6

The Struggle for Happiness: Commodified Black Masculinities, Vernacular Culture, and Homoerotic Desires

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For Brett Cemer

The Capitalist conception of sport is fundamentally different from that which should exist in an underdeveloped country. The African politician should not be preoccupied with turning out sportsmen, but with turning out fully conscious men, who play games as well. If games are not integrated into the national life, that is to say in the building of the nation, and if you turn out national sportsmen and not fully conscious men, you will very quickly see sport rotted by professionalism and commercialism.

—Frantz Fanon

It is still true, alas, that to be an American Negro male is also to be a kind of walking phallic symbol: which means that one pays, in one's own personality, for the sexual insecurity of others. The relationship of a black boy to a white boy is a very complex thing.

—James Baldwin

Nothing could be worse, for the work of mourning, than confusion or doubt: one has to know *who is buried where—and* it is necessary *(to know—to make certain) that, in what remains of him,* he remains there. *Let him stay there and move no more! Let us call it a hauntology.*

—Jacques Derrida

…cultural forms such as rap and hip hop are not just brilliant and haunting polit-ical aesthetics rising from the ruins of deindustrialized cities, they are also global communicative forms. Culture may be commodification but it is also communication.

—Angela McRobbie

In the winter of 2000 one of my students brought me a copy of *Notorious*—Sean "Puffy" Combs' then-new magazine named in honor of the late Notorious BIG, or Biggie Smalls. She wanted to share with me an interview with the artist now known again as Prince. She told me of a comment Prince had made about being emancipated from his record contract with Warner Brothers—a fight that took seven years. Prince said in the interview that "Contracts don't work. Now that I'm free I can make an album with Lenny Kravitz, but he can't. He's still on the plantation. He's down south, I'm up north." I was entirely intrigued by the ways in which Prince's economy of speech called to attention a range of haunting historiographic metaphors to map the tensions, contradictions, and banalities of black commercial musicians in the contemporary era. The haunting of slavery and segregated U.S. racial politics marked his speech. But as I skipped through the magazine I came to the back cover and the advertisement on it and could not move on—I could not put the magazine down. The Nike ad caught my attention and immediately called to mind the savage beating of Abner Luima in New York City. The ad was a plunger and a blue and white AirGarnett sneaker set on a full page; between the AirGarnett and the plunger were the words "ALWAYS GETS THE JOB DONE." The Nike ad shocked me because those of you who followed the Luima case will remember that it was alleged that Luima was homophobically sodomized with a plunger. It was later revealed to be a broom. The Nike ad called to mind for me all the violent ways in which black male bodies are inserted into late modernism, even when those bodies remain absented. In this particular case the absented presence of black male bodies both victimized and spectacularized as pitchmen for Nike bore down heavily on me as I responded to the ad psychically and emotionally—not to mention ethicopolitically.

In this chapter I want to elliptically think through or think about the relation of violence as a behavior-orienting practice of the relations between the black man and the white man. I am therefore suggesting that violence appears to be the foundational site for the enactment of the racialized and sexualized relations between white and black men. This violence finds itself played out in the brutal sexuality of capitalism and is reproduced in the haunting vernacular cultures of the black Atlantic in late modern capital as black men unconsciously evoke the disappointment and the pleasures of their location within late modern capitalist behaviororienting practices. This violence is partially lived out through the complex relations of both the practices and artifacts of late modern capitalism. This chapter takes up the problematic of the popular spectacularization of

the hard black male body as both desire and threat vis-à-vis its relation to the white male body. In particular, I probe representations and representations of black popular culture for this archetypical black hard body, but I also look to alternate renditions of black male bodies, less popular but politically and intellectually engaging, to ascertain the continuing yet changing dynamic relations of black masculinities. I suggest that the life/ death axis of slavery in a postslavery world continues to haunt our contemporary cultural moment.

The salability and bankability of blackness—and therefore its commodiflcation—is currently unquestionable. It is evident whether we are talking about clothing, music, or prisons. Such an observation can serve as a place for the production of a melancholic response. I'm going to try to avoid such a response. The commodified conditions of representations of blackness, specifically black maleness, in late modern capitalist cultural practices leaves much to be desired and this conundrum of race, masculinity, and capital has often expressed itself as melancholic—in fact, one might read the Nation of Islam's Million Man March as a symptom of melancholia. Whether we are talking about Oprah Winfrey, Michael Jordan, Vince Carter, bell hooks, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Spike Lee, or Bruny Surin, specific markers of blackness have been coded, possibly patented, trademarked, and solidified as a commodity. The marked and marketed body of the slave is the flesh of early modern capital that haunts our contemporary consumerist culture. In my reading, at least for this instance, I am going to call on what Paul Gilroy has recently termed in a signifying gesture, or at least a trace to Gayatri Spivak, as "strategic universalism." This strategic universalism, one which for the moment wraps us all into the infectious dragnet of blackness[1] does so with a desire that recognition of our complicity might allow those of us opposed to the regimes of late modern capitalism to formulate ethico-political responses that allow for imagining a different present-future.

In Gilroy's *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* and David Scott's *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality* both theorize of what Scott calls the "changing present" and turn to the disappointments of our "post" society (postcolonial, postmodern, postcivil rights, etc.) to require us to at least force the question of reimagining—and therefore, articulating—a different political present—future than the one we presently inhabit. Their demand is a politically inflected demand, largely built on the foundationality of Frantz Fanon's critique of a colo-nial world system. The recent return to Fanon by those who as Stuart Hall says, "work on and work with"[2] him and those who have established orthodoxies concerning "the correct" Fanon has opened up a moment for

thinking about the stakes of (and it will be clear which side I come down on) working over theorists and thinkers for our postcolonial presentfuture. In such a regard, I invoke C.L.R.James in the title of this chapter to signal what will be an implicit working through of his thesis in *American Civilization.* In that text, James suggests that what the people want at all cost is happiness. But lest I suggest that James is offering us some abstract notion of happiness let me hasten to say that James means liberty, leisure, and sustaining material conditions of life by happiness.[3] In essence then, James's notion of happiness sits at odds with capitalist regimes of socioeconomic organization. Happiness can't be bought—so cancel your trips to Disney World and remember that the sensation of buying those Armani pants will only last as long as it takes to make the transaction.

Happiness is not exchange value and it ain't Prozac—it is use value. I work through the notion of a struggle for happiness to arrive at a place where thinking the complexities of black manhood (and I deliberately placed it in the singular here), might occasion both a sustaining critique of some of its various articulations and utterances, and point us somewhere else as well. Calling into question the complex architectures of black masculinities and manhood requires a "hauntological" approach following Derrida's re-reading of Marx in a post-communist world. The postslavery world in which black Atlantic manhood comes to be requires that we think about black masculinities contrapuntally within and against the various transformations of capitalist reordering. Frederick Douglass's experiences of manhood have come to be the *de rigeur* founding text (here I mean to signal what has come to be marked as the pivotal fight between Douglass and Covey) for discussing the symbolic formations of black manhood and the hauntological conditions of black manhood in the postslavery and postmodern era. A brutal sexuality as constitutive of capitalism is revealed in the slave narratives often as heterosexual dominance. However, along with the insights of Darieck Scott, I want to insist that we also need to account for the homosocial and pathological homophobic homosexuality of early capitalism as it is premised on the slave economy.[4] So let me transgress, then, and suggest that no longer is Frederick Douglass's schema of how a man is made a slave and a slave a man an immediately useful intervention for thinking about the formations of black manhood in late capitalism.

Therefore, the hauntology that I offer is one that seeks to map not a linear and unbroken narrative of the shadow of slavery flashing up in contemporary associations and affiliations of black masculinities, but rather one that is informed by the ways in which trans-Atlantic slavery offers us the lens through which to constitute a deciphering of black masculinities

that might point us in ethico-political directions useful for articulating a possible politics of rupture of our present episteme. Such a rupture would require that we follow Sylvia Wynter's call for "a practice of decipherment" (240).[5] Wynter's notion of decipherment takes its tenor from ethnocriticism, deconstruction, and a challenge to unitary ways of knowing as constituting meaning. Wynter writes: "a deciphering turn seeks to decipher what the process of rhetorical mystification does. It seeks to identify not what texts and their signifying practices can be interpreted to mean but what they can be deciphered to do, and it also seeks to evaluate the "illocutionary force" and procedures with which they do what they *do"* (266–67).[6] It is with this insight of Wynter's in mind that I bring a number of different black Atlantic theorists into association and affiliation and offer a reading of the black male body in its material substance, its imaginary fantasmatic qualities, its "hardness," its desires and disappointments, and its "genitalization" into conversation.

But I do so because I want to write against masculinity—that is against masculinity studies[7] as it repeatedly constructs the white male body and its body politics as the continued ground of its address. In short, I want to enter into the debate of masculinity studies—which is at least some fifteen years old now—to ask what is at stake when men—black or white, not to mention all the others—formalize the study of themselves in relation to the fields constituted in some registers as feminist studies, women's studies, and gender studies? This is no doubt an old question, but one that bears repetition in the aftermath of the various "million marches" after the Nation of Islam's Million Man March. For example, in the 2000 Million Mother's March on Washington, D.C., on Mothers' Day, most of the TV news clips I saw focussed on mothers speaking about the gun deaths of boys as though girls don't die by guns too—what an irony! A certain kind of evasion is occurring that has important consequences for social, cultural, and political reorderings. What about daughters killed by the guns of abusive husbands and partners—one wants to ask?

In "Pecs and Reps: Muscling in on Race and the Subject of Masculinities" the afterword to *Race and the Subject of Masculinities,* Deborah McDowell calls into question the study of masculinity when the study does not shift from what she identifies as "those who study and those who are the objects of study. Non-white men dominate the latter camp" (366).[8] McDowell's demand for a shift from white maleness and its constitutive powers is important, and yet it raises an interesting dilemma for those of us—black—who seek to turn the gaze on ourselves and by so doing to reveal what she calls "the psychic architecture of white masculinity" (367).[9] This

is a disturbing dilemma, if as Fanon pointed out, now almost fifty years ago, "not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man" (110).[10] Thus McDowell's suspicion of masculinity studies is well founded when the study of the man of color might only be yet another way of reproducing the father figure of us all—the Great White Daddy. The white man's burden never ends, even when it is in a black mask. Yet I want to resist what Gamal Abdel Shehid calls "good-boy feminism" and not entirely endorse McDowell's argument, even though I see my concerns as affiliated with those cogently and critically articulated by her—especially her skepticism that masculinity studies holds, at least an ambivalent and ambiguous relation to feminist studies. I am concerned to extricate black manhood from the wretched phantasm of masculinity as we currently know and experience it. Therefore, my project is steeped in a self-conscious method of renovation of masculinities so that different present-futures might be imagined and possibly achieved without an attempt to render women an absented presence and more importantly, to undermine feminists politics of all kinds.

The decade of the 1990s produced a bevy of black masculinities in a range of representational apparatuses.[11] However, it might be too simplistic to say—but I'll risk it anyway—that one particular performance of black manhood has been consolidated, at least, in the popular imaginary—the one of hardness. The sporting world has continued to be one of the most salient places for the spectacularization of black manhood. Everyone from Joe Louis to Paul Robeson to Muhammad Ali, to Magic Johnson to Michael Jordan to Dennis Rodman, to Mike Tyson to Ben Johnson to Tiger Woods stand in as some kind of representation of black manhood across historical time. However, most of the contemporary representations of black manhood have been contextualized in popular film, music, and music videos. Much of this popular cultural representation harkens back to an identifiable tradition of the blues and prison literatures of previous decades, but not with the same panache—and need I say, not with the same intellectual rigor. For example, can you conceive of Chester Himes in conversation with Dr. Dre or Ice Cube? And what of Tupac with Assata? One needs only to visit the impossible conversation between Angela Davis and Dr. Dre in *Transition* in 1992[12] to encounter the relative unsophisticated and importantly, conservative utterances of contemporary prison articulations among its popular cultural representatives as expressed in gangsta rap.

The consolidation of a hard black masculinity sits alongside the "endangered black man" thesis and if critically read reveals at least one irony: If black men are indeed "the hardest of the hard," they also seem

to be the easiest victims in North Atlantic society—thus the discourse of endangered. Where does their hardness disappear to? This irony of hard, yet victim and therefore endangered, flashes up I believe because black men suffer from the crises of the undermining of patriarchy in postliberation society in ways that continually reference the haunting of slavery. bell hooks writes of the relations between black men and white men, "The discourse of black resistance has almost always equated freedom with manhood, the economic and material domination of black men with castration, emasculation. Accepting these sexual metaphors forged a bond between oppressed black men and white male oppressors. They shared the patriarchal belief that revolutionary struggle was really about the erect phallus, the ability of men to establish political dominance that could correspond to sexual dominance" (58).[13] While postslavery society has provided avenues for black men to partake more fruitfully of the patriarchal pie, black men's access to full patriarchal participation has continually been limited.

The endangered black man discourse juxtaposed with his hardness is really about the inability of the black man to resignify masculinities in ways that might produce a different kind of economy of masculinity—and thus community. For as Spike Lee, John Singleton, the Hughes brothers, the Hudlin brothers, and a bevy of sports stars and popular musicians made public and consumable a variety of versions of black masculinity—all of them in one way or another hard—other less popular versions have been offered up as well. What about RuPaul? Isaac Julien, Marlon Riggs, Essex Hemphill, Joseph Beam, Samuel Delany, Dennis Rodman, Keith Piper, Lyle and Thomas Harris, and a host of artists working across a range of genres offered and continue to offer representations of black masculinities that force ethico-political questions on those who engage their work. That much of this work is only viewed, read, and engaged in other ways by relatively small groups—often academic and activist/intellectual communities—means that the struggle to produce forms of masculinity that utter different performances resonate within small and relatively privilege communities that might have the luxury to think otherwise about performing masculinity. I raise such as a concern, in its apparent naiveté and simplicity, as an intellectual caution and not as an excuse for the lack of a broader engagement for resignifying masculinities in black Atlantic communities more generally. Black masculinities are conceived so very much along an axis of life and death that throughout the 1990s representations of black male death continually crossed the hetero/homo divide, culminating and consolidating I believe in the death of rapper Eazy E.[14]

The death of former NWA rapper Eazy E from AIDS was reported as being caused by a previous drug habit. His death occasioned a moment of reflection in the largely patriarchal conservative hip hop world whereby rappers stopped to consider AIDS and its consequences. But I often can't help wondering: What would it mean to have imagined that Eazy E died of AIDS contracted through male on male sex? What would have happened to the hardness of hip hop in the late 1990s had Eazy E's death been connected to male on male sex? Would this have been the moment when some reflection on the regime of black male hardness would have occurred? How would hip hop resignify itself as "real" had Eazy E contracted AIDS from male on male sex? I ask these questions because life and death issues have been so central to the production of 1990s black pop culture—but most of the deaths of black men in those venues were deaths that looped back to the black man as victim and endangered. A dangerous discourse for black feminisms. It might well be argued that 1990s hip hop represented the pinnacle of necrophilic responses in pop culture to-date. This necrophilic impulse in what we short handedly called gangsta rap cannot and should not be minimized. If anything would have caused a sustained reengagement with Fanon's thesis in *Wretched of the Earth,* "Concerning Violence," it could have been the continued fantasmatic representations of violence in the lyrics and music videos of gangsta rap. Fanon wrote "The native who decides to put the program into practice, and to become its moving force, is ready for violence at all times. From birth on it is clear to him that this narrow world, strewn with prohibitions, can only be called in question by absolute violence" (37).[15] It is not difficult to read Fanon's thesis in relation to post-Reagan ghetto culture with its helicopter surveillance, barricade-like policing, and other forms of surveilling poor and working class communities alongside the rise of the crack economy, AIDS and other forms of devastation like the disappearance of jobs and service opportunities (the pulling out from these neighborhoods of banks, stores, etc.) unleashed on mainly black and Latino/a urban communities. Life and death issues characterized the decade of the 1990s for urban communities.

But there is also a possible other accounting for hip hop's necrophilic desires. Fucking the dead in hip hop is largely a homoerotic activity. This homoerotic relation to the dead plays out not only in revenge fantasies or homeboy love, but I would suggest as well in the potential erotic charge that taking another's life might offer. New World slavery might be understood as at least one script for that desire. In effect, I am suggesting to you that one of the affects of hardness as the substance of a black manhood is the erotic charge of violence in its relation to the violence that white males

inflict on black manhood, reducing black men to, in the language of gangsta rap, "pussies." It would not be too simplistic to suggest that part of Fanon's thesis on violence has in part something to do with the relationship between the fractured mirror of the (mis)recognition of the black man to the white man and vice versa. The misrecognitions are in effect forms of violence.

The difficult queer writings of Gary Fisher highlight this relation of violence and its erotics for black/white relations.[16] Because Fisher can acknowledge his homoerotic pleasures and thus perform without guilt or shame, he is able to reveal for us the primal nature of the black man's attachment to the white man and their self-constituting practices—it is often a practice of violence, desired and disavowed. For performances of black male heterosexuality, Fisher's cross-racial erotics are refracted as a kind of plutonic homeboy love. But this homeboy love is revealed as something more in the moment of death. Trauma reveals the hints of a homeboy love that must fashion a hardness to resist the potential of sexual encounter, sexual pleasure.

One only needs to encounter the "love and loss" songs in honor of Tupac, and especially The Notorious BIG, to at least recognize the workings of an erotics and a politics of necrophilia in black popular cultures, especially gangsta rap. The "I am missing" genre thematizes the homeboy love and allows for its outlet in publicly affirmative ways. In the tribute to Notorious BIG the track "We'll Always Love Big Poppa" publicly announces homeboy love but in its repetitions of "we'll always love big poppa" I hear—or rather, I detect—a kind of love that exceeds platonic tones. Loving "big poppa" can easily shift into loving the lost/loss father of us all—the Big White Daddy—which is McDowell's concern. The openendedness of the genre allows its listeners/readers to substitute just whatever it might be they are missing. It could be a range of things. But lest we forget, academics like to fuck the dead too; we share necrophilic textual relationships, and there in might be the link between the downbeat of hip hop and its attraction to academics like myself.

The deaths of Tupac and Biggie Smalls, like the retirement of Michael Jordan from the National Basket Ball Association (NBA) signaled an end of a particular era in black Atlantic popular culture. I like to think of it as the post-NBA era, for the link between basketball and hip hop while indelible and enduring no longer holds any real mystique in relation to some notion of an authentic black community. It is now clearly exposed as all consumption. And, the number of black pop personalities who want to be seen at basketball games as a part of constituting a public black

authenticity evidences this (Spike Lee, Whoopi Goldberg, etc.). But most importantly, this post-NBA era highlights, I believe, the crisis of masculinity in North America, at the least. But let's encounter the obvious once again: masculinities of all sorts are in crisis and the crisis of masculinity in North America exists for both homosexual and heterosexual men. The crisis is one whereby the struggle to be happy is experienced through a relation to a possibly commodified masculinity—we are all required to figure out which one or which ones, we will try on, living with it and adjusting as necessary. That men in North America find it difficult to figure masculinity outside of commercial interests should not be surprising.

As Fanon cautioned in a discussion of the making of national culture, "if you turn out national sportsmen and not fully conscious men, you will very quickly see sport rotted by professionalism and commercialism" (196).[17] While Fanon seems to suggest that there exist some pristine elements before professionalism and commercialism, what is important here is the emphasis that national sport once inserted into the regimes of capitalist organization does not bring with it any ethicopolitical consciousness. We need only engage the politics of Jordan, Charles Barkley, or Rodman to ascertain such.[18] So what is at stake, then, is the way in which these men work symbolically to render possible particular forms of masculinity.

The symbolic work of sporting figures and other popular cultural figures, like musicians and movie actors, as the scuffling that commodified masculinities are built on rests on the scopic nature of late modern capitalist conformist-fashionings. The look is central to commercial masculinities. This is particularly evident as ESPN launched its new fashion magazine *The Life* on *Fashion* TV.[19] The first issue featured basketball players, mainly black, dressing each other. Vince Carter and Charles Oakley were featured in the television story. While it was briefly mentioned that Oakley designed and made all his own clothes because of his size, the new magazine had no intention of using that as the basis for the kind of masculinity it sought to erect. Instead, the spokesperson, when asked, by *Fashion TV's* Genie Becker to comment on why ESPN was getting into the fashion business, made statements like: "it is [that is clothing and style] [which is] something straight average guys can feel good about" and "athletes are living every fifteen-year-old boy's fantasy life, are you going to tell them that's girly?" as a way to justify ESPN's penetration into the fashion and style market. (But to be rhetorical, I always thought it was girly-men, otherwised called gay, who revealed the pleasures of shopping for other men). Black male bodies were called to

labor once more, in yet another echo of the postmodern plantation, but to retain the complexities of our moment, these sporting/laboring bodies are transcendental in the contemporary market place—they are black and something more.

These mainly black figures, at least in the narrative I am constructing here, represent bodies in labor for capital. Again let us take note of the hauntological qualities of this late modern capitalist practice as it raises the specter of slavery and postslavery permutations of the exploitation of black male bodies given release in service of capital.

However, in postmodern and postcolonial society the complexities of black male insertions into late modern capitalism are far more complex than merely raising the specter of slavery would suggest. Black men as producers, artists, and consumers are implicated in a conservative "biopolitics"[20] to use a Paul Gilroy term, which marks and markets the black male body in ways that cannot be merely read as white racist projections and insertions of black male bodies as the victimized lack and excess of racist capital. For example, Suge Knight's record company, Death Row Records, specifically cites the relationship between life and death that I discussed earlier. As one of the major producers of gangsta rap in the 1990s, and the recording and others kinds of home for Tupac, at the time of his death, Suge Knight and Death Row Records played a pivotal role in cementing the hard image of black manhood. But it is not a long stretch to metaphorize the hardness of black manhood to the hardness of the black man's genitalia. In many ways gangsta rap reproduced and reduced black manhood down to "a dick thing."

But if the black man is both only a penis and its opposite—a pussy—simultaneously, the black man might embody the fantasmatic representations of not only the spectacularization of one aspect of colonial gender ordering but more pointedly, as McDowell suggest, the black man might be the best example of "masculinity [as] incoherent, unstable, and in a state of utter convulsion" (369).[21] The black man's manhood might be in many ways the clearest example of the crisis of masculinity. There is probably no better recent example of the crisis of masculinity than for example this: Bert Archer, a white man announces the "end of gay"[22] while another white man—Eric Brandt, articulating an antiracist queer positionality—edits a book devoted to addressing the tensions between blacks, gays, and the struggle for equality.[23] Those two texts speak to the instability and incoherence of masculinity in its queer appearances and its impossible performances in post-liberation movement North America. That at least one white boy can mobilize academic queer theory to announce the end of gay; as yet another white boy attempts to make space in queer politics and

sociality for black queers, leaves much for consideration. Added to all this, the ways in which some black queer men struggle to find space within the fraternity of sexual practice and consumer niche marketing of postmodern urban gay life is, to say the least, ironic. For that niche market is significantly marked as white. However, once the socio-political consequences of what currently constitutes queerness in North America is approached the ethicality of the end of gay recedes into the place of how the architecture of whiteness, even in its "weaker, feminized" male queer forms holds such potential to shape how the world might be represented and even possibly lived in certain contexts (just encounter *Queer as Folk, Friends,* or *Will and Grace* as examples of this white architecture).

So let me read against the grain, but not in contention with some folks that I don't normally conceptually disagree with. Contrary to Richard Dyer, Fred Pfeil, and some others of the whiteness school, who have given us the language of white invisibility as constitutive of a marked whiteness, I want to suggest something else. I want to suggest that in contemporary queer culture whiteness is not at all invisible, but highly spectacularized. Whiteness and in particular white masculinities are spectacularly performed as "white" (see *Queer as Folk* and *Will and Grace).* That is, in contemporary post—Stone Wall gay male culture whiteness is not invisible, but whiteness is an assumed quality and qualifier of gayness, thus Eric Brandt's anthology *Black, Gays and the Struggle for Equality* (an attempt to place blacks within the rubric of queer—still) and the absence of any consideration of the cross-cutting complexities of queerness in Bert Archer's contribution to queer debates. But this marked and marketed whiteness in everything from ads for circuit parties to boat cruises, to bathhouses to furniture and booze elides a complex sexual politics that, as Baldwin wrote, makes "the relationship of the black boy to the white boy a very complex thing" (217).[24] What is this complex thing that we are to see? I want to suggest, along with a number of other theorists, that it is a scopic relation—that is, it is about the "look," the place, the site, and desire of the "look." In contemporary queer culture the "look" is white and it is not invisible; it is the quality and colour actively sought after and desired. And one of the best places to see it at work is in a place where the etiquette "look" is more central than the word—that is the bathhouse.

The bathhouse is a site where despite being populated by the weaker and feminized forms of masculinity, patriarchal regimes are unleashed to the fullest. The "look" and the touch in the space of the bathhouse are the appeal to relations of power and performances and practices of power that are deeply gender racialized and obviously sexually racialized. The space of the bathhouse is the place where the unveiling of the complex thing between the black boy and white boy reveals itself. Each of them performing or relinquishing an exterior structure of behavior-orienting practices in favor of a desire and pleasure that is entirely scripted and rescripted on the basis of the economy of stereotype and a public all-male privacy. But the bathhouse is also the place were white is adamantly visible in an economy of sexual desires and practices were men otherwise formed and fashioned by more complex narratives of racial positioning relieve themselves of those ethical considerations and turn to a sexually racialized practice that ordains the white body as that which is most desirable.

Now some might ask, "what makes this different from the norm outside of the bathhouse?" Well, the point I am trying to make is that in the context of the bathhouse patriarchal relations reveal the ways in which the scopic pleasures of, for my purposes, being constituted the Negro as in Fanon's famous scene might be and can be—and often is—lived out as a very pleasurable thing. To enjoy being constituted as the Negro (either brute or passive) is to open up the disturbing pleasures of a post-liberation society haunted by the constitutive degradations of the erotic economy of slavery. So to be the Negro in the bathhouse can also be the imagined body of continued rejection, in a manner that would be contested ethically and politically in any other circumstance outside the bathhouse as racist. But this contradiction of love/hate dynamics between white men and black men is one of the primary self-constituting practices of at least North Atlantic black masculinities—both homo and hetero. In the space of the bathhouse black and white men demonstrate that the black man "is black in relation to the white man"—and importantly vice versa—and that it might be pleasurable, as Isaac Julien provokes us to think in his short film *The Attendant.* This revelation within the context of the practice of maleon-male sex opens up the mutual self-constituting nature of sexually racialized practices, which have enormous consequences for outside the bathhouse where these performances revert to the "real thing" of black and white—that is, the contemporary moral regime of simple notions of racism. In the "real thing" the antagonisms and tensions that exist can lead to extremes, including death, but in their more mundane everyday world these are played out at the level of black and white patriarchal struggles over the authority to speak on behalf of respective imagined communities. We are left wondering about the silences of patriarchal collusion, even when it is an unequal patriarchal union.

Let me move toward a conclusion with—or at least on—a more hopeful note. I want to think about and think with at least one of the artists that I mentioned earlier who I believe offers a different "look" and register of black masculinity. In particular, I want to concentrate my concluding comments on the work of Lyle Ashton Harris, who is a photographer and performance artist. I first encountered Lyle Ashton Harris's photography in the summer issue of the now defunct *Outlook: National Lesbian and Gay Quarterly* in 1991. An image of Harris's irreverent selfportraiture adorned the cover. But I did not purchase the magazine for his images. In fact, I thought that the image was an accompaniment to the Essex Hemphill article—the reason I had bought the magazine in the first place. When I read the magazine I encountered Harris's selfportraiture and his accompanying article "Revenge of a Snow Queen," in which he wrote: "For me transgression begins not by going beyond, but by inhabiting that racially and sexually fetishized space, and by exploring our relationship to it." His art then takes up the dilemma that I tried to describe above, but without sentiment and fully conscious of the risks involved, so that something else might happen—possibly a shift in our consciousness? This is ethico-political art inflected by post-liberation movement disappointments and pleasures that engage a critical intellectual tradition.

The self-portraiture of Harris is a site where a practice of decipherment and a hauntology collide in terms of reading practices, and the ethics required to do justice to reading the work. Harris's work forces us to confront the gendered, racialized, and sexualized work of the "look." This is not a look that can be commodified, for its does not have market qualities. In fact, the "look" that Harris's work engenders is one that seeks to call attention to the ways in which looking is ideologically and psychically constituted. Harris's work in *Outlook* engaged explicitly with Fanon; in fact, one image even resignified Fanon by quoting him: "In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself." This engagement with black skin/white mask and white mask/black skin, as it reverses in Harris's work, places a number of very important issues on the table concerning race, whiteness, blackness, gender, masculinity, femininity, sexuality, homosexuality, and heterosexuality. I want to focus more specifically on a reading of Harris's work for questions of masculinity.

Harris's work highlights the genitalization of the black male body. The black male body reduced to a penis, Harris attempts to resignify the penis as something more. In fact, it might be suggested that the explicit engagement of the economy of stereotype to call attention to gendered and racialized sexual looks in the work of Harris opens up "what has come to be called the scopic drive—the eroticisation of the pleasure in looking" (16), as Stuart Hall puts it in discussion of Fanon's use of the look as a central theme in his writing. In the photography of Harris the

look is both autobiographical and autoethnographic in that his performative self-portraiture draws on cultural fragment as evidence of the constitutive elements of discriminatory practices. Stuart Hall puts it this way: "The principal counterstrategy here has been to bring to the surface—into representation—that which has sustained the regimes of representation unacknowledged: to subvert the structures of 'othering' in language and representation, image, sound and discourse, and thus to turn the mechanisms of fixed racial signification against themselves, in order to begin to constitute new subjectivities, new positions of enunciation and identification…" (19). Hall is writing of the black British contexts, reading it through the work of Fanon, but he could have been writing of Harris.

Harris thematizes these "new subjectivities, new positions of enunciation and identification" by revealing the process of genitalization. Because his self-portraiture embodies being both the pussy and the dick the ambivalent relations of taking pleasure in the relations of domination and subordination in all its racial, sexual, and gendered connotations are at the least opened up. His resignifying of black manhood, for example, opens up the "spectacular matrix of intelligibility" (20) in which "the loss of social power by substituting an aggressively phallo-centred 'black manhood'" (30) is deconstructed in favor not of a resolution, but rather for the possibility of talk to occur—here then enters the talking cure. Harris's work is not about cracking the mirror, or that mimesis can become possible—we all already know that it can not—rather reflected in Harris's mirror are the little bits that we all share in each other. His crossresonant photography highlights a practice, one which speaks to the indelible cross-cutting of identities and identifications in the post-Enlightenment world, a strategic universalism.

Thus central to Harris's art is the pose and how the pose informs our look. In the essay "Posing" Craig Owens suggests that the pose cut at least two ways, especially in photographs: "[F]or that matter, in any photograph—is the figuration of a gaze which objectifies and masters, of course, but only by immobilizing its objects, turning them to stone" (207). But photography—or rather posing for the photograph—is "a form of mimicry" (212) and "posing has everything to do with sexual difference" (212), Owens tells us in parenthesis. Finally, Owens tells us that "to *pose* is, in fact neither entirely active nor entirely passive" (214) but rather "the subject in the scopic field, insofar as it is the subject of desire, is neither seer nor seen; *it makes itself seen.* The subject poses as an object *in order to be a subject"* (215). Owens's contribution to thinking psychoanalytically about the pose is useful because it refuses to allow

for a reading of the work of artists like Harris as only constituted through a crass notion of the social. And yet we must still insist on the social, but as a Fanonian sociogeny in which the collective unconscious might be accounted for. Lyle Ashton Harris's work invokes and provokes the Fanonian project of sociogeny cogently articulated by Fanon in the opening pages of *Black Skin, White Masks.* I have produced art here as a kind of savior and a kind of last resort for at least opening up new places for different kinds of identifications that might occasion a more ethicopolitical response in the world.

But lest I leave you with the idea that art always holds some possibility for offering us a way out of ethico-political conundrums, a few words about the much acclaimed *Boys Don't Cry*. An otherwise quite interesting and provocative fictionalization of the documentary *The Brandon Teena Story* and the chronicling of a life cut short, *Boys Don't Cry* creators made the decision to excise the murder of Philip Devine from the fictionalized version. I don't know their reasons for excising Devine, but what remains a pressing concern is the life and death axis that engenders a patriarchal discourse of endangered black male and is given partial credence by such choices. Devine's clearly sexualized-racialized murder adds to the complex picture of Brandon's death, for Devine's death also points to the anxieties that our culture holds about sexual and racial difference and the price that is exacted on some as representative of that difference. To have excised Devine from the fictional version, for whatever reasons, is to reproduce the notion that these things do not cross-cut each other. Such is the furthest from the truth. Is there a correspondence between *Boys Don't Cry* and the Nike ad that I began with? And how might we think about the ways in which we cross-cut each other? Is it still possible to approach identity and its behavior-orienting practices as exclusive performances or do we require methods for thinking about our cross-cutting resonances? How does late modern capitalist consumption and commodification cross-cut and implicate us all in its complex webs and circuits?

Finally, in Lee Edelman's reading of James Baldwin's *Just Above My Head,* Edelman argues that Baldwin's commitment is to "dismantling the armored identities that keep self and other, inside and outside, resolutely, if arbitrarily distinct" (73). Baldwin's project, then, was to reveal the ways in which we cross-cut each other as a way of moving us toward a more ethico-political orientation to the world we inhabit. His ethico-political demand suggests that identity-orienting practices required a move from identities as foundational to processes of identification that would allow for the acknowledgement of our cross-cutting resonances, a different universalism. Edelman points us to the concluding words of Baldwin in the

essay "Here Be Dragons," in which Baldwin's project of hope and possibility is partially revealed, and I conclude with them: "Each of us, helplessly and forever, contains the other—male in female, female in male, white in black and black in white. We are part of each other. Many of my countrymen appear to find this fact exceedingly inconvenient and even unfair, and so, very often, do I. But none of us can do anything about it" (74).[25]

NOTES

1. See Barbara Browning, 1998, *Infectious Rhythm: Metaphors of Contagion and the Spread of African Culture.* New York: Routledge.
2. Stuart Hall, 1996, "The After-Life of Frantz Fanon: Why Fanon? Why Now? Why Black Skin, White Masks?" In *The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation,* ed. Alan Reed. Seattle: Bay Press.
3. See chapter 6 in particular C.L.R.James, 1993, "The Struggle for Happiness." *American Civilization.* Cambridge: Blackwell.
4. See D.Scott, 2000. "More Man than You'll Ever Be: Antonio Fargus, Eldridge Cleaver and Toni Morrison's *Beloved."* In *Dangerous Liaisons: Blacks, Gays, and the Struggle for Equality,* ed. Eric Brandt. New York: The New Press.
5. Sylvia Wynter, 1992, "Rethinking "Aesthetics": Notes Towards a Deciphering Practice." In *Ex-Iles: Essays on Caribbean Cinema,* ed. Mbye Cham. Trenton, N.J.: African World Press, Inc.
6. Wynter, 1992.
7. For examples, see R.W.Connell; Lynne Segal; Brian Pronger; Fred Pfeil.
8. See 1997, *Race and the Subject of Masculinities,* ed. Harry Stecopoulos and Michael Uebel. Durham: Duke University Press.
9. Deborah McDowell, 1997, "Pecs and Reps: Muscling in on Race and the Subject of Masculinities." *Race and the Subject of Masculinities,* ed. Harry Stecopoulos and Michael Uebel. Durham: Duke University Press.
10. Frantz Fanon, 1967, *Black Skin, White Masks.* New York: Grove Press.
11. See for example: 1996, *Representing Black Men,* ed. Marcellus Blount and George P.Cunningham. New York: Routledge; 1996, *Are We Not Men?: Masculine Anxiety and the Problem of African-American Identity,* Phillip Brian Harper. New York: Oxford; 1997, *Race and the Subject of Masculinities,* ed. Harry Stecopoulos and Michael Uebel. Durham: Duke University Press.
12. Angela Davis and Dr. Dre, "Nappy Happy," *Transition,* Issue 58.
13. bell hooks, 1990, "Reflections on Race and Sex." In *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Poli-tics.* Toronto: Between the Lines Press.
14. See Rinaldo Walcott, 1998, "Queer Texts and Performativity: Zora, Rap and Community." In *Queer Theory in Education,* ed. William F.Pinar. Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
15. Frantz Fanon, 1968, *The Wretched of the Earth.* New York: Grove Press.
16. Gary Fisher, 2000. See *Gary in your Pocket: Stories and Notebooks of Gary Fisher.* Ed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Durham: Duke University Press; Robert Reid-Pharr, "The Shock of Gary Fisher." In *Dangerous Liaisons: Blacks, Gays, and the Struggle for Equality,* ed. Eric Brandt. New York: The New Press.
17. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth.*
18. See bell hooks on Michael Jordan's politics, "Representing the Black Male Body." In *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics.* New York: The New Press.
19. The show aired on May 13, 2000, on CityTV, Toronto, Canada.
20. Paul Gilroy, 2000, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
21. McDowell, 1997.
22. Bert Archer, 2000, *The End of Gay: (And the Death of Heterosexuality).* Toronto: Doubleday Canada.
23. Eric Brant, *Dangerous Liaisons: Blacks, Gays, and the Struggle for Equality,* ed. Eric Brandt. New York: The New Press.
24. 1993, "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy." In *Nobody Knows My Name.* New York: Vintage.
25. Lee Edelman, 1994, "The Part for the (W)hole: Baldwin, Homophobia, and the Fastasmastics of 'Race.' "In *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory.* New York: Routledge.