commonly invite a measure of detachment”, yet “the cruel human suffering depicted in the image [of Nhamuave] arguably disrupts any attempt...to establish a comfortable distance” (p. 107). In Strauss’s perhaps optimistic view, Ugah’s documentary worked against “the tangle of media responses and images that reduce [Nhamuave]...to an archetype of corporeal suffering” (p. 107).

It is worth providing one further current example of the trope of the destroyed black body so as to counter the contention that this is by now an outdated historical motif. Reporting on the Farlam Commission of Inquiry investigating the Marikana mine shootings, Poloko Tau (2012) observed that

Image after image was beamed onto screens showing...sets of crime scene photos and images taken in the aftermath of the August 16 Marikana massacre...Some images showed bullet-riddled bodies...others revealed dead miners with their hands cuffed (<http://www.iol.co.za/news/special-features/mining-crisis>).

How then are we to understand the libidinal economy that underlies these images, the psychical dynamic that keeps them in circulation and that is itself – crucially - set in motion by the structural racism of the (post)apartheid context? Secondly, how are we to grapple with the affective intensity of such images which seems necessarily to outstrip the political effect of representation, indeed to exceed the signifying impact of image-as-text? Lastly, how might we think the ethical dimension of such photographs, and, perhaps more importantly yet, the ethical injunction that is, in effect, posed by them? I will turn to each of these questions in turn.

### **Reading white fantasy**

One of the great strengths of Fanon’s (1952/1986) *Black Skin White Masks* lies precisely in its apparent exaggerations, which show how adept the young Fanon was, amidst his early enthusiasm for psychoanalysis, in reading white fantasy. Fanon uses the imagery of the

black body being broken apart, burnt, cut, exploded, eviscerated, describing such scenes with the notion of 'corporeal malediction'.<sup>3</sup> He was obviously deeply affected by accounts of lynching and related forms of physical racist violence, but his disturbingly eloquent descriptions, articulated in the vocabulary of phenomenology and psychoanalysis, go further than this. He taps into the just 'beneath the surface' *imaginary* quality of racist fantasy. Fantasy of this sort is not readily assumed or 'owned' by the subject. It is not openly spoken of, or effectively 'subjectivized'; quite the contrary, the experiencing subject might be surprised, even repelled by the fantasy if it is rendered too clearly, in overly explicit forms. Nor for that matter is the fantasy wholly unconscious; it is more like a latent schema of understanding, a subliminal frame of apprehension through which black otherness comes to be understood.

Fanon (1952/1986) is also profoundly aware of the idealizing aspect of such fantasies. These idealizations are entwined with stereotyping caricatures, so that apparently admirable qualities become reduced to racial vices: the perception of economic industriousness is thus transformed into 'the Jew's love of money' (for detailed elaboration of Fanon's argument, see Hook, 2011). What this postulate brings to light is the possibility that the (post)apartheid preoccupation with the black body-in-pieces maintains a 'co-representative', an additional fantasmatic component. I have in mind here the notion of the black body as strong, impervious, possessed of a formidable and superior physicality. This stereotypical trait, which might be recognized variously in irrational attributions of athleticism, bodily strength, vitality, natural physical endowment, is of course well-known trope of racism also in British and US contexts (St Louis, 2005; Stuart, 2005). The black body here becomes – perhaps unexpectedly – 'phallic': an emblem of strength, of power, of what the white subject has lost, or stands to lose.

Our tentative analysis thus points to a twofold schema, an antinomy of fantasy. On the one hand: the phallic corporeality of black corporeality, the black body as epitome of physicality, as icon of vitality, as *body in apotheosis*. Yet, in contrast to such (distorted) idealizations, these bodies remain in perpetual proximity to death, to suffering; they are pictured in terrible states of duress, of dismemberment and violence that the white subject can never quite imagine for themselves. The fantasmatic black body exists thus in two irreconcilable scenes: as site of destruction (the body-in-pieces), and as image of physical perfection,

bodily exultation, site of exaggerated vitality. Body *in extremis* coincides thus with the body *in excelsis*.

Such a complex of coinciding images makes for fertile terrain within the racist (or racialised) imaginary, and affords a variety of dynamic explanations. One may understand the alternating components of this complex, this racist 'archetype', along the lines suggested by Mbembe's (2001) discussion of the body of the colonized, in which an exaggerated physicality eradicates properties of agency, spiritual elevation, humanity:

[I]n the colony the body of the colonized individual is considered, in its profanity, one object among others. Indeed, being no more than a "body-thing," it is neither the substrate nor the affirmation of any mind or spirit...His cadaver remains lying on the earth in a sort of unshakable rigidity, a material mass and a simple, inert object, condemned in the position of that which plays no role at all (Mbembe, 2001, pp. 26-27).

What is particularly useful about Mbembe's contribution is that it links many of the above psychoanalytic theorizations of the body to a more overtly political dimension, that of key notions within the philosophy of colonial subjugation.<sup>4</sup> These ideas link back to a longstanding Fanonian theme: the delegation of the bodily. This is the idea that the crass corporeality of the body that a particular (racial/class) group disavows is projected upon another group, who is thus consigned to the position of abject racial other.

Fanon's concern is primarily with white attributions of the hyper-sexuality of blacks, but we may extrapolate his idea to include the facet of excess corporeality, the dimension of the *abject* body. The factor of racialization here is impossible to ignore: the broken body, the suffering body, the repulsive body-in-pieces is always, certainly within apartheid culture, *the black body*. We can go one step further, and link this conceptualization to Lacan's (2006) formulations regards the *corps morcelé*. In his seminal essay on the mirror-stage, Lacan notes that the "fragmented body...is regularly manifested in dreams", particularly so under experiences of "the aggressive disintegration of the individual" (p. 78). Of course, given the predominance of the social fantasy with which we are concerned here, it is apparent that such schemas of fragmentation are not equally distributed throughout all social groups. One would expect, in situations of radical social asymmetry, that such

imagery would be delegated to racial/cultural/class others who are then given the burden of acting as depository for all such values and all related anxieties of fragmentation. This would be to say that the white body-in-pieces in racist or (post)colonial culture is elided; it never comes into view; it is never present except in the *displaced* form of the abjected *black* body-in-pieces.

On the basis of the above theorizations we can offer at least two accounts of the dynamic relationship between the facets of the fantasy we are examining. Doing so enables us to speculate on the libidinal economy, that is, the distribution of affects, in these related scenes. We might begin by emphasizing the priority placed on the imagining of the black body-in-pieces in racist contexts, and stress the need for white subjects to revisit or visualize this image precisely as the displacement of the fragmentary experiences of the white body-in-pieces. Odd as it may sound, such images here would have a placatory function, soothing anxieties of dissolution by locating them in a site of pronounced *dis*-identification. A societal fixation with such images, their incessant repetition within various forms of popular culture, can thus be understood along affective lines: such images glow with the gratification of respite, with the alleviation of anxiety, they make a tacit pronouncement: 'White bodies are not destined for this fate'.

There is also an argument that such scenes visit upon their victims exactly the violence they are thought to deserve. One relies here on the notion of projection, the idea that the other comes to be the carrier of the repellant values that the racist subject has themselves discarded. One thus attacks the other, blames them, with vigor proportionate to the need to expel these attributes from the self. To this we may add the Lacanian thesis that such depictions play the part of a scene of (*dis*)identification. Lacan's (2006) notion of the mirror stage specified that a double relation obtained between the subject and potential image of identification: the image is both jubilantly loved as a narcissistically-gratifying object, and yet also hated inasmuch as it proves a destabilizing or rivalrous influence. Such images of black body-in-pieces are, as such, a pure imagining of hate. There is a wishfulness about them, as if they visualize a desire, perhaps like the picturing of a wish in a dream, albeit in a literal and unusually undisguised manner.

Despite that at first appearance these accounts may appear to contradict one another, they can in fact sit side-by-side. The ambivalent quality of such imaginings, which move between providing gratifying relief from anxiety, and further stimulating affective levels of anxiety and



aggression, is of the nature of fantasy itself. A Lacanian perspective on fantasy insists on this: fantasy oscillates between extremes of unease and domestication, staging both a prospective castration and a scene which shields the subject against just such a possibility.

### **Exhibiting atrocity**

Before turning to a second theoretical perspective on the visual idiom of the black body-in-pieces, it helps to introduce a brief case-study of a particular image which in many instances can be taken as paradigmatic of the subset of images with which we are here concerned.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> April 1988, the Afrikaans newspaper *Rapport* published a gruesome photograph of a severely mutilated black body on the front page of its Sunday edition. The image was thought to justify a two-page spread, and it appeared on both front and back covers of the newspaper, above the headline '*Selfmoord Terro's*' (i.e. 'Terrorist kills himself') and beneath the back page banner '*Kamikaze-bom!*' ('Kamikaze bomb!'). The image, which I have opted not to reproduce here, shows the remains of a man, a 'terrorist', who had been killed while attempting to prime a limpet mine, presumably intended for civilian targets.

The photograph graphically depicts the scene of a body-in-pieces. It shows a white man, no doubt an investigating officer, squatting over the remains; a dismembered leg lies some distance away from the bottom (left-side) half of the man's abdomen. An inlay shows the man's (right-side) upper body and his head, which is being cradled by another investigator. Neither of the man's arms are intact, his face, while not recognizable, has been turned towards the camera – no attempt has been made to conceal his features. The text alongside the image reads as follows (my translation from Afrikaans):

The gruesome scene of the first bomb explosion on Friday night at Sterland, Pretoria. The limpet-mine apparently exploded when the terrorist attempted to attach it to a car in the parking-lot. The photograph shows the power of the bomb that blew the man's body to pieces (Rapport, 1988, p. 1).

Subsequent research revealed the name and background of the man in the image. Oderile Maponya, aka 'Mainstay', was, at the time of his death a commander in MK (*Umkhontu we Sizwe*, the armed wing of the

African National Congress) (Pigou, 2003). Although little is recorded of Oderile's background, the fate of his brother, Japie, featured as an important topic of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Japie was tortured and killed by apartheid security police operatives who were attempting to elicit information about Oderile's whereabouts; Oderile was thought to be orchestrating a series of 'terrorist' activities within the Northern 'Vaal triangle' region of the country at the time.

My intention here is not to embark on a sustained analysis of the pictorial codes and frame elements of this brutal image. Nonetheless, it is worth enumerating just a few of these elements, for they clearly play their part in redoubling the violence of an image which is perhaps the most explicit public picturing of the apartheid fantasy of the black body-in-pieces.

The sensationalistic tone of the accompanying "kamikaze-bom!" byline accords the scene neither a sense of gravity nor of human tragedy or loss. This jaunty proclamation, taken alongside the sparse, even telegraphic textual description, succeeds in suspending the true horror of what has happened. More overt yet is the undoubted shock-value of the scene which holds its audience with the *frisson* of the macabre, indeed with the prurient quality of the grotesque, rather than with any real intimation of human loss. The audience is invited to be appalled, disgusted by a gruesome depiction which solicits nothing by way of sympathy or identification. The very excessiveness of the image's contents as portrayed in such a forum – the man's eviscerated torso, his horrendously deformed and scattered remains - betrays its ideological agenda, pronouncing: whites cannot be depicted like this; a black terrorist and enemy of the state, by contrast, *can*.

It is tempting, in respect of this image, to apply Butler's (2009) thesis that the interpretation of a photograph is wholly reliant neither upon the subjectivity of the viewer nor the narrative accompaniment of captions. The photograph, she argues, is not merely an image awaiting interpretation. By delimiting what will count within the frame and

by virtue of the structuring constraints of genre and form on the communicability of affect...the photograph itself becomes a structuring scene of interpretation (p. 67).

One might expect thus that photographs of atrocity *extend* the brutalities they document. Indeed, "rather than merely referring to acts of atrocity, the photography builds and confirms these acts" (Butler,

2009, p. 70). In all of these respects, one might argue, this is a 'scene that should not be seen'; the very act of recording it adds to its violence.<sup>5</sup>

This is not of course to discount the effect of the framing elements I have been discussing – quite the contrary. These formal elements, once taken in conjunction with the racialising lens of apartheid discourse – which presumably lent the image its ideological legibility – effectively erase the dead man's status as human. This is perhaps the most obviously concerning aspect of the image: the dehumanization of the body which, depicted in such terms, can be offered no conceivable dignity, no respect for the dead. This anonymous, de-subjectivized body is more corpse than man, more waste matter ("body-thing"...cadaver...a material mass" to quote Mbembe (2001, pp. 26-27)) than person.

There are a number of further questions that one could ask, centering on the context and form of the image: why has it been used as the front-piece of an ostensibly family Sunday newspaper?; why the gratuitous (and no doubt further objectifying) double-page spread?; why, moreover, the front- and back-cover treatment reserved typically for major historical events? Interesting as these questions no doubt are, I wish to direct attention rather to the affective dimension of the picture, to the charge of *jouissance* associated with the image, that is, the prospect of the viewer's relish in what is depicted.

Although Butler (2009) does not make use of this psychoanalytic term, she does, like Sontag, stress the *transitive* nature of such photographs, underlining the fact that they relay affect, affirming also that the viewership of such atrocities may *exult* in what they see. This prospect of the – less than conscious – enjoyment to be gained in this image is of course variable, and it cannot be assumed in each viewer. That being said, such affective responses cannot, equally, be reduced to the subjective; they remain linked to symbolic co-ordinates, to the conditions of legibility of the apartheid context itself. In this case, the *jouissance* of the image is – at least in my reading – channeled toward a moralizing conclusion: this terrorist got what he deserved. Put differently, the illicit enjoyment 'in' the image is linked to its pragmatic function, the declaration it performs, that of intimidation, warning: this is what happens to terrorists.

The *Rapport* image epitomizes all that Strauss (2011) hoped that the proper human contextualization of the Nhamuave image was able to transcend. It exemplifies the tradition of visualizing atrocity; it conveys not so much a sense of suffering as of obliterated humanity. As such it

provides an instance of moral desensitization in which a dead person is reduced to an emblem of corporeality - to a corpse – which is forever removed from the empathic range of the (white, apartheid) viewer. The body in this image is a veritable icon of *dis-identification*; the disgusted reaction it inevitably invokes seems to have the potential only to harden attitudes of distance and separation.

### **In excess of representation**

The ‘turn to affect’ within contemporary social theory (Blackman & Venn, 2010; Clough & Halley, 2007; Massumi, 2002; Sedgwick, 2003) has given rise to a distinctive theorization of the *affectivity* of images. Work of this sort (Coleman, 2008, 2012, 2013; Featherstone, 2010; Latham & McCormack, 2009) ushers in a new and vital research field, one which avoids many of the presumptions of a ‘media effects’ model intent on gauging the impact of images upon bodies, each of which (images and bodies) is considered autonomous and easily separable from the other. These scholars expand upon the limitations inherent in a representational paradigm that treats images largely as descriptions of something else, and – as in the case of many discourse analysis and cultural studies approaches – as texts, that is, as carriers of ideology and discursive meaning that can be broken down and analysed so as to identify particular signifying relations and practices (Blackman & Venn, 2010).

This emerging tradition maintains that the affective force of an image, its ‘ambiance of sense’ as we might put it, outstrips the (not uncomplicated) complex of signifiers and discourses that it is thought – on the level of representation – to convey. As Alaimo and Hekman (2008) stress, the constant prioritization of *ideology*, *discourse* and *representation* has led not only to the neglect of the affective vicissitudes of experience, but also to that of the bodily-reactivity of images. As Featherstone (2010) insists:

images of bodies in the media...may literally move us, make us feel moved, by affecting our bodies in inchoate ways that cannot easily be articulated or assimilated to conceptual thought (p. 195).

Featherstone cites Massumi’s (2002) insistence on the primacy of the affective in image reception and goes on to stress that the body-image possesses *presence*. There is, furthermore “an unstructured non-

conscious experience transmitted between bodies”, and between body-images and bodies, we might add, “which had the capacity to create affective resonances below the threshold of articulated meaning” (Featherstone, 2010, p. 199).

Featherstone’s argument seems particularly applicable in the case of the disturbing order of images we have been considering. What is being advanced then is a mode of engagement with images which prioritizes *affect* over signification, *sense* over meaning, and *direct experience* over *processes of reading*. Coleman’s (2013) distinction is helpful: images work not only through what they depict, but how they are felt in and *through* the body. What follows from this is attention not to representational content, but to the resonances and experiences images induce in bodies. That is to say, staying with Coleman, “Images are...intensively experienced rather than intensively read...images are felt and lived out” (2013, p. 1). Hence the new research objective of grasping not only the experiential intensity of images, but grappling also with how such ‘pre-signifying affective materiality’ is felt in bodies (Latham & McCormack, 2009). We need thus to approach images in terms of their ability to generate bodily intensities, to arouse or inflame, indeed – harking back to psychoanalytic terminology used above - to engender effects of *jouissance*, to incur modes of libidinal investment or response.<sup>6</sup>

Importantly, what is being argued here moves beyond the (fairly intuitive) contention that images of bodies frequently have a visceral impact upon viewing subjects. While this much is true, one needs also tackle a more paradoxical assertion, namely that bodily-affecting images are, in a very important sense, not strictly separable from the bodies within which they induce reactions. This begs further explanation. What would it mean then, to say with Coleman (2008), that “A body is not a human subject who has relations with images...rather a body is the relation between....a human subject and images” (p. 168)?

Let me offer a few reflections on Deleuzian ontology (Deleuze, 1992; Deleuze & Parnet, 2002) – clearly a vital influence on Coleman’s own work - so as to contextualize the argument in question. The overlay of body and image,<sup>7</sup> their effective inseparability, is not well served by speaking of a ‘relation’. ‘Relation’ is not the right word here inasmuch as it implies a type of engagement between two discrete entities which maintain relative autonomy from one another. ‘Relationality’ thus comes a little closer to grasping the Deleuzian notion of an inter-

connected, varying, flux of reciprocities between image and body which are conjoined in a continual process of 'becoming'. Conceptually then, the task is not to presume the ontological primacy of discrete entities linked via a series of interconnections, but to grasp the interconnection rather as the ontological priority and as antecedent to the object-parts we tend to think of pre-existing such an interaction. Deleuze and Guattari's (2009) *Anti-Oedipus* is full of such examples: we have not an infant sucking at the breast, but rather the flow of the sucking-machine of breast-infant. A philosophy of becoming thus attempts to escape the dualism of thinking a 'relation' in subject-object terms; rather than the case of a *baby* sucking at the *breast* there is an emphasis on the 'interface area' where the outline of the two connected forms starts to blur and become indistinct (i.e. the focus is now on the *sucking-machine* made out of subsidiary parts).<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, rather than the presumption of *static* bounded entities whose nature is only temporarily affected by relations with other objects, the emphasis is now clearly on *the doing* rather than on the *nature* of the objects involved. The ontological focus is on the changing 'becoming' of what is being mutually-constituted in a relationality that is neither partial nor temporary but instead an on-going and constantly varying element of the materiality in question. The reconceptualization Deleuze offers is at least twofold then: it avoids the division of a field of interacting bodies into discrete parts, firstly, and it places the emphasis on processes, 'becomings' that emerge 'indivisibly between' such bodies.

It is for the above reasons that Coleman (2008) can claim that we need to "understand bodies not as a bounded subject that is separate from images but [instead] see the connections between humans and images as *constituting* a body" (p. 168).<sup>9</sup> This approach might shed a new light on the type of images we have been considering. The potency of these images lies with their ability to reproduce the *abjected* body not, or not only, as a representation, *but as lived visceral response*. Such an argument would support the contention that what is in question is not racism as product of discourse and representation, but instead a 'pre-discursive' effect (indeed, *affect*), an "unstructured non-conscious experience" which engages the body directly as an intensity that is, citing Featherstone, "palpable, but difficult to decipher and articulate in language" (2010, p. 199). What this means, in short, is that types of affectivity that are themselves asignifying, outside the remit of discourse

and representation, might nonetheless play their part in substantiating passions of a decidedly political sort.<sup>10</sup> So, while I agree with the above theorists as to the asignifying potency of affects upon bodies, it is also worth stressing the degree to which such regimes of affect can be put to use in substantiating different and racist orders of embodiment, differential categories of humanity. We might say then that although affect emerges in a way that is not immediately 'gentrified', i.e. domesticated by discourse, this free-floating period of non-attachment does not typically last long. Such affective intensities are inevitably taken up within or aligned to some meaning structure, even if they are never fully encompassed within or exhausted by it. In this respect we need to take seriously Hemmings's (2005) critique of "the contemporary fascination with affect as outside of social meaning" (p. 550). Wary of Massumi's (2002) notion of the autonomy of affects and Sedgwick's assertion of affective freedom, she notes:

affect [typically] manifests precisely not as difference, but as central mechanism of social reproduction...affective responses [often] strengthen rather than challenge a dominant social order (p. 51).

### **A scene not to be seen**

It is necessary here to briefly return to the case-study image discussed above. The *Rapport*'s publication of the image of Oderile Maponya (who was not of course identified as such in the image) led to a series of appalled reactions from the newspaper's readership. The newspaper had to cancel its annual literary prize when a prominent sponsor withdrew its support for the award due to the publication of the photograph. It is worth considering in a little more detail the nature of this outrage. Did this scandal reflect the (justified) anger at the unethical and sensationalistic use of an image of a subject who, in the given context, could be afforded no dignity whatsoever? This was, no doubt, a part of the reason for the outcry. Did the moral indignation occasioned by this publication also have something to do with the fact that the image 'carried things too far', exemplifying in grotesque terms the abjection of black bodies in apartheid? Did the photograph expose a truth that apartheid ideology labored to conceal?

Extending this argument: was the image so distressing because it showed so explicitly that which was omnipresent and yet typically undeclared, the 'scene not to be seen', i.e. precisely that which was best

left at the level of fantasy? The reaction to such a scandalous image is necessarily of course overdetermined; there are multiple – and historically-variable – reasons for the responses it provokes. I have already hinted at my own view: the disturbing charge stems at least in part from the fact that it rendered all too clearly a fantasmatic object of white apartheid subjectivity – the black body-in-pieces. The image is rightly considered ‘obscene’ in a precise sense. That is to say, it breaks the rules of (psychical and discursive) representation by picturing the social fantasy that usually exists beneath the surface in an implicit, assumed, *imagined* form. Such an image is not to be made explicit; if it is, one is confronted by what is most unacceptable, unpalatable about one’s own desire. The irony of the situation is of course that ideologically, the image would seem to fully support the apartheid regime, and in multiple ways. It is simultaneously a warning to terrorists (its implication: *this is the fate you deserve*); a sobering reminder to whites of why such opponents of the political system are to be feared; and an invocation of the object-status of the black body which may be depicted in such a mutilated state without the risk of white empathy. The lesson here, one often reiterated by Slavoj Žižek (1989), is that by pushing ideology too far, identifying too strongly with its unspoken injunctions, one is able to subvert its appeal.

Apartheid entailed a destruction of black bodies. The black body-in-pieces was, I think, a fantasmatic preoccupation of white apartheid South Africa, the correlate of a no less racist imaginary of the physical superiority, the indestructibility, the vitalism of black bodies. As already suggested, these two schemas need to be read together, as dynamically related, in the sense of Lacan’s twofold function of the fantasy so usefully illustrated by Žižek (1997). Firstly: fantasy<sub>1</sub>, the beatific or utopian imaginary that covers over a threat to my being, hiding from view any challenge to my narcissistic wholeness. Secondly: fantasy<sub>2</sub>, the disturbing scene that precisely pictures castration, depicting that which puts an end to my enjoyment, the wholeness of my being. The paradox of the situation in the context of the (body-in-pieces/indestructible body) ‘couplet’ of fantasies that we are discussing is that it is the *disturbing image* (the destroyed, suffering body) which presumably plays the role of the soothing fantasy<sub>1</sub>. It is this social fantasy which functions to hide the more threatening (yet less obviously troubling) fantasy<sub>2</sub> of the immortal physicality of the black body.

### **The present in the past still to come**



In an essay that explores the multiple ethical dilemmas of photographic depictions of torture and war, Judith Butler (2009) cites Susan Sontag's stark injunction: "Let the atrocious images haunt us" (p. 96). Sontag's (1977) early work on photography has of course proved incredibly influential; her arguments have come to inform many of our commonplace views on the subject. One example is the idea that visual representations of suffering have become so routine in today's mass-media, that images of this sort no longer possess the power to rouse ethical passions. Despite such arguments, and her conviction that narrative proved a more effective means of developing sustained political commitments, Sontag (1977) nonetheless maintained that photography possess the immediacy necessary to most effectively convey the reality of human suffering.

These views intersect with Butler's own concerns with 'grievable lives', that is, with the question of whose pain, life, death and suffering effectively counts as opposed to that of others and under what conditions. In an inspired reference to Barthes' (1999) elegiac essay on the nature and impact of photography, *Camera Lucida*, she points out that "The photograph relays less the present moment than [that of]...a time in which "this will have been"" (p. 97). Although Butler does not make this connection, this time of the future anterior is also, for Lacan, the time of Freud's *nachträglichkeit*. It is, in other words, the psychical temporality of the retroactive, Freud's 'deferred action', which disrupts linear or chronological time. Historical events, from this perspective, remain latent, effectively incomplete, subject to the contingencies of later circumstances through which they might be reactivated in unexpected ways.

What Butler takes from Barthes (1999) is a subtle appreciation of the concurrence of two temporal modes presented by the photograph, particularly, although not exclusively, in the case of portraits, pictures of people, indeed, of bodies. There is, on the one hand, the dimension of *what has been* (photograph as record of history), that is, a type of absolute pastness. On the other, there is the dimension of the constant present (photograph as frozen segment of time) about to spill over into the future, the aspect thus of *what will be*. The conjunction of these factors, of the *what has been* and the *what will be* gives us the future anterior of *this will have been*. Or, extrapolating to the case of human subjects, we have the declarative sense of 'he or she *will have been*'. This is a paradoxical tense which concedes the importance of the past

whilst simultaneously opening it up for alternative re-makings of the future. In other words, it accords a subject a history whilst also underscoring the potentialities of the present, and does so by virtue of the supposition of an as of yet undefined future.

How the temporality of the photographic record anticipates the inevitability of death is crucial here; mortality is important in the accounts of Sontag and Barthes alike. "Photographs" says Sontag, "state the...vulnerability of lives heading toward their own destruction" (1977, p. 66). Furthermore: "this link between photography and death haunts all photography of people" (p. 64). Likewise for Barthes, photographs of people, once placed within the inevitable continuum of history, necessarily tell of death in the future. Every photography, says Butler (2009), paraphrasing Barthes, is this catastrophe of death, "installing and soliciting perspective on the absolute pastness of a life" (p. 97).

One starts to appreciate thus the importance that the link between mortality and photography, along with the aligned idea of a double temporality, has for Butler's concerns with the conditions of grievability. In other words, the latent ethical dimension of the photograph, of the haunting image, is brought to fruition through the function of retroaction, through the retroactivity of double temporality. Furthermore, Butler asks: "does this quality of "absolute pastness" counter the forces of melancholy and open up a more explicit form of grieving?" (p. 97).

Is this quality of "absolute pastness" that is conferred on a living being...precisely the quality of grievability? To confirm that a life was, even within the life itself, is to underscore that a life is a grievable life. In this sense the photograph, through its relation to the future anterior, instates grievability (p. 97)

As Butler rightly notes, Sontag's insistence that "the atrocious images haunt us" allows for the possibility that we may refuse such a troubling relation to history, or that, given our particular historical and discursive location, this haunting may be unable to reach us. So, evidently there are situations within which we are not haunted, when – and the original circumstances of the *Rapport* photograph would seem to attest to this – to all intents and purposes, there has not been an aching loss, the public commemoration of a valued life lost. If we are shaken, haunted by a photograph, then it is because "the photograph acts on us in part through outliving the life it documents" (p. 98). We may put this simply

by saying that the photograph is evidence of a life, and yet, by its ability to freeze a moment of a life progressing toward death, it represents also the possibility that this life will, at some future point, be reflected upon, its meaning and value revisited, reconsidered. As such

the photograph is linked through its “tense” to the grievability of a life, anticipating and performing that grievability...the anticipation of the past underwrites the photograph’s distinctive capacity to establish grievability as a precondition of a knowable human life (p. 98).

One may argue of course that the image of Oderile Maponya pushes this argument to, and beyond, breaking point. Can such an image, one that reduces its subject to state of abject corporeality seriously be thought to ‘institute a mode of acknowledgement’? The answer I think is yes – and we should bear in mind that Sontag (1977) is concerned with precisely *atrocious* images – although there is a different facet of acknowledgement that will need be necessary if this is to be the case.

Butler’s revitalization of Sontag’s ethical imperative puts the stress on extended temporality, on the factors of repetition and non-forgetting, that is, on the inability to leave something behind. However, there are other possibilities for intervening within, experimenting with, Sontag’s imperative, that return us to the issues of bodily affect. What if we stress instead the first key term of this injunction, focusing thus on that which is *atrocious*, or, by extrapolation, *obscene*, which is of course precisely the facet of social fantasy I have emphasized above. The imperative now highlights the importance of *non-denial*, of not turning away from the social fantasy which, after all, is sustained precisely because it is never spelt out, and kept instead at one step’s remove.

Elided, disavowed, and thus secured; this is the very condition of social fantasy: never openly declared, yet for that very reason, a constant cultural presence. This presents us with the possibility of an odd ethical reversal. That one is appalled by an image – intensely affected by it - and wishes it to be removed, censored, may itself be a defense against one’s own desire, a means of keeping that image, or, more importantly, the associated fantasy, intact. Taken in this sense, the injunction now comes closer to the directive to know – or better yet, to *claim* – your fantasy, your obscenity, and, moreover, your *enjoyment*. And this is an altogether different proposition from the imperative to be haunted, to be appalled, or indeed, however tacitly, to repeat.

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<sup>1</sup> In speaking of a 'social fantasy' I mean to imply a fantasy thoroughly conditioned by and the result of prevailing socio-historical conditions; such a fantasy does not exist outside of the political context in which it occurs.

<sup>2</sup> See for example Krog, Mpolweni & Ratele's (2009) discussion of the footage broadcast on SABC showing the remains of the 'Gugulethu Seven' and subsequent images of security police officers posing "with hunter's pride alongside their 'trophies'" (p. 194).

<sup>3</sup> Fanon's famous description of being apprehended by the white racist gaze includes an account of his natural corporeal schema crumbling, being replaced by a "racial epidermal schema":

[C]ompletely dislocated, unable to be abroad with the other, the white man...I took myself far off from my own presence...and made myself an object. What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage that splattered my whole body with black blood? (Fanon, 1986, p. 112).

<sup>4</sup> Drawing on Fanon (1986) is likewise instructive in this respect inasmuch as his analysis similarly refuses to reduce phenomena of political oppression to naturally-occurring psychical operations.

<sup>5</sup> The same charge could be laid against the current paper: rather than critiquing or apprehending the violence of the image, my engagement here plays its part in extending it.

<sup>6</sup> To avoid any confusion: the theorists of affect cited above do not as a rule introduce psychoanalytic vocabulary – this is my own doing, by means of which I hope to facilitate a correspondence of ideas between the two theoretical domains.

<sup>7</sup> In this section I have *images of the body* in mind when speaking of the relation between images and the body.

<sup>8</sup> One should note furthermore that the subsidiary parts may not be drawn along the lines of division we are most intuitively familiar with. Deleuze's intervention is one which causes us to reconsider where one places the lines of ontological division: what had been discrete objects are now arts (subsidiary constituents, we might say); what

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had been clear lines of division between objects are now interface areas, zones of flow, of interconnection, that are of primary ontological concern.

<sup>9</sup> It is worth noting here an important convergence in respect of Lacanian and Deleuzian theory. Lacan's (2006) mirror-stage is concerned with a *body-image*, an image which enables a form of 'corporeal mapping' and that is as such a necessary vehicle of mediation in the always to some degree virtual task of assuming a body. More starkly put: in Lacanian theory the subject does not 'have' a body – in any significant sense – without the mediation of an image, an image, furthermore, that is always in some or other state of flux or variation, which constantly needs to be updated, 'refreshed', and which is never the exact, distortion-less, replica of the subject's physicality. In Lacanian theory then, images and bodies can thus be said to be 'spliced' into one another. Images serve as a template of sorts, as an organizing schema for the task of accommodating to a body. The ineffable 'real' of the body's corporeality, in turn, constantly disrupts such idealizing schemas of integration and cohesion. The notion of 'inter-spliced' images and bodies is as such a perfectly coherent research topic in Lacanian psychoanalysis – it is, as suggested above, also a key Fanonian problematic – even if a Deleuzian ontology might be said to radicalize this notion by means of its emphasis on *becoming*.

There are other notable convergences between these theories. Take for example how Coleman (2012), following Deleuze, thinks the virtual, as the intangible, immaterial or 'not-yet' aspect of actual or concrete everyday life. Such a definition overlaps significantly with the notion of the fantasmatic as I have deployed it above. Both terms privilege the visual dimension of the image (in Lacanian terms, the terrain of the *imaginary*, in Freudian vernacular, that of 'the Other scene') and entail a relation at once suspended from and yet intimately related to 'the actual'. Of course, the great benefit of a Deleuzian ontology is that its emphasis on materiality and – certainly within his work with Guattari – its political ethos avoids the prospect of psychical reductionism that so often underlies references to the psychoanalytic notion of fantasy.

<sup>10</sup> The role of affect as simultaneously outside of and yet supportive of racist discourse and ideology is a topic I have addressed in some detail elsewhere (see the discussion of 'pre-discursive' racism in Hook, 2011).