

# The Phallus, Excess and “Lack” in Police Brutality

By

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Submitted to OCAD University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

In

Contemporary Art, Design and New Media Art History

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2020

## Abstract

Through a post-structural approach that utilizes art as theory, this research attempts to highlight the issue of phallic “lack” with relation to white male policing of Black male bodies. The research is centered around the southern United States with a history of brutal policing practices from the period of enslavement that transcends to the present. With a psychoanalytic, Black Marxist framework, the paper is geared towards a Lacanian analysis of language in transcripts from two videos of police brutality, displaying that police brutality moves beyond the perceived stereotyping of Black males as “violent” and “dangerous,” but rather is steeped in anxieties around castration in the presence of the mythic larger Black male phallus.

## Acknowledgements

Asé to the ancestors for guidance and protection throughout this journey to complete this degree. Thanks to Keith Bresnahan, director of the programme that I was enrolled in (CADN) for his consistent support and encouragement. Without him there was no way I would have completed this program. I give thanks to my primary advisor, Gabrielle Moser for her great balance of patience/stern. I cannot thank her enough for her invaluable contributions and suggestions to get this project to the point at which it is today. I give thanks to my secondary advisor, Camille Isaacs, for her meticulous edits and helpful suggestions. And finally, I give thanks to my family, for the love, care, prayers, energy and life that I receive from them every day.

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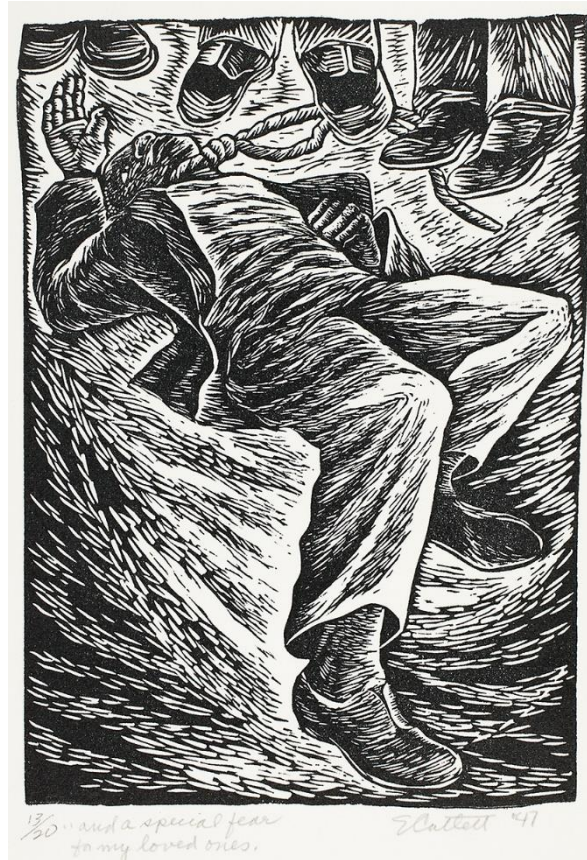
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## Introduction

As we transition from moment to moment, from era to era, there becomes... a repetition... a going over of days passed. When we thought certain terrors could not last... we remain...



**Fig. 1.** Catlett Elizabeth *...and a special fear for my loved ones*. 1946, The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago. By The Art Institute of Chicago Museum Education Department, *Art Institvte Chicago*, <https://www.artic.edu/artworks/184343/and-a-special-fear-for-my-loved-ones-from-the-black-woman-formerly-the-negro-woman-published-1946-47> Accessed 29 April 2020.



**Fig. 2.** Still from video of Eric Garner’s Choking Death, 2014. “5 Years Later: No Indictments in Choking death of Eric Garner,” by Kamau Franklin and Marc Steiner, *The Real News Network*, 2019. Source: <https://therealnews.com/stories/5-years-later-no-indictments-in-choking-death-of-eric-garner>. Accessed 15 December, 2019.

*Stark realities of then and now being similar, hardly differing outside of time and space. The continuation of the chokehold to death is highlighted here alongside the historical rendition of lynching to highlight the continuances.*

In conversation with a professor whose main area of research is Black Studies, I was told that one should not create parallels between lynchings in the past and police brutality of the present, as, in his opinion, the econo-socio-political (of these moments) is radically different. Brutality is where I locate this research – the seemingly unconscionable violence meted out to bodies deemed inferior – Black bodies. I liken the current act of the shooting of unarmed Black men to that of “spectacle lynching,” as articulated in African American scholar Carol Anderson’s Book, *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of our Racial Divide* (2016), a practice occurring since

the early 1900s, of advertising the killing of a Black person, where special promotional trains were contracted to bring out white crowds to act as spectators (43). Today, although there is an on the ground, physical crowd, with the advent of the cell phone, the act of murdering Black males has indeed been met with a new wave of spectacle in the digital/visual recording of this brutal act—which we,<sup>1</sup> as viewers, seem to be increasingly numbed to, due to the consistency with which these videos are being made available to the public.

There can be no separation between state-sanctioned brutality—by state sanctioned I mean the irony that although in word or law, the state does not support the brutalizing of Black bodies by “white institutions,”<sup>2</sup> the lack of accountability that is meted out when institutions enact violence of this kind contradicts this utterance—during earlier years, pre- and early post-Civil War, and the current climate in which we live, as brutality then was foundational for the brutality enacted in the present. Historically, lynching was carried out by white male civilians (often times with a blind eye turned by the state that was very much culpable, where persons of governmental capacity acted in the moment as mere civilians) as a means of corralling and disciplining Black bodies, so that they would remain in their place. Amy Louise Wood, in her research on lynching as spectacle, observes that,

The practice increased dramatically in both frequency and intensity after the Civil War and Reconstruction, peaking from the 1890s through the first decade of the twentieth century.

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<sup>1</sup> This “we” refers to the general populace who receive “the message.” The message here referenced is that which is sent in communication and received.

<sup>2</sup> By this I mean the apparatus/rubric within which certain ways of navigating power have been stitched into the fabric of operation, where neither physical race nor gender matters, but the systemic creation of a white/male prerogative as the foundational stance upon which the institution lies. As Carol Archibald argues, “Most of the historical literature describing the early development of policing in Colonial America focuses specifically on the northern regions of the country while neglecting events that took place in the southern region – specifically, the creation of **slave patrols** in the South.

Slave patrols emerged in South Carolina in the early 1700s, but historical documents also identify the existence of slave patrols in most other parts of the southern region (...) Samuel Walker identifies slave patrols as the first publicly funded police agencies in the American South.” (4)



At this time, lynching became a predominantly southern, racialized phenomenon, as white southerners sought to restore their dominance in the face of emancipation and the threat of black enfranchisement and social autonomy. (3)

Through this practice one sees the means by which white patriarchy performed and navigated the loss of power; the regaining of power; and the maintenance of that power through this specific act which they had access to.

**Fifty years later, still see my brothers choked to death**

**R.I.P to Eric Garner, only right I show respect**

**Nowadays they hangin' us by a different tree**

**Branches of the government, I can name all three**

**Judicial, legislative and executive...**

**(Joey Badass ft. Chronixx – Babylon, Pro Era &**

**Cinematic Music Group, 2017)**

If, as the United Nations' Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recently declared in 2016, this entire rubric of anti-racism is systemic, and has not shifted, where profit and gains for the few propertied class are the desired outcome at any cost, where the lives of the laboring class are particularly considered evidentiary dispensable, then there is no reason to anticipate that the practices of giving *carte blanche* to those empowered by the state for purposes of protecting and upholding the status quo within that unchanging system should change. This is what Black studies scholar Christina Sharpe, author of *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, highlights when she speaks of living in the wake:

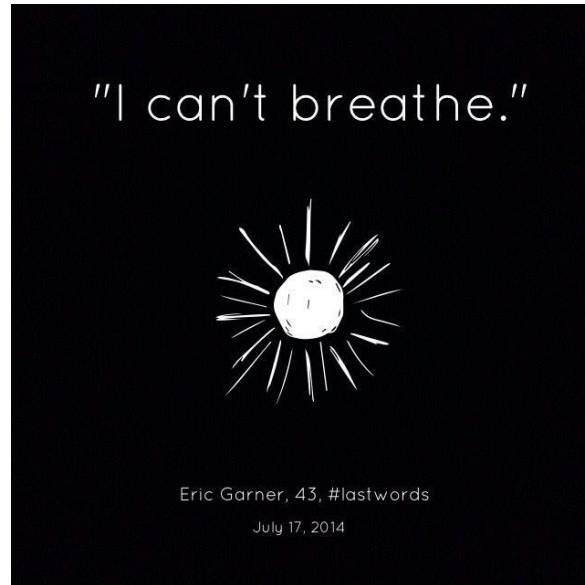
Living in the wake means living the history and present of terror, from slavery to the present, as the ground of our everyday Black existence; living the historically and geographically dis/continuous but always present and endlessly reinvigorated brutality in, and on, our bodies while even as that terror is visited on our bodies the realities of that terror are erased. Put another way, living in the wake means living in and with terror in that in much of what passes for public discourse *about* terror we, Black People, become the *carriers* of terror, terror's embodiment, and not the primary objects of terror's enactments; the ground of terror's possibility globally. This is very clear as we think about those Black people in the United States who can "weaponize sidewalks" (Trayvon Martin) and shoot themselves while handcuffed (Victor White III, Chavis Carter, Jesus Huerta, and more)...  
(15)

The Black body marked indelibly as terror/terrorized exists within this unyielding space where assumptions of progress can be easily demystified when faced with stark realities of sameness. This is further iterated by Kehinde Andrews, author of *Back to Black: Retelling Black Radicalism for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, when he argues that;

In both Britain and America the battles and hard-fought victories for recognition and legislation have lulled us into a false sense of progress. Landmark gains for civil and voting rights in America, and race relations bills in Britain opened up the dreams of inclusion and equality for Black so-called citizens. The sad reality is that fifty years after these apparent gains racism is as embedded in the fabric of society as ever, coded into the DNA of the system. (xv)

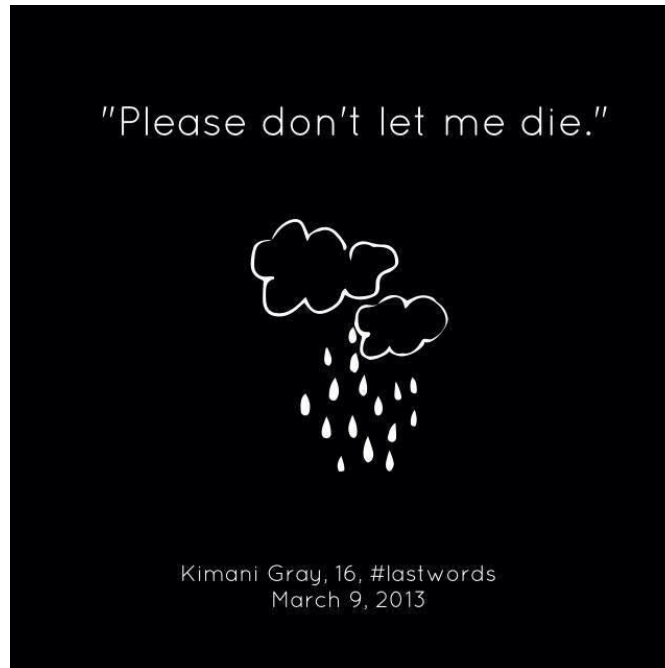
This assertion is reiterated by Anderson, in her chapter, “Rolling Back Civil Rights,” when she states, “The objective was to contain and neutralize the victories of the Civil Rights Movement by painting a picture of a ‘colorblind,’ equal opportunity society whose doors were now wide open, if only African Americans would take initiative and walk on through” (101). The idea is the assumption that radical anti-Black racism no longer exists, but within the Trump era, it is becoming even more glaring that that has not been accomplished. This is by no means limited to America but does include Canada. Robyn Maynard, Black feminist writer and grassroots community organizer, has noted the “Canadian proclivity for ignoring racial disparities.” She continues, stating that anti-Blackness in Canada “hides in plain sight, obscured by a nominal commitment to liberalism, multiculturalism and equality” (3). Canadians oftentimes separate themselves from overt violent forms of racism in the United States, when the insidious forms of racism existent in Canada prove to be just as, if not more violent than that of the U.S.

Recognizing this climate does not mean that it is easier, then, to make sense of it. We try to find ways of articulating this reality, to make sense of the extent to which there exists a lack of conscience/consciousness by police:



**Fig. 3.** Bargi, Shirin. *"I Can't Breathe."* #lastwords. 2014, "Ten Powerful Minimalist Pictures That Beautifully Challenge Police Brutality in America," by Eileen Sheem, Mic 2014, <https://www.mic.com/articles/96438/10-powerful-minimalist-pictures-that-beautifully-challenge-police-brutality-in-america>. Accessed 21 December 2019.

The last words of Garner are representative of the suffocating reality of Blacks on the ground. If a loud utterance of discomfort is unable to jolt the perpetrator to the reality of their brutalization, as in Fig. 4.:



**Fig. 4.** Bargi, Shirin. *"Please don't let me die."* #lastwords. 2014, "Ten Powerful Minimalist Pictures That Beautifully Challenge Police Brutality in America," by Eileen Sheem, Mic 2014, <https://www.mic.com/articles/96438/10-powerful-minimalist-pictures-that-beautifully-challenge-police-brutality-in-america>. Accessed 21 December 2019.

...then the quest towards the undoing of this needs to extend further from where we have been, which is further than attempts at lawful policy changes that decade after decade have been instituted,<sup>3</sup> where the reality of Kendrick Lamar's "Alright" is and has been our daily fear:

Nigga, and we hate the po-po

Wanna kill us dead in the streets fo sho'.

(Kendrick Lamar: Alright, Top Dog Entertainment,

Aftermath Entertainment & Interscope Records, 2015)

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<sup>3</sup> On paper, changes have been made but have not been enacted in practice since the days of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), into early post-enslavement efforts to the now, with the efforts of the presently, seemingly defunct #BlackLivesMatter, with their marches, and also an effort at derailment by the Obama Administration with a scheduled meeting to discuss ways to go forward, undoing histories of inequality, that nevertheless yielded no fruit.

The apparatus of regulation has been effective; the flash of blue and red lights does not signal safety for those of us who have been relegated to the sidelines as “non-citizen” or not belonging to this North-American space. Instead, it signals danger. The notice has gone out: If you are in danger as a Black being, DO NOT, under any circumstances, call the police; one might as well call the fire department. These are the lessons being learned in 2020:

“... Somewhere between the fact we know and the anxiety we feel is the reality we live.”

(Mamie – Mother to Emmett Till, qtd. in Timothy B. Tyson - *The Blood of Emmett Till*)

This expression by Mamie Till reflects the unfortunate history of sadism enacted by whites against Black bodies seeking the freedom of existence, that follows into the present. As Wood writes, “Southern mobs in this period also were more likely to lynch their black victims openly and with excessive force, exacting unprecedented tortures and mutilations.” (3)



**Fig. 5.** Bargi, Shirin. “....” #lastwords. 2014, “Ten Powerful Minimalist Pictures That Beautifully Challenge Police Brutality in America,” by Eileen Sheem, Mic 2014, <https://www.mic.com/articles/96438/10-powerful-minimalist-pictures-that-beautifully-challenge-police-brutality-in-america>. Accessed 21 December 2019.

*Shirin’s minimalist art profoundly speaks to the barrenness of the many lives lost, bringing to life the one individual within that vast nothing, emphasized in the moment, where the most poignant words, the “last words” can remain deliberately indelibly etched into minds. This art is used here to emphasize those stark realities that often go unnoticed.*

## **Methodology**

Through the lyricism of rap activists, like Kendrick Lamar and J Cole, and while locating the historical and contemporary loci of the perpetuation of stereotypes as highlighted in Robert Mapplethorpe's portrait photograph, *Bob Love* (1979), this major research paper explores the disseminated idea of the "sexed" Black male body and attempts to theorize the subconscious machinations that occur when those bodies come into contact with white police.

This research seeks to:

- 1) demonstrate that the violent, irrational, unconscious, stereotypical impulses of the police when apprehending the Black male body stem, along with ideas of their bodies as signs of "danger" and "violence," from the idea/fear/fetish of the equation that Black male = big phallus;
- 2) explore the resilience of the ideas of the Black man's hypersexuality and larger-than-normal phallus and how those sit within both the general and in particular the white male unconscious, allowing for a phantasm in the white, armed, male body that heightens senses of "lack" within Jacques Lacan's extension of Sigmund Freud's concept of the "castration complex"; and
- 3) demonstrate what has become evident (and the proof has been there from the inception with the Haitian Revolution of 1791-1804)—that within the current systemic modes of white supremacy, Black freedom is impossible.

This study is situated within the Black radical tradition, stemming from the fight for freedom of the Haitian enslaved, through to Marcus Garvey and the Black Panthers in 1960s America. The research recognizes Black Marxism as imperative within ideas of freedom today, as this idea of

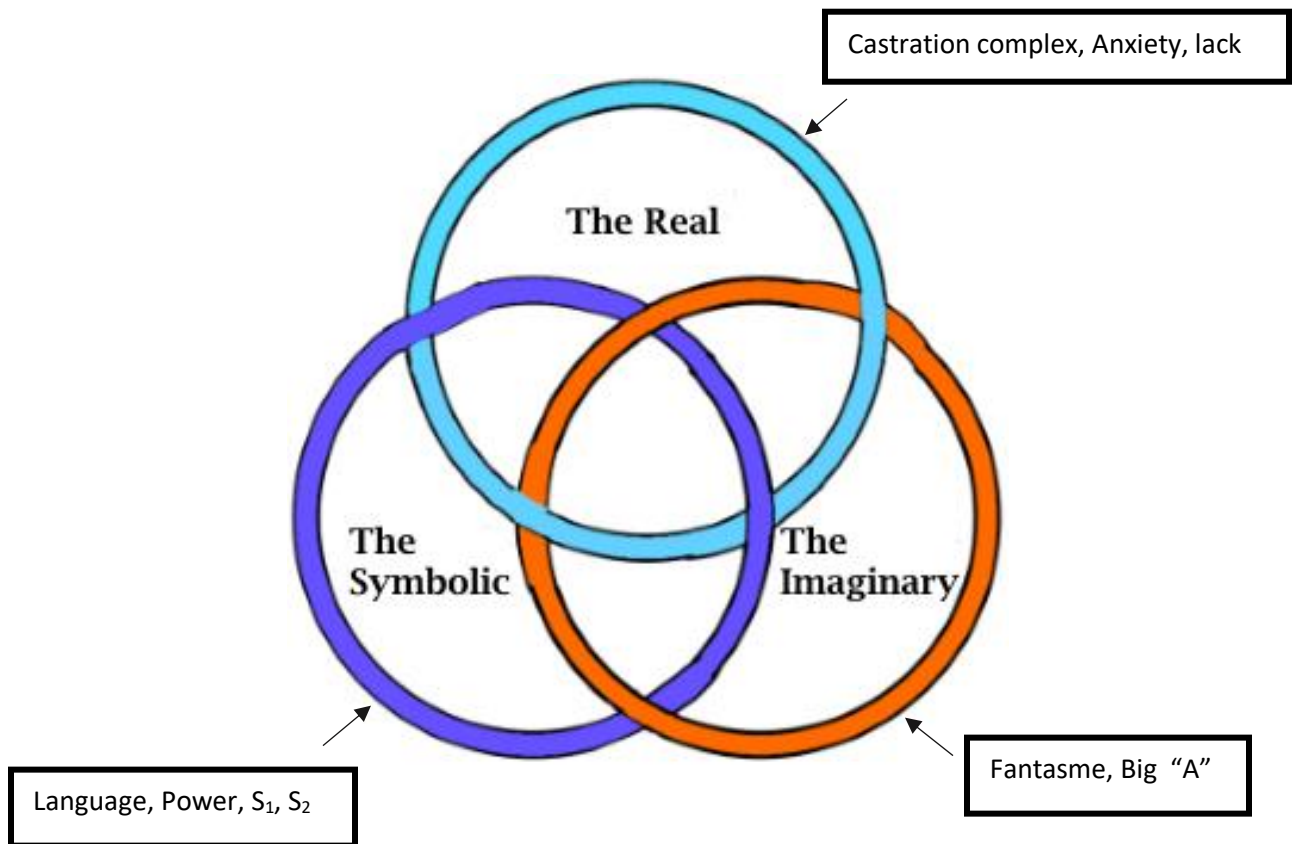


freedom cannot be attained within the current western socio-politico-economic state. Considering ideas from postcolonial studies, specifically those of Frantz Fanon, with regard to decolonization, this research is geared towards the undoing of unconscious biases that continue to this day and are yet to be rooted out. To do so, both the psychoanalytic stance of Jacques Lacan with his ideas of “lack” related to the castration complex, along with ideas of the economy, generation and dispersal of culture purported by Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno, will be utilized.

For a number of reasons, I have chosen to focus on the southern part of the United States because of its foundational role as the location of the development of a system that would harness the labour of millions of Black enslaved people for profit, and for the sustenance and protection of that system, which clearly defines (both on and off paper), which official and unofficial laws had to be enacted. Because of the ability of visual culture to transcend national and cultural boundaries, particularly in today’s technologically driven society that provides new modes of proliferation and dissemination, the visual artworks I analyze are not confined to the South, although emphasis is placed on videos of police brutality produced in the southern United States in order to give a clear trajectory for the tracing of brutality into the present. This is with the recognition that, by no means are those practices of brutality relegated to the South alone, but that the South serves as the historical seat of the development of those practices, and their legality and impunity within North America. In the attempt to grasp the contemporary realities of police brutality, I have decided to make use of some of the most recent recorded videos of instances of police brutality that were released on the internet within the past ten years and that are site specific. Recognizing the possible wide scope of the research, but limitations of a major research paper (MRP) such as this one, I have decided to narrow down the vast number of videos analyzed to two of the most prominent

videos that have clearly articulated conversations that would allow both for the analysis of the language and the idea of spectacle.

My intention of sketching unconscious police impulses operating within acts of police brutality is guided by Jacques Lacan's Borromean Knot (Lander and File 22), which has been edited for the sake of elucidation for readers, as displayed below.



At the commencement of each section, the area from which I work to unpack the unconscious will be highlighted, working as a signpost for readers.

This research is situated in a quest to work within what Fred Moten calls "our resistant, relentlessly impossible object" of "subjectless predication" (vii). For that reason, I make heavy use

of the em-dash as a means of creating both tactile and psychological space for opening thought. This will be further expanded by making use of varied forms of visual/aural/written art forms throughout the work which are intended to force open pockets of thought for thinkers to expand upon the ideas presented here. I use a post-structural approach for the layout of this work, as a means of fragmenting the real, as I work towards deconstructing this psychosocial act. Therefore, the use of boxes of reference, to either highlight thought that exists outside of my writing but adds to the validity of my work, or to further explain an art piece, works as means of consistently separating the reader from my work to maintain active thinking while reading and thinking through my arguments via varied avenues within the same postulations. While the research attempts at unveiling the “real” within the unconscious of white police, it also attempts to move past the reader’s first point of conscious receiving of what is communicated, teasing out their unconscious, embedded means of perception to further connect to the messages that I explore in this paper.

### **Literature Review**

Much work has been done on the visualization of the Black body, its figuring into the domineering sphere of representation and re-representation, and attempts at denying the inscriptions applied to the Black body from the period of enslavement as a means of categorizing and justifying those bodies before emancipation, to post-emancipation where these insipid inscriptions have not been erased and continue to do the work of marginalizing and inferiorizing. Author bell hooks in *Black Looks* (2015) has consistently interrogated the visual representation of Black bodies, from a feminist/anti-racist/anti-capitalist lens. hooks is mindful of the fact that representation is often repeated in visual works, even by Black authors, who have not made efforts to work through a critical lens and their own modes of internalized racism.

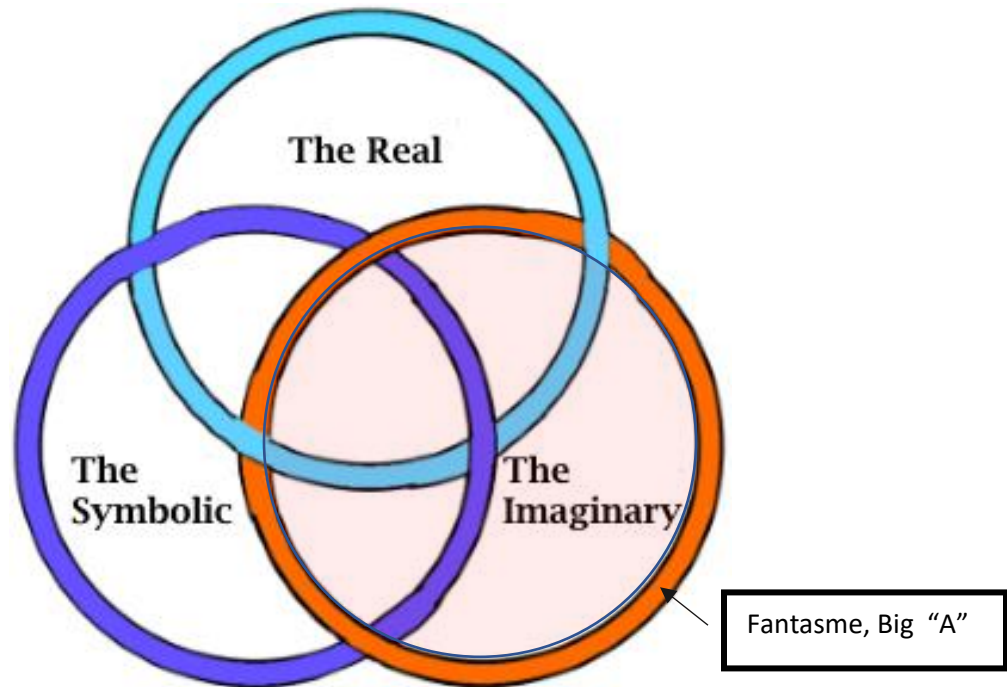
The Black body remains as spectacle and is interrogated by Amy Louise-Wood who chronicles the early exhibition of Black pain in *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940* (2009). She highlights the brutality enacted on Black bodies and the willingness of white masses to not only be present for these abominable acts and treat it as a socializing act, but also to reproduce the scene for mass consumption in the form of photographs and postcards. The pained Black body is often researched and theorized about, specifically after the 1991 Rodney King police brutality case that sparked massive upheavals and riots in the US.

Both Kimberly Juanita Brown in *The Repeating Body: Slavery's Visual Resonance in the Contemporary* (2015), and Nicole R. Fleetwood in *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality and Blackness* (2011), seek an alternative form of reading Black bodies on display, where these bodies are not reduced to simply “the seen” that is hoped for within stigmatized perspectives, but rather provide more nuanced readings that not only take into consideration the effects of enslavement on bodies that existed as beings before enslavement, but also extends into contemporary visual arts and ways in which art can be read outside those prescribed lenses. Author Michelle Wallace adds to that debate, writing on the need to both focus on Blackness as represented through stereotype, and also attempt to trouble the already skewed ways of apprehension in itself in the book *Dark Designs and Visual Culture* (2004).

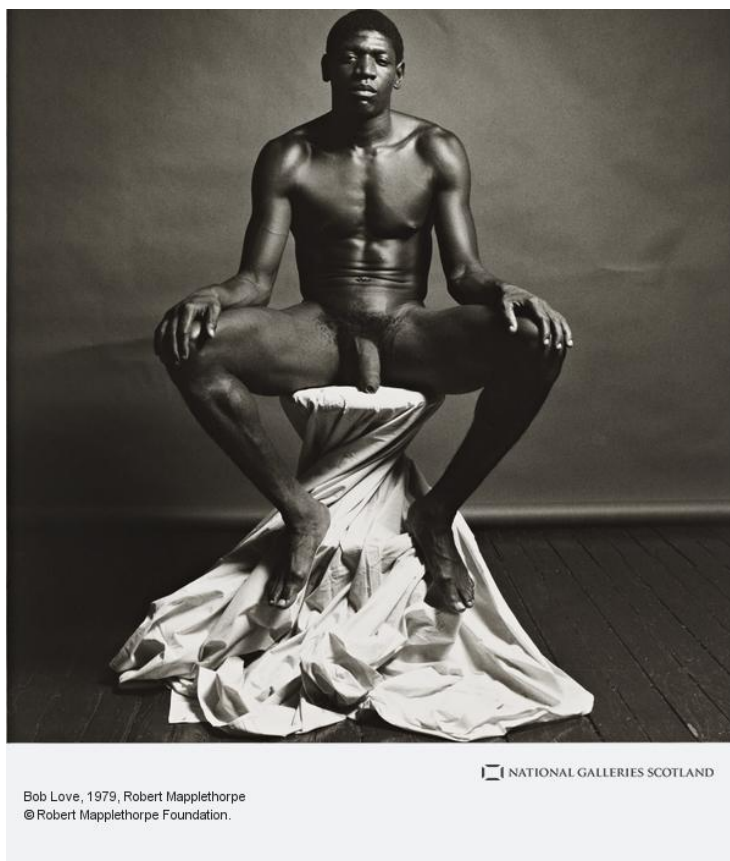
My work stands on the shoulders of these authors, who have always troubled seeing, attempting to catapult the contemporary, easily accessible visual representation of the pained body beyond merely seeing and absorbing Black pain as repetitive and natural, and turning it on its head to understand not the Black pained body, but rather the white unconscious, as inflictor of that pain. This work is not singularly done through the theoretical, but makes use of visual artists' creations,

as a means of further exploring and splaying the psychic underpinnings of everyday life within the white/patriarchal/capitalist rubric.

Section One: “The thing looked at...” (Sartre): OBJECT



*“In relation to the Negro, everything takes place on a genital level.” (Fanon 121)*



**Fig. 6.** Mapplethorpe, Robert. *Bob Love*. 1979, ARTIST ROOM Tate and National Galleries of Scotland. *National Galleries Scotland*, <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/90865/bob-love>. Accessed 16 December 2020.

*The Bob Love series used in this section is to specifically bring to life the sexualization of the Black male and the pointed focus on the phallus, which Mapplethorpe unabashedly indulged in. This is a recall of Fanon, the specific line being quoted in the beginning of this section.*

The current reality is still unsurpassed: Blacks are perceived as less than/none/(in-between?). The need for the colonizer/capitalist was/is to apprehend the Black human as “thing.” Apprehending the Black human as “thing” gives ample space for the white subject to associate

the Black body/subject as “tool.”<sup>4</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre’s book, *Being and Nothingness*,<sup>5</sup> has given me a foundation as I attempt to grasp the tendency to violently apprehend Blackness. The ease with which Black subjects were relegated to the category of “thing” can be explored through Sartre’s concept of instrumental objects. For Sartre, everything that a human, as subject encounters, be it human or thing, is first encountered as object *qua* instrument. He states:

Yet it must be noted that this future of the world which is thus revealed to us is strictly objective. The instrumental-things indicate other instruments or objective ways of making use of them: the nail is “to be pounded in” this way or “to be picked up by the handle,” the cup is “to be picked up by its handle,” etc... Thus the world appears to me as objectively articulated; it never refers to a creative subjectivity but to an infinity of instrumental complexes. (425)

According to Sartre, this primary apprehension applies to all that one comes into contact with, but consciousness thus comes to recognize bodies as beyond mere instruments of “utility,” differentiating between an “objective” and an “existential” relation. Sartre believes that the body is recognized as “the instrument which I cannot use in the way I use any other instrument, the point of view on which I can no longer take a point of view” (433). But in the apprehension of the Black body by the white thief, this recognition of being is suspended to accommodate intention.

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<sup>4</sup> It would be remiss of me to not mention that in the Caribbean this word is used to simultaneously refer to both what has been noted in the English language, but also to the phallus.

<sup>5</sup> In the English translation of 1956.





**Fig. 7.** Mapplethorpe, Robert. *HOODED MAN (FROM PORTFOLIO Z)*. 1980, Los Angeles County Museum of Art. *Los Angeles County Museum of Art - LACMA*, <https://collections.lacma.org/node/2155810>. Accessed 16 December 2020.

*The hooded Black male is deliberately denied the look, as Mapplethorpe refocuses on the “hooded” male phallus, drawing the eye definitively to his intention... Mapplethorpe takes it a step further and removes possibilities of being apprehended as subject – always object – tool – phallus.*

Sartre goes on to further assert that it is when the Other returns the look, that the original perceptor is incapable of keeping the other locked within the instrument/object lens (355): “In particular my own *look* or my connection without distance with these people is stripped of its transcendence by the very fact that it is a *look-looked-at*” (Sartre 356).<sup>6</sup> This is the moment of acknowledgement of the Other’s subjectivity—as beyond “thing.” This idea of thinghood in relation to separation from the body has been built on assertions made by earlier philosophers, particularly Georg Hegel who theorized that the connection with another eliminates the initial perception of the other as a “this” among “thises” (154). Hegel believes that human beings are really only capable of recognizing themselves as they “mutually recognize one another” (231). But having been denied the look, ergo the capacity to retain subjectivity, Blacks were to remain as instrument to be utilized.

In attempting to apprehend the Black being as subject, there is little ability to move past being a “tool” into an actual subject, specifically with the Black male body that is always already locked within the imaginary as phallic.

On the Phenomenological level, there would be a double reality to be observed. The Jew is feared because of his potential for acquisitiveness... As for the negroes, they have tremendous sexual powers. What do you expect, with all the freedom they have in their jungles! They copulate at all times and in all places. They are really genital. (Fanon 121)

This phallic obsession crops up and lives through the very existence of the Black male. It is illustrated in the means of expressing how they have been openly witnessed in society:

In each case the crime was deliberately planned and perpetrated by several Negroes. They watched for the opportunity when the women were left without a protector. It was not a

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<sup>6</sup> Original emphasis

sudden yielding to a fit of passion, but the consummation of a devilish purpose which has been seeking and waiting for the opportunity. This feature of the crime not only makes it the most fiendishly brutal, but it adds to the terror of the situation in the thinly settled country communities. No man can leave his family at night without the dread that some roving Negro ruffian is watching and waiting for this opportunity. The swift punishment which invariably follows these horrible crimes doubtless acts as a deterring effect upon the Negroes in that immediate neighborhood for a short time... *The generation of Negroes which have grown up since the war have lost in large measure the traditional and wholesome awe of the white race which kept the Negroes in subjection, even when their masters were in the army, and their families left unprotected except by the slaves themselves. There is no longer a restraint upon the brute passion of the Negro.*<sup>7</sup> (The “Daily Commercial” qtd. in Wells-Barnett 19)

The attempts at self-assertion and moving away from society’s doled-out objecthood becomes, in mass visual cultures, the unleashing of an unbridled passion that was able to be restrained during enslavement—autonomy becomes difficult to gain when a society’s consciousness has been sedimented. This attempted autonomy, then, is the phallus, which needed to be subdued at all cost.

Researchers of Black subjugation during and post-enslavement have noted that part of the lynching process included the physical castration of the Black male. Fanon, foremost thinker on Black phenomenology connected to psychoanalysis, states: “No anti-Semite, for example, would ever conceive of the idea of castrating the Jew. He is killed or sterilized. But the Negro is castrated. The phallus, his symbol of manhood, is annihilated, which is to say that it is denied” (125). The

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<sup>7</sup> Emphasis added.

hypersexuality of the Black male has been a touted myth of society, along with fantasies of a larger than usual/larger than life phallus. Research, as Fanon indicated, citing the work of Dr. Pales on African men, has shown that the phallus “rarely exceeds 120 millimeters (4.6244 inches). Tetsut in his *Traite d’anatomie humaine*, offers the same figure for the European” (131). Despite this, the myth of the Black male phallus and his sexual/sexed nature is consistently re-visited in and sedimented by reproductions generated from the collective imaginary in the North-American context. In *The Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (1972), Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno elucidate the ways concepts of Enlightenment and reason have, through mimesis (in their time, mainly television and radio), been used by the culture industry to maintain the economic structure. They state clearly that, “Those in charge no longer take much trouble to conceal the structure, the power of which increases the more bluntly its existence is admitted” (95). The populace has been so entranced by not just the visual, but the myths that sustain the given visibility, that little attempt is made to actively push back against this, unless the ego allows for a breakthrough of alternate knowledge, which is hardly available as all these are supported by what Louis Althusser calls the “Ideological State Apparatuses” (systems built within society to sustain the given socio-politic-economic structure). To the dominant tools mentioned in the time of Horkheimer and Adorno’s theorizing of mass culture, I would like to add social media as the current most potent tool of dissemination.

Literal castration has ended, but to view videos of police shootings, there is an unexplainable violent reaction to the meeting of white police officers and the Black male subject that I believe is beyond the unconscious impulses as outlined by Malcolm Gladwell in *Blink: The Power of Thinking without Thinking* (2017). Gladwell refers to a study by psychologist John Bargh that used white and black faces, pairing them with either a wrench or a gun. The end result was

that, with the split-second decision, the cohort tested fell back on their unconscious predilections to stereotypically associated Blackness with violence (233). As was the case of Charles Kinsey, a behavioral therapist, who was shot by the police in 2016 while attempting to pacify his autistic patient. It was not a split-second decision. In the video, he repeatedly explained why he was there with his mentally ill patient while both hands were kept in the air. In an interview with CNN, he states that he is unable to understand why he was shot and has not received a satisfactory explanation (Cnn.com). I believe that there exists an impulse to erase the Black body, adding to those ideas of “danger” in the white imaginary as outlined by Gladwell, which is rooted in the concept of “lack” that stems from the castration complex, all coalesced in the imaginary, from original myth and mythification.

In articulations of the reasonings behind denying the Black person personhood, white subjects’ responses have remained affixed on the spectre/imaginary of Black genitalia. As a response to the court ruling in 1954 of *Brown v. Board of Education*, Judge Thomas Pickens Brady, who served on the Mississippi Supreme Court, penned the now legendary speech, “Black Monday,” in which he wrote:

School integration is the first step toward racial intermarriage... Wherever white men infused their blood with the Negroes, white intellect and white culture perished. It happened tragically in Egypt, Babylon, Greece, Rome, India, Spain and Portugal. When the NAACP petitioned the Court for integration, it was to open the bedroom of white women to Negro men. (qtd. in Tyson 96)

Efforts made by Blacks towards further integration were read immediately as Black male desire of the white female, exposing an inherent phallic anxiety. This anxiety around Black power

centered on the phallus was brought to life in D.W. Griffith's film, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915),<sup>8</sup> where he attempted to demonstrate that Southern women's sanctity was imperilled by Black male desire run rampant after the victories of the Civil War.<sup>9</sup>



**Fig. 8.** Griffith, D. W. Gus Chasing Elsie *The Birth of a Nation*. 1915, “A Terrorizing Mythology: On the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Birth of a Nation” by Phenderson Djèlé Clark, *The Musings of a Disgruntled Haradrim*, 2015, <https://pdjeliclark.wordpress.com/2015/02/08/a-terrorizing-mythology-on-the-100th-anniversary-of-birth-of-a-nation/>. Accessed 23 December 2019.

*Gus, looking ghoulish and overbearing is juxtaposed to the smaller, white and very vulnerable Elsie. Gus, the Black/evil is about to do the unthinkable, use the phallus to take from the white male. She is heroically saved by the white male. Gus is to face retribution (shooting/lynching) for his attempt.*

<sup>8</sup> President Woodrow sanctioned the veracity of the film by stating that: “This is like writing history with lightning” (qtd. in Bogle T.K)

<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that this film ends with the victory of the Ku Klux Klan over Black licentious desire and inability to govern rationally.

This film is heralded in film circles as the beginnings of the language of American cinema, without often recognizing what it meant for Black representation then, and continues to mean now, despite the quickly forgotten response to this film in *The Birth of a Nation* (2016), a response by Black film Director Nate Parker.<sup>10</sup> This is noted in bell hook's *Black Looks* (2014), where she mentions that the necessity to control images was recognized early by white supremacists as crucial to "any system of racial domination" (hooks 2).

Lynching served its purpose as regulation. From physical crowds to online crowds, the re-enactment of the performance of power proliferates. There is something potent and indelible in consuming the imagery of a body that has been decapitated, towards the end of erasure of self-hood and self-determination, be it imagined or actual. This continued display/performance/spectacle of violence to the end of regulation can only gain its imaginary permanence through reproduction.

***This is how the media pillages  
On the TV the picture is  
Savages in villages...  
Stereotyping the image of the images  
And this is what the image is...  
(Damian Marley & Nas – "Patience", Republic  
Records & Def Jam Recordings, 2010)***

The necessity of having an ingrained visual sustaining the myth of Black inferiority and objecthood has been sustained and continues to be projected at the forefront of white minds: This

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<sup>10</sup> Little wonder that current Hollywood cinema still stands on the footholds of the foundations of racism endemic to cinematic language.

visual permanence is fed by mass media and becomes part of the wider masses' daily consciousness.

It was the spectacle of lynching, rather than the violence itself, that wrought psychological damage, that enforced black acquiescence to white domination... Even more, mobs performed lynchings as spectacles for other whites. The rituals, the tortures, and their subsequent representations imparted powerful messages to whites about their own supposed racial dominance and superiority. These spectacles produced and disseminated images of white power and black degradation, of white unity and black criminality, that served to instill and perpetuated a sense of racial supremacy in their white spectators.

(Wood 2)

Lynchings were enacted on both physical and psychic levels, solidifying each race's socio-spatial hierarchies.<sup>11</sup> The reproduction of lynchings and the relics that were kept post-lynching were designed to reproduce that moment of enactment and assert power boundaries. This practice took the form of kept "pieces of rope, links of chain, scraps of the victim's clothes, charred bits of wood, photographs [...] and picture postcards" (Fuoss 19). Those relics served as constant reminder, with the intended imprinting and impressing upon the imaginary, that each should know their place and maintain those delineated psychological boundaries; particularly when Blacks have overstepped and attempted to cross that border into subjecthood, they need to

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<sup>11</sup> "For many lynchings, trees were filled with spectators, as were upper story windows and rooftops. Children not fortunate enough to get the bird's eye view afforded by these seats might nevertheless find a perch on a parent's shoulder, and women also are reported to have sat or stood on men's shoulders to get a better view. In some lynchings, such as one in Waco, Texas, women and children were given special dispensation. The local newspaper reported that 'women and children who desired to view the scene were allowed to do so, the crowds parting to let them look on the scene,' and James SoRelle reports that one of the women 'applauded gleefully when a way was cleared so that she could see the writhing naked form of the fast dying black'" (Fuoss 7).



be reminded every now and then that reclaiming that imagined phallic power, in any attempted usurpation of power, incites internal psychic anxieties of castration.<sup>12</sup>

What remains is the lack/loss of a “thing,” and issues of keeping that “thing” as the “tool” of capital gain.



**Fig. 9.** Hammons, David. *Too Obvious*. 1996, The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York. *Artsy*, 2018, <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/david-hammons-too-obvious>. Accessed 22 January 2020.

*Capitalism started with the introduction of Black labour as a driving force for industrialization, and this Blackness, portrayed through the cowry shells (an early form of currency in Africa), is still being plundered, both as labor force and specifically referencing the vast number of resources extracted from Africa for the sake of new and old forms of capitalism.*

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<sup>12</sup> This logic and repetition of castration in white supremacy will be further analyzed in the next section.

As time changes, the materialist nature of any space changes. For capitalism, then hyper-capitalism, now hyper-digi-capitalism, the anxieties of power and positionality have not been altered: That need to maintain a stable workforce from which large profits can be garnered. Tools were needed then, and are still needed to this day, to maintain this need.<sup>13</sup> This occurs despite the movement of the search for human tools being transferred largely away from the seen,<sup>14</sup> to places outside normalized “first world” “advancement,” where the bulk of the ugliness of Western capitalism’s exploitation has moved to the global South. Hence, efforts towards maintenance of the hierarchies necessary for the survival of this economic order have not changed—the location has shifted. Within hyper-digi-capitalism, visibility is used at the service of this continuation of the deliberately invisible; alternately, what is allowed to be visible (Black pain/Black plight) is on a scale that produces numbness. Hyper-visibility gives way to unwittingly becoming so accustomed to an idea or thing, to the point where it ceases to matter. Everything is readily available and accessible—microwavable experiences that soon move into sites of non-existence. The mind, becoming saturated, continues on within this satiation, becoming the “is,” which is naturalized, even for a race that is traumatized by it.

The internet is overwhelmed with sickening visuals of young Black men being beaten by white police. Bombarded every day, the viewer’s anger flashes, then quickly subsides...

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<sup>13</sup> Byung-Chul Han draws attention to the new reality of capitalism, where the earlier intent of enslavement in factories for capitalist gain has now moved to individual self-enslavement: “Although the achievement-subject deems itself free, in reality it is a slave. In so far as it willingly exploits itself without a master, it is an *absolute slave*” (3).

He goes on to explain, “As a mutant form of capitalism, neoliberalism transforms workers into *entrepreneurs*. It is not communist revolution that is now abolishing the allo-exploited working class – instead, neoliberalism is in the course of doing so. Today, everyone is an *auto-exploiting labourer in his or her own enterprise*. People are now master and slave in one. Even class struggle has transformed into an *inner struggle against oneself*” (5).

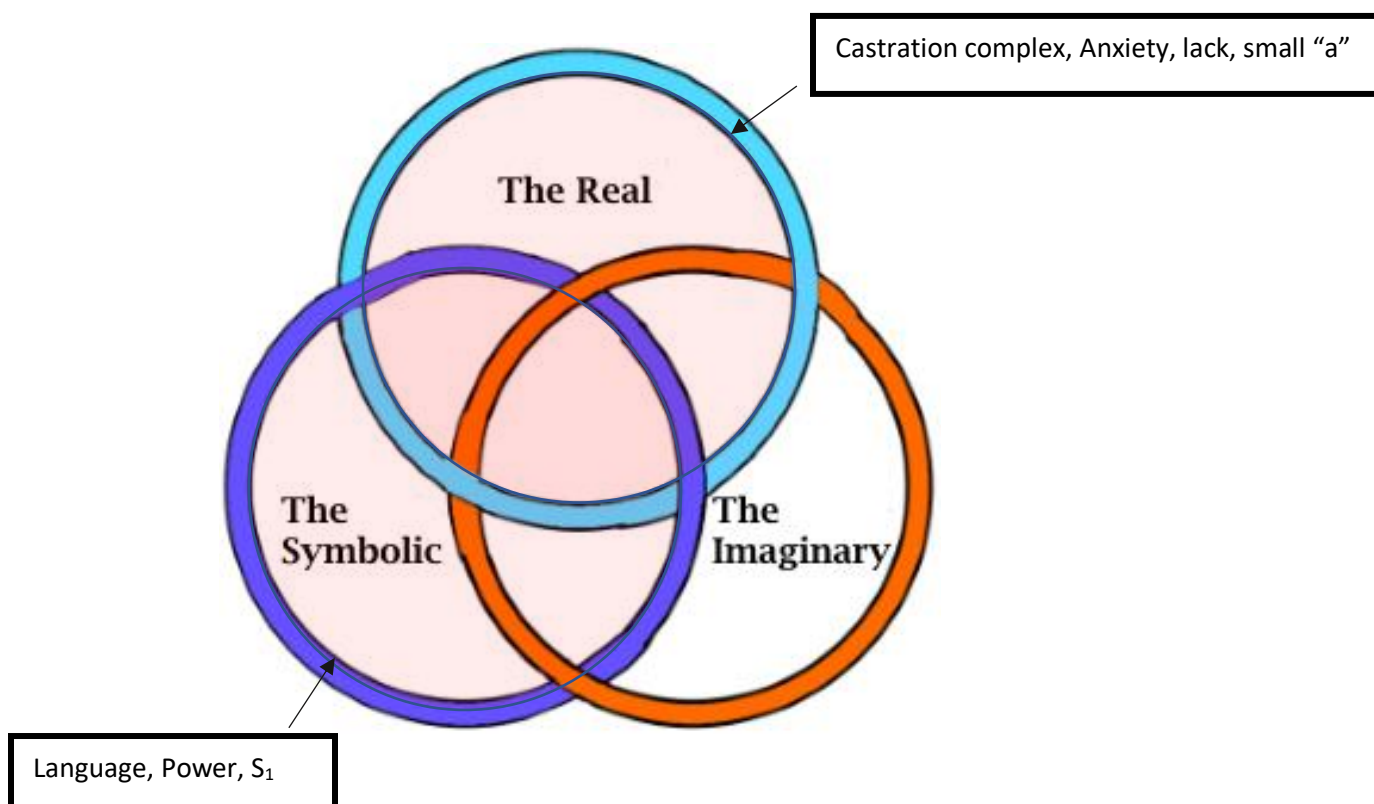
<sup>14</sup> Those enjoying the full girth of capitalism in the North are shielded from the realities of exploitation done to maintain their wealth and status.

Digital outrage cannot be *sung*. It admits neither action nor narration. Instead, it is an affective *condition* devoid of the power to act. The general distraction and dissipation characterizing society today prevent the epic energy of rage from arising. Rage, in the strong sense, is more than an affective state. It means the capacity, or power, to interrupt existing conditions and bring about new ones. In this way, it produces the future. Today's fits of outrage are extremely fleeting and scattered. Outrage lacks the mass—the gravitation—that is necessary for action. (Han 8)

What remains is the spectacle that was once produced through postcards and other mementos of a lynching scene, part of a story to tell after having taken the train to the site. This mass-produced spectacle proliferates, and what remains is the same visuality of being put in one's place and being reminded of the dichotomies of white/black, power/powerless, superior/inferior. The imprint that is marked and re-marked is that gnawing knowing that we continue to live with.

## Section Two: “The look returned...” (Sartre): OBJECT to SUBJECT

In this section, two videos are analyzed, to pinpoint the moment of anxiety that triggers violence by the police: the point at which “shame” and “anger” begin to take shape within the space of verbal exchange between police and victim—that moment when the police felt endangered. The purpose of this research is to get at “The Real”—to unearth the unconscious that has been largely impacted and sedimented by the imaginary, through an analysis of the symbolic. The intention is to demonstrate that white police brutality goes beyond claims of the Black male being read as “violent” or “dangerous,” and that it is caused instead by the lending of the imaginary of the phallus to get to the actual perceived danger as beyond danger of the flesh, but rather, an endangered phallus.



With this Lacanian approach, language becomes in this study the site at which the unconscious is revealed. This research attempts to unearth the dynamics occurring in conversation at the moment just before the assault and seeks to pinpoint the “trigger” for not only pulling out the gun, but also the point at which it is decided that this “threat” needs to be eliminated. According to Romulo Lander,

Lacan states that desire, which is normally silent, becomes known to the subject when it passes through the defiles of the signifiers. Elsewhere he claims that “desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second.” The demand is nothing more than the request expressed in the signifying chain. (5)

Desire arises when the extension of that request to be loved and valued has not been satisfied (Lander 44). What I seek in this research is to capture “desire” in the moment expressly signified through language.<sup>15</sup> Lacan relied on speech for analysis, where in the emitted word lies “the functions of the individual; its domain is that of concrete discourse, in so far as this is the field of the transindividual reality of the subject; its operations are those of history, in so far as the history constitutes the emergence of truth in the real” (37). Lacan threads the history and being of the analysand from speech. For Lacan, the unconscious truths lie in the conscious. He asserts:

The unconscious is that chapter of my history that is marked by a blank or occupied by a falsehood: it is the censored chapter. But the truth can be rediscovered; usually it has already been written down elsewhere. Namely:

- In monuments: this is my body. That is to say, the hysterical nucleus of the neurosis in which the hysterical system reveals the structure of a language, and is

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<sup>15</sup> This desire is two-pronged as it is situated in the phallus. Desire to be recognized as the owner of the phallus and a homoerotic desire, as addressed by Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (135).

deciphered like an inscription which, once recovered, can without serious loss be destroyed;

- In archival documents: these are my childhood memories, just as impenetrable as are such documents when I do not know their provenance;
- In semantic evolution: this corresponds to the stock of words and acceptations of my own particular vocabulary, as it does to my style of life and to my character;
- In traditions, too, and even in the legends which, in a heroicized form, bear my history;
- And lastly, in the traces that are inevitably preserved by the distortions necessitated by the linking of the adulterated chapter to the chapters surrounding it, and whose meaning will be re-established by my exegesis. (38)

Language operates as symbol/symbolic ( $S_1$ ), as a sign of, from which can be ascertained the underlying real.<sup>16</sup> With regard to the symbolic function, Lacan refers to it as present in “a double movement within the subject: man makes an object of his action, but only in order to restore to this action in due time its place as a grounding. In this equivocation, operating at every instant, lies the whole process of a function in which action and knowledge alternate” (55). Therefore, what is revealed is that transcendence of the for-itself, being “read” and gleaned from text. “The phallus (as the signifier of the lack) changes from a metaphoric to a metonymic signifier, for the lack (as phallic signifier) moves, circulates” (Lander 27). The attempt is to apprehend, from the text transcribed from the two videos chosen, not only the moment of the awakening of anxiety in the white police, identified in the language, but also the moment of trigger of impulse to react violently. In those video transcripts, we observe the transference of the

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<sup>16</sup> Lacan leans here towards Claude Lévi-Strauss and his concept of the symbol.

anxiety onto firstly the gun, used as an extension of phallic power, while the second video transcript is used to highlight recognition and “the look” with reassertion of power bearing down on the fist; differing “tools” as weapons of reasserting dominance, here figured into the spoken word.

### **CASE STUDY 1: 14 JUNE 2014, JASON HARRISON (DALLAS, TX)**

It took thirty-six (36) seconds, from the time the police arrived for Jason Harrison to be shot. The police officer knocked on the door, the mother stepped out, with her son in tow, who stopped in the doorway. She informs them that her son is ill:

**Mother:** Oh this is off the chain, you can hear him.

**Police Officer 1:** Who’s that?

**Mother:** Talking about chopping up people. My Son.... *(Inaudible)* Bipolar/Schizo.

*Young man stops in the door way, screwdriver in hand, comfortable stance of confidence.*

The police ask that he drop the screwdriver:

**Police Officer 2:** Would you drop that for me? Drop that for me guy?

**Harrison:** Nah

The refusal to comply is simple: “Nah.” At this point, the guns were already directed at Harrison. In this refusal, a lot has happened. Confronted by the Black male, with the extension of the screwdriver, the next response is an immediate yell:

**Police Officer 2:** Drop it!! Drop it!! Drop it.

**Mother:** Hey!! Hey!! Heeeyyyy!! *(Lunges towards the police officer 1’s hand)*. Don’t shoot him!

*Three shots ring out. Young man’s body gets rigid and falls towards the garage door.*

In this split second of anxiety, when both officers start yelling, their voices are raised to demand recognition, but that recognition is not given. In the one refusal, where power (phallus) has been challenged, anxiety has taken over, and the irrational sets in. Harrison has been shot, he has toppled over. The gun, *with rapidity, pulled out from their pants*,<sup>17</sup> becomes the metaphoric instantiation of asserting phallic power.

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<sup>17</sup> Italicized for emphasis of paralleling the action's phallic tendency with the gun.





**Fig. 10.** Haskell, Thomas. Single portrait from *Jab Molassie*, featured in the series *Mas'Queer'Raid* (See full art piece: Index 3), 2017.

*Haskell's Jab-Molassie is utilized here to further interrogate the symbolism of the phallus, and the centrality to the systemic overtures that white male police navigate. The devil hides behind the phallus, holding on to it intimately as that which is dear to it. The dominance of the phallus over the entire being emphasises the importance of the psyche's attachment to the phallus.*

## The Police --- The Gun --- The Phallus

***“Fuck the police comin’ straight from the underground***

***A young nigga got it bad ‘cause I’m brown***

***And not the other color so police think***

***They have the authority to kill a minority...”***

***(N.W.A - Fuck Tha Police,***

***Ruthless Records & Priority Records, 1988)***

The police yell, “Drop it!” What “it” are they insistent should be dropped? In this moment, a spate of anxiety is experienced. This anxiety, an “enactment of castration,” according to Lander’s reading of Freud, stands as “an invasion of the Real into the Imaginary that will hence affect the body and the ego (*moi*)” (23). Lander also notes: “The illusion of the loss of the “phallic signifier” triggers the appearance of castration anxiety” (26).



**Fig. 11.** Haskell, Thomas. Single portrait from *Jab Molassie*, featured in the series *Mas'Queer'Raid* (See full art piece: Appendix C), 2017.

*Fear of the castrated phallus is highlighted here in the specific attention trained on the violent Jab who interrupts pleasure with a pitchfork. Angry and sardonic, he stands in as a representation, for Haskell, of the violence intrinsic in a capitalist/patriarch system. He states: "In my incarnation of these characters the group is an orgiastic collective, playing on the phallus as the primary representation of masculinity... The phallus is interwoven in their forms, either gargantuan, or meager, questing or climaxing... Yet here in the Jab Molassie it squelches outward in insecurity; it demands your validation of its mighty member, though underneath lies its insignificance." (39)*

I introduce here the gun as “object” extension of the phallus, an appendage that could aid in the reassertion of subjectivity/dominance/owner of freedom. As the defenders of the capitalist state, white police have been *generously* equipped with “tools” that secure their positionality

within the wider rubric of the Gramscian three separations of state.<sup>18</sup> In discussing Freud's approach to sublimation, Lacan asserts;

It is a question of the object. But what does the object mean at that level? When Freud at the beginning of his more emphatic formulations of his doctrine begins his first topic by articulating that which concerns sublimation, notably in the Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality, sublimation is characterized by a change of objects, or in the libido, a change that doesn't occur through the intermediary of a return of the repressed nor symptomatically, indirectly, but directly. The sexual libido finds satisfaction in objects... (94)

The gun is a feared object, but also the gun pointed by this individual who holds authority is that much more feared. Significations of gun-plus-police-uniform should stand as the ultimate symbols of power and hence deserve respect. The gun becomes a transferrable metaphor of comfort in this case, standing in as the extension of the diminished phallus. Lacan adds:

That means that right away, at a moment when things cannot yet be articulated powerfully, for want of that component of his topic he will produce later, he introduces the notion of reaction formation. In other words, he illustrates a given character trait, *a trait acquired through social regulation*, as something which, far from occurring as a direct consequence or as in line with a specific instinctual satisfaction, necessitates the construction of a system of defenses that is, for example, antagonistic to the anal drive. (Lacan 95)

The instinctual reaction by those white police, specifically here in Harrison's case, is to fall back on this gun in order to silence and reassert dominance at all costs. This is in an effort to protect the threatened phallus. This direct object association becomes for the police situated in these

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<sup>18</sup> Gramsci speaks about the "organs" that are put in place in the state "at the disposal of bourgeois conservation: from the army to the magistrate, from parliament to the functionaries of the executive power" (115).

Western racist/sexist structures a crutch of comfort—a pathway to bring the anxiety experienced under control. It is noted there that the repressed lack of the phallus, and reattachment to already having the phallus that should be desired by the Other can only be fulfilled in the harnessing of the weapon. As Sartre observes, an attempt is made to reclaim subjectivity and return the Other to the place of object, as further explained here:

But it can happen also that “to look at the look” is my original reaction to my being-for-others. This means that in my upsurge into the world, I can choose myself as looking at the Other’s look and can build my subjectivity upon the collapse of the subjectivity of the Other. It is this attitude which we shall call *indifference toward others*.<sup>19</sup>

This attitude towards the other as a means of reclamation of subjectivity becomes the defence mechanism, per se, of the white police who experience those anxieties.

*“Example of scene one”*

*“Pull your god damn ass over right now”*

*“Aww shit, now what the fuck you pullin’ me over for?”*

*“Cause I feel like it!*

*Just sit your ass on the curb and shut the fuck up”*

*“Man, fuck this shit”*

*“Aight, smart ass, I’m takin’ your black ass to jail!”*

*(N.W.A - Fuck Tha Police,*

*Ruthless Records & Priority Records, 1988)*

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<sup>19</sup> Although Sartre had already italicized this, I wanted to doubly “highlight” the importance of this phrase.

N.W.A unwittingly captured in this exemplified exchange the quick response of reasserting dominance, as soon as the utterance, “Man, fuck this shit,” is made. Here, access to determining who goes to jail is brandished as a show of phallic power. It comes back to re-asserting dominance in the face of a perceived danger, and is displaced by the recurring confabulation, “I thought he was carrying a weapon.” Somehow, the threat is attached, always, to seeing the other brandishing a weapon. That weapon “seen” on the Black male by the police officer cannot be denied, except that this “weapon” had been gleaned from an imagined brandished phallus.

*Police Officer 1 calls in the incident.*

**Police Officer 1:** Drop that... Put it down!

*Mother is still screaming in the background. Young man lays on the ground bleeding to death.*

**Police Officer 2:** Drop it! Drop it guy!

**Police Officer 1:** Put the damned thing down! Put the screwdriver down!  
Put the screwdriver down! Drop it!...

In the moment, all transference is directed at the screwdriver. The repetition of “Drop it!” – a mantra, repeated, even after Harrison has died. I ask then, what exactly did they fear, and what exactly did they want dropped? In the article, “Here are 13 Killings by Police Captured on Video in the Past Year,” from which this video was sourced, authors Jaeah Lee and AJ Vicens quoted the attorney for the police officers, cited in the *Dallas Morning News*, who said that they feared for their lives, going on to say it would be very easy to kill someone with a screwdriver (motherjones.com). All displacement of the fear of the Black male phallus had been centered then around the screwdriver, standing as metaphor for that which was feared by the police. To that, the response was to return with an even bigger phallus, here, the gun.

So much in Western society is fixed in *phallogentrism*; in the Father—in the patriarch as the seat of power, and that power being attached to the phallus. To be without the phallus means to be without power. This notion has been articulated thus by bell hooks:

It is easy to see how this served the interests of a capitalist state which was indeed depriving men of their rights, exploiting their labor in such a way that they only indirectly received the benefits, to deflect away from a patriarchal power based on ruling others and to emphasize a masculine status that would depend solely on the penis. (94)

It appears that the perpetuated knowledge of Blacks being a debased race from the period of enslavement, moving into a freedom with lack of access to capital within a capitalist system, would warrant that Blacks acknowledge their positionality as still within objecthood to be manipulated as “thing-among-things” for capitalist gain. That Black people are still economically deprived should stand to match the lack of power, which should be acknowledged by all Blacks existing specifically in the global North. The position should remain as object—as object denied. The return of the look by Blacks, then, becomes an assault that needs to be corrected. The Black look dares to assert a positionality that does not exist logically, based on Western epistemology, especially in the presence of the white male. But the reality is the recognition that this seat of power within capital, being concentrated on the phallus, belies the gaps in this given knowledge, because one thing that is “known” is that the Black man, in the area of the phallus, always stands in *de trop*. The white male’s consciousness is acculturated to perceive the Black male as *de trop*<sup>20</sup>—the white male “knows” that in the presence of the Black male, he lacks.<sup>21</sup> In the

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<sup>20</sup> As Sartre’s postulations of possibilities (29).

<sup>21</sup> This lack is directly connected to “castration anxiety” as postulated by Freud. In her book, *Psychoanalysis and Pediatrics: Key Psychoanalytical Concepts with Sixteen Clinical Observations of Children*, Françoise Dolto explains Freud’s position:

The unease that the child experiences when he discovers the absence of the penis in girl initially introduces him to disregard the evidence of his eyes. As we said before, he remains convinced that the girl has got a smaller one, and that it will grow, or that it is hidden between her legs... But however much the child tries

moment of perceived loss, attributed to anxiety in the moment of castration, in the face of *de trop*, the individual must act. This acting upon manifests as an act to remove the threat.<sup>22</sup>

What then happens in confrontation when an individual—here the white policeman—recognizes that that phallus which he wants to be for the Other, actually exists in that Other and not him—when the Other contains that thing that he should have so that the Other may desire his being. Through the hoped recognition of the owner of the phallus in him, the Other would accede to being simply object for him, *as phallus*. Because Freud considered desire to be associated always with the sexual, a correlative association can be made here between the desire for power, and superiority being attached to the phallus. The deceit to self is that the phallus is intact, and safe, as long as that phallus remains in positions where the illusion of power can be maintained (i.e., policing). The inherent “lack” that humans navigate life with—the *petit a* having been lost—prompting desire, remains an unconscious reality (Lander 4). But only the one with imagined phallic power knows the baselessness of this power. It is to be the white male’s secret. As long as the Black male does not return the look, and remains as object, he will never know that he, too, owns power (phallic power) because he does not see the white male’s lack. Ergo, the Black male’s look remains refused and restrained. This antagonism is not easily assuaged. Sartre argues that where value exists, desire comes into play.

The Other has unveiled his lack, which he attempted to conceal, but there he stands, stripped of his veil, and can then act on his shame, simply as “not phallus.”<sup>23</sup> Sartre cites this moment as shame from being seen:

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to comfort himself with these consoling hopes, the boy nevertheless feels the fear that something like this may happen to him, because he has seen that it “is possible” (53).

<sup>22</sup> In a very vivid imaginary with this instantiation, I see this as a swallowing of *de trop* to regain position as owner of the phallus. This attempted complete erasure of the Black Body in the moment, is an attempt to gain the perceived lost object.

<sup>23</sup> “The phallus is the signifier of this *Aufhebung* itself, which it inaugurates (initiates) by its disappearance. That is why the demon of Aibws (scham, shame) arises at the very moment when, in the ancient mysteries, the phallus is



...in the field of my reflection I can never meet with anything but the consciousness which is mine. But the Other is the indispensable mediator between myself and me. I am ashamed of myself as I appear to the Other.

By the mere appearance of the Other, I am put in the position of passing judgement on myself as on an object, for it is as an object that I appear to the Other. Yet this object which has appeared to the Other is not an empty image in the mind of another. Such an image, in fact, would be imputable wholly to the Other and so could not “touch” me. I could feel irritation, or anger before it as before a bad portrait of myself which gives to my expression an ugliness or baseness which I do not have, but I could not be touched to the quick. Shame is by nature *recognition*. I recognize that I am as the Other sees me. There is however no question of a comparison between what I am for myself and what I am for the Other as if I found in myself, in the mode of being of the For-itself, and equivalent of what I am for the Other. In the first place this comparison is not encountered in us as the result of a concrete psychic operation. Shame is an immediate shudder which runs through me from head to foot without any discursive preparation. (Sartre 302)

This extended quote is made use of here to establish the not-understood reaction in the face of the other who is supposed to remain perpetually as base/inferior, but who suddenly returns “me to myself”—a jolt at the unexpected being, being able to in this single moment, deny “me”

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unveiled (cf. the famous painting in the Villa di Pompei). It then becomes the bar which, the hand of this demon, strikes the signified, marking it as the bastard offspring of this signifying concatenation” (Lacan 288). This will be reiterated in the discussion of the signifier in relation to the revelation of the phallus.

freedom.<sup>24</sup> This instantiation of the look denied and demanded is more clearly illustrated in the following case study.

**CASE STUDY 2: 25 AUGUST 2017, JOHNNIE JOHNNIE RUSH (ASHEVILLE, NC)**

**Police Officer 2:** *(In car to Police Officer 1)* With the jaywalking he just did it again... And again! He's not learning. Right after you just told him...

...

**Rush:** I haven't done nothing wrong.

**Police Officer 1:** You just committed four crimes in a row.

**Rush:** How?

**Police Officer 1:** Just because you don't agree it's a crime, doesn't mean it's not a crime.

The officers have stepped out of the vehicle to have a conversation with Rush because he “did not listen.” Rush, not yet recognizing the imagined phallic power, believing to be in command of his own power, has offended the police officer who at that point, felt the need to assert and demand recognition.

Rush is confused. He is yet to understand the real implications of not recognizing the white phallic power, blatantly returning the gaze.

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<sup>24</sup> I use the personal (first person) in the manner of Sartre to “bring to life” my perception of the inner dialogue of empowered men of white structural policing encountering the Black male.

**Rush:** It ain't the point of that man, you ain't got nothin' better to do besides messing with me, and I'm trying to go home...

....

**Police Officer 1:** It doesn't matter if you're paying attention. I was polite with you and asked you, use the cross walk. I know what you're doing man, you think I'm a punk, guess what, I'm not. I don't think you're a punk either.

Officer narrows what has happened down to feeling belittled.

**Rush:** (*Cutting in*) So what is I'm doing?

**Police officer 1:** You didn't use the cross walk four times in a row... after I asked you two seconds ago not to...

**Rush:** Are you serious? I was already going through level four before y'all even came...

**Police Officer 2:** Doesn't matter when you went through, he asked you nicely to stop!

Rush's refusal to "listen," is what is in question. Rush refused to acknowledge power. At this point both police officers are still speaking calmly, waiting for Rush to acknowledge their positionality.

**Police Officer 1:** Look at me, look at me...

**Rush:** All I'm trying to do is go home, man. I'm tired...

**Police Officer 1:** Look at me, I've got two options. I can either arrest you right here or ticket you.

**Rush:** It doesn't matter man, do what you got to do besides keep harassing me man.

**Police officer 1:** I'm not harassing you.

**Police officer 2:** That's all in your mind, man.

...

Rush also refuses to return the look as demanded. The police officers continue to demand recognition. Police Officer 1 imposes power blatantly, determining that Johnnie has been stripped of all power. It is as hooks has noted:

“Only the child is afraid to look.

Afraid to look, but fascinated by the gaze. There is power in looking.”

(115)

For so many years since conquest, there has been one unconscious, indelible truth that has been ingrained in the Western mind—that the white male is king, and hence, owns all “things.” Not only was that idea of position-hood passed down, but as explored in the previous section, derogatory markings were inscribed on the Black body to ascertain that within consciousness, their “baseness” was understood as fact—that which could only be crystalized in narrative (representation), through repetition. To think of the post Civil Right movements, where under the illusion of equality so much of these old ascriptions had died, but then coming to realize that they they have been formulated and revisited for both viability and longevity. Black

resistance existed from before the plunderers set off from the coastal shores of Africa with kidnapped bodies to now, but one must be cognizant of the amount of effort put towards the maintenance of the dichotomy of superiority/inferiority. Within that conditioning of authority nestled in production of the state, both material and ideological, what was being fought for from inception by Blacks was the right to return the gaze. The gaze, even fleeting, can both do and undo—seat, and unseat. The white/state gaze trained on the Other is designed to fix them in perpetuity as “thing,” but that Other, emboldened, dares to return the look. The gaze of the white male is understood as a given right that should not be returned. The look returned declares humanity—declares subjecthood. Sartre theorizes on the returned look thus:

In particular, my own look or my connection without distance with these people is stripped of its transcendence by the very fact that it is a *look-looked-at*. I am fixing the people whom I *see* into objects; I am in relation to them as the Other is in relation to me. In looking at them I measure my power. But if the Other sees them and sees me, then my look loses its power; it can not transform those people into objects for the Other since they are already the objects of his look. (Sartre 356)

This return to self (the seen), is an immediate recognition of self as object—that which can only be apprehended fully by the Other. The look apprehended is an exposure of self, in many instances often forcibly denied because of the destabilizing of unstable “facts” of power relations and dynamics. Becoming an object, suddenly, on account of the look returned by *that which* had been given the permanent state of objecthood is where difficulty begins to arise, exemplified in situations of uneven power dynamics such as policing the Black body.

**Rush:** You're right. It's not sir, it's not, I'm sorry... so sorry...

**Police officer 1:** Look at me, look at me...

**Rush:** I don't have to look at you...

....

**Police officer 2:** Just write him a ticket. He wants to act like a punk...

Rush tries to deescalate by acting docile and reaffirming that power remains with the police, yet in doing so, the underlying escalation has nothing to do with the use of the word “Sir,” but rather in the fact that he refuses the look that is demanded over and over. Sartre narrates this moment of recognition: “In this case I suddenly realize that I exist as an object for the Other, that I possess a self which he knows and which I can never know, and that I am vulnerable to the Other, who may anticipate and block my possibilities for action” (Sartre xlix). Sartre sees this moment as perceived as being “in danger” (360). Specifically here in that interaction between the white/state police with the Black male body, this moment of returning the look was read as endangerment.

There is danger in this look; fear of the Other recognizing how baseless the perceived power is. Fear arises from the possibilities of that recognition, and in this slippery dynamic, the Other could easily “act” within their subjectivity. This is exaggerated in Western societies, where so much value is centred around access to power that is tied to and maintained by foundations of non-sustainable signs and significations. In this case, the police officer continues to determine that the look belongs to him, but Rush continues to deny him.

Phallic power is raised in the form of the ability to “write him a ticket.” Rush responds then:

**Rush:** Man, y’all ain’t got shit better else to do besides harass somebody about @#!&ing jaywalking.

**Police Officer 2:** Put your hands behind your back! Don’t, don’t.. DO NOT! (*Walking towards Rush while pointing*) Stop, drop the bag, put your hands behind your back!

*Rush takes a few steps back*

**Police Officer 2:** Stop! Drop the Bag! Put your hands behind your back!

Rush’s response is an outright denial of recognition as the one who is in possession of the phallus. Police Officer 2 goes immediately from reasoning to anger and yelling. He points as he walks towards Rush, so Rush receives the determination of a command to which he must adhere. Rush concedes, but feeling uncomfortable at how he was being handled, he broke away from the Officer’s grasp:

**Rush:** Sir look. Sir, don't do that, don't do that.

*Rush runs away.*

**Police Officer 2:** (*Pointing*) mother \_\_\_\_\_

*Police Officer 2 running after Rush calls for back up...*

**Police Officer 2:** (*To Rush*) You know what's funny? You're gonna get @#! #ed up hardcore, get on the ground.

*Rush is pinned to the ground.*

*Violence ensues...*

In one single moment, Rush denies the police officer his phallic power. He gives a command, "Don't do that," which assumes power in a space where he should be powerless, then turns away from the police and runs. Refusal to acknowledge phallic power is compounded here. When he runs away, the anger escalates. Then comes the absolute determination by the police to regain and preserve the phallus: "You know what's funny? You're gonna get fucked up hardcore..." After being held down, Rush yells that he is unable to breathe. The response to that is raining blows down on Rush's head. He is held in a chokehold, screaming for help. He is then tasered. The taser stands in for a gun, as the final resort. Masculinity and the phallus had already been imaginarily regained through the fist.



*Tasered, Rush lays on his side, held down by one policeman...*

**Rush:** Please.

**Police Officer 2:** Oh, it's a please now is it? After all that, it's a please now? AFTER ALL THAT? It was a ticket! And you wanted to act like that? What's wrong with you? (*Walking away*) What the FUCK is wrong with you? (*He returns*) I don't know what your problem is, I don't know if you got a gun, I don't know if you got a knife...

After having reasserted dominance, the officer reminds Rush over and over, that he is the one in power, lauds his power, in spite of Rush's protests. In retelling the story to his fellow officers, it is laced with exaggerations of Rush laughing and cussing and telling the officers that he cannot be caught. In actuality, he needed to assert dominance that was not mirrored in his partner who was the one having the initial conversation with Rush.

## Conclusion

Andrews clearly states that the biggest issue with social justice movements today is the consistent treatment of the symptoms of an erroneous system and not making efforts to fix the systems that support injustices such as police brutality with little to no retribution (219). Such a state cannot be called a failed state if its measures for protecting the "citizen" are adhered to and work. This state, rather, is fully functioning as intended. When the status of full citizen has not yet been granted to some, to be treated as less than is considered normalcy. Those white/patriarchal structures stand on the shoulders and blood of the Other, and much thought has

been put towards the maintenance of that order. James and Costa Vargas question our reality as follows:

What happens when instead of becoming enraged and shocked every time a Black person is killed in the United States, we recognize Black death as a predictable and constitutive aspect of this democracy? What will happen then if instead of demanding justice we recognize (or at least consider) that the very notion of justice... produces and requires Black exclusion and death as normative? (qtd in Sharpe 7)

As Sharpe states, “The ongoing state-sanctioned legal and extralegal murders of Black people are normative and, for this so-called democracy, necessary; it is the ground we walk on” (7). As laudable as all the efforts of the activists have been, there must be a point at which we get to the root of the issues. In this case, strictures and mechanisms of maintaining power binaries have to be dismantled in more nuanced ways.

Black death surrounds us and has been normalized. Death as imprisoned—as brutalized—as raped—as demonized. Rinaldo Walcott, Black Canadian academic and author clearly states that, in looking to the work of Black intellectuals, whose works stand as critiques to capitalist society, “we suggest that Black death cannot be delinked from the ways in which cultural institutions operate” (72). This study reiterates the power of the imaginary and phantasmatic in these institutions. A myth propagated from the early years of slavery within the master/slave dialectic has continued on unperturbed, constantly reinforced by the cultural state apparatuses in mass representation and consistent re-presentation. This phantasm has lingered and has become so indelibly marked that it is no longer stitched into the fabric but is part of the threads of the fabric in itself. The Black man’s phallus haunts and distorts society, fixing the Black male in a state of being desired—lust, power attainment, debasement—becoming nothing else; not father,

brother, son, but one absolute big phallus—a threatening one at that, which continues to stand as the possible reason for the failure of the state itself. Phallic power is expected to be used to damage, and hence should be castrated, before those beings become castrators—those who inflict loss and failure.

Unconscious fears will take centuries to be rooted out. The current population lives off of centuries of trusted phallogocentric/patriarchal modes of becoming. Recent history has taught us one thing (from the work of Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X and the Black Panthers, to #BlackLives Matter)—on the level of the psyche, nothing has changed when the Black body is apprehended. On the level of the psyche, the Black body is still “tool.” Understanding this is foundational to any movement, or else quests towards equality will consistently go through the cycles of racist occurrences to which we have grown accustomed.

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## Appendices:

### Appendix A: Full Transcript of Jason Harrison Video

#### **June 14, 2014: Jason Harrison**

*Knocking on the door.*

**Police Officer 1:** Police

*Door opens, mother walks out.*

**Police Officer 2:** Hello, what's going on?

**Police Officer 1:** How are you doing ma'am, what's going on?

*Mother continues to walk out the door, son in tow.*

**Mother:** Oh this is off the chain, you can hear him.

**Police Officer 1:** Who's that?

**Mother:** Talking about chopping up people. My Son.... *(Inaudible)* Bipolar/Schizo.

*Young man stops in the door way, screwdriver in hand, comfortable stance of confidence.*

**Police Officer 1:** What's going on?

**Police Officer 2:** Would you drop that for me? Drop that for me guy?

**Harrison:** Nah

**Police Officer 2:** Drop it!! Drop it!! Drop it.

**Mother:** Hey!! Hey!! Heeeyyyy!! *(Lunges towards the police officer 1's hand).* Don't shoot him!

*Three shots ring out. Young man's body gets rigid and falls towards the garage door.*

**Mother:** Oh you killed my child! Oh you killed my child!...

**Officer 2:** *(Gun still pointing towards dying man)* Drop it! Drop it!!



*Police Officer 1 calls in the incident.*

**Police Officer 1:** Drop that... Put it down!

*Mother is still screaming in the background. Young man lays on the ground bleeding to death.*

**Police Officer 2:** Drop it! Drop it guy!

**Police Officer 1:** Put the damned thing down! Put the screwdriver down!  
Put the screwdriver down! Drop it!...

## August 25, 2017: Johnnie Rush

**Police Officer 2:** *(In car to Police Officer 1)* With the jaywalking he just did it again... And again! He's not learning. Right after you just told him...  
...

**Rush:** I haven't done nothing wrong.

**Police Officer 1:** You just committed four crimes in a row.

**Rush:** How?

**Police Officer 1:** Just because you don't agree it's a crime, doesn't mean it's not a crime.

**Rush:** It ain't the point of that man, you ain't got nothin' better to do besides messing with me, and I'm trying to go home...  
....

**Police Officer 1:** It doesn't matter if you're paying attention. I was polite with you and asked you, use the cross walk. I know what you're doing man, you think I'm a punk, guess what, I'm not. I don't think you're a punk either.

**Rush:** *(Cutting in)* So what is I'm doing?

**Police officer 1:** You didn't use the cross walk four times in a row... after I asked you two seconds ago not to...

**Rush:** Are you serious? I was already going through level four before y'all even came...

**Police Officer 2:** Doesn't matter when you went through, he asked you nicely to stop!

**Police Officer 1:** Look at me, look at me...

**Rush:** All I'm trying to do is go home, man. I'm tired...

**Police Officer 1:** Look at me, I've got two options. I can either arrest you right here or ticket you.

**Rush:** It doesn't matter man, do what you got to do besides keep harassing me man.

**Police officer 1:** I'm not harassing you.

**Rush:** Yes you are!

**Police officer 2:** That's all in your mind, man.

...

**Rush:** You're right. It's not sir, it's not, I'm sorry... so sorry...

**Police office 1:** Look at me, look at me...

**Rush:** I don't have to look at you...

....

**Police officer 2:** Just write him a ticket. He wants to act like a punk...

**Rush:** Man, y'all ain't got shit better else to do besides harass somebody about @#!&ing jaywalking.

**Police Officer 2:** Put your hands behind your back! Don't, don't.. DO NOT! (*Walking towards Rush while pointing*) Stop, drop the bag, put your hands behind your back!

*Rush takes a few steps back*

**Police Officer 2:** Stop! Drop the Bag! Put your hands behind your back!

*Both police officers enclose Rush*

**Rush:** Ok, ok..

*Police Officer 2 tackles Rush. Rush escapes his grip.*

**Rush:** Sir look. Sir, don't do that, don't do that.

*Rush runs away.*

**Police Officer 2:** (*Pointing*) mother \_\_\_\_\_

*Police Officer 2 running after Rush calls for back up...*

**Police Officer 2:** (*To Rush*) You know what's funny? You're gonna get @#! #ed up hardcore, get on the ground.

*Rush is pinned to the ground.*

*Violence ensues...*

*Tasered, Rush lays on his side, held down by one policeman...*

**Rush:** Please.

**Police Officer 2:** Oh, it's a please now is it? After all that, it's a please now? AFTER ALL THAT? It was a ticket! And you wanted to act like that? What's wrong with you? (*Walking away*) What the FUCK is wrong with you? (*He returns*) I don't know what your problem is, I don't know if you got a gun, I don't know if you got a knife...

...

Appendix C: Haskell, Thomas. Full frame *Jab Molassie* from the exhibit *Mas'Queer'Raid*



