

PSYCHOANALYSIS, LIMINALITY, AND OPTICAL ABERRATION: A REPORT
ON THE POSTMODERN URBAN CONDITION

by

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ABSTRACT

I define *intellectual urbanite* as a person that exists on the margins of two societies. In this project, I will empty the term “urbanite” of its chic cultural value and use it to refer to a member of society who lives in the inner city and is subjected to multifarious racial, economic, and/or cultural forces perpetuated by controlling ideologies. The intellectual urbanite is marginalized by *mainstream* culture due to physical location, lack of wealth, racialization, racialized discourses, or any combination of these factors. Intellectual urbanites are also exiled to the margins of their own culture as those who act in ways other than what is coded for them within their home communities. This project will explore the postmodern psychological condition of the intellectual urbanite and suggest a means by which intellectual urbanites can differentiate themselves as nomadic thinkers rather than (re)productions of ideological domination.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

She sat staring with her eyes shut into his eyes, and felt as if she had finally got to the beginning of something she couldn't begin, and she saw him moving farther and father away, farther and farther into the darkness until he was the pin point of light.

—Flannery O'Connor, *Wise Blood*

I say: the category of the subject is constitutive of all ideology, but at the same time and immediately I add that the *category of the subject is only constitutive of all ideology insofar as all ideology has the function (which defines it) of "constituting" concrete individuals as subjects.*

—Louis Althusser

While popular culture¹ disseminates false copies of reality that reinforce ideologies of dominance and oppression within urban society, urban society is implicated in its own demise as well because of the discursive reproduction of its own social oppression through hegemonic urban practices. I heretofore distinguish intellectual urbanites from classical urbanites as the difference between those who actively resist assimilation vs. those who have “bought in” to the system of hegemony within their own culture. With the help of Deleuze and Guattari, I will define the unique place where the intellectual urbanite resides as the “schizo position.”

Throughout this project, I will bear in mind the Heideggerian claim that whenever a sign appears, it places whatever it re-presents under erasure. The aim of this essay will

¹ From this point forward I refer to ‘popular culture’ and the ‘deputies of popular culture’ as the mainstream media’s presentation of urban culture through movies, music, television, video games, etc. as racialized, unintelligent, and inherently dangerous. Some entities inside of urban culture are also complicit in the maintenance of popular culture stereotypes with their manufacture of songs and music videos that inform, author(ize), reproduce, and exploit such stereotypes. While some forms of popular culture work to counter stereotypes through ‘conscious’ hip-hop, ‘zines,’ and independent media reporting, they will not be the focus of this paper.

be to place essentialist signifiers of inner-city persons under erasure to determine the socially epistemic influences that (re)form his or her thoughts: terms like ~~ghetto-kid~~, ~~hoodlum~~, ~~statistic~~, and even ~~intellectual-urbanite~~ are *not* adequate to represent these subjects.

The “patient” in this study will be rhetoric professor Vershawn Young of the University of Iowa. His book, *Your Average Nigga: Performing Race, Literacy and Masculinity*, will serve as an autocritographic case study through which to analyze the condition of the intellectual urbanite as I view his story as representative of the term. Coined by Michel Awkward, autocritography is “‘a self-reflexive, self-consciously academic act’ that gives an ‘account of individual, social, and institutional conditions that help produce a scholar’” (Young 12). Young cites E. Patrick Johnson (*Appropriating Blackness*), Keith Gilyard (*Voices of the Self*), Victor Villanueva (*Bootstraps*), Michael Awkward (*Scenes of Instruction*), and W. E. B. DuBois (*The Souls of Black Folk*) as precursors who, to varying degrees, used “performative writing to expose the tension that education and academic literacy produces for people of color, particularly males” and influenced the style of his book (10).

It will be the goal of this paper to put Young in dialogue with Freud, Lacan, and Deleuze and Guattari. This will allow me to stage a therapy session between the scholar and the psychoanalysts in a discussion mediated through direct discourse. For Deleuze and Guattari, direct discourse “is a detached fragment of a mass and is born of the dismemberment of the collective assemblage; but the collective assemblage is always like the murmur from which I take my proper name, the constellation of voices, concordant or

not, from which I draw my voice.” (Deleuze and Guattari 84 *A Thousand Plateaus*). As such, I will quote Young and his analysts at length in some sections in order to place them in conversation with each other as I move from an analysis of the unconscious to global considerations involving popular culture and class, utilizing the theories of Karl Marx, Antonio Gramsci, and Louis Althusser. I will conclude with a synthesis between psychoanalysis and Marxism using Slavoj Žižek.

Epigraphs will be used at the beginning of each section to situate the context in which I write and to emphasize the intertextuality of this piece with other theories that have informed my ideas. For, as Deleuze and Guattari remind us, “My [own] direct discourse is still the free indirect discourse running through me, coming from other worlds or other planets” (84). My words too are the product of other voices. I hope that this exploration, this examination, this *schizoanalysis* of the intellectual urbanite from the deepest level of his personal psychology to the global level of his social and economic stratification will prove to be a stimulating and engaging study. But before I begin, I must (re)approach my patient.

RE/VIEWING THE CASE (STUDY)

Reading a text is never a scholarly exercise in search of what is signified, still less a highly textual exercise in search of a signifier. Rather, it is a productive use of the literary machine, a montage of desiring machines, a schizoid exercise that extracts from the text its revolutionary force.

–Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari

Professor Vershawn Young subverts stylistic tradition to create and sustain his identity throughout his book; and, by extension, he subverts the controlling hegemonic structures that articulate him in both urban and mainstream societies. Beyond the autocritographic function of *Your Average Nigga*, its title edgy, uncomfortable, and unacademic, we are forced to read (accept), the book's front cover art, which lends itself to a complete deconstruction of what it represents. Young undermines the gaze of both urban culture and mainstream culture as he visually signifies his angst in being forced to perpetually *perform* in order to fit into either culture, even though his ultimate desire is to simply exist as an "average" African American.

Young's account fuses academic art urban style. The tension of articulating two cultures appears in Young's title as the bold black letters fade into even larger grey words and return to smaller and thinner black letters that display his name on the white background. In this visual representation of Bakhtinian dialogism we witness an optical dialectic of struggle. Once existing as a bold African American figure, he is racialized and othered by grey (competing) voices in both black *and* white societies, until his very essence (represented by the thin letters of his name) is left anemic and unsubstantial. In

this manner, Young constructs what Horkheimer and Adorno call a “negative truth².” He hides his face in white background and, as such, we can only determine his race by the back of his head. In this position, he effaces himself while highlighting his struggle for acceptance in the mass community, feeling alone (and vulnerable) in his own culture as well. Young’s cover art, a reversal of my above epigraph from Flannery O’Connor, allows him to “fade farther and farther into [*whiteness*] until he was a pinpoint of [*dark*].” Beyond identifying with other “art” Young’s work both identifies with and negates *itself*; it is thus in the name of art that Vershawn Young engages his autocritographic “performance” of race, literacy, and masculinity.

² For Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, true artists produce a style so deliberate that it opposes the structure that it recreates. In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* they write, “The great artists were never those who embodied a wholly flawless and perfect style [as in traditional meter, etc.], but those who use style as a way of hardening themselves against the chaotic expression of suffering, as a negative truth” (1245). Rather than existing as a reproduction of the hegemonic discourses of “high” culture and thus becoming “the aesthetic equivalent of domination,” true style subverts the very foundations upon which it was built. Horkheimer and Adorno claim that “The factor in a work of art which enables it to transcend reality. . . . is to be found in those features in which discrepancy appears: in the necessary failure of the passionate striving for identity” (1245).

THE GAZE

Generally speaking, the relation between the gaze and what one wishes to see involves a lure. The subject is presented as other than he is, and what one shows him is not what he wishes to see. It is in this way that the eye may function as an *objet a*, that is to say, at the level of lack.

—Jacques Lacan

[Racism is the] temptation at the heart of every structural system: the temptation to fetishize difference.

—Jean Baudrillard

Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory was heavily influenced by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Alexandre Kojève's 1934 *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, and through the work of Sigmund Freud (Lacan exaggerates the Hegel in Freud). For Hegel, recognition is possible "when each is for the other what the other is for it, only when each in its own self through its own action, and again through the action of the other, achieves this pure abstraction of being-for-self [self consciousness]" (Hegel 113). Lacan builds on Hegel's concept of recognition and Freud's concept of the mirror stage using his theory of the *imago* in which the child identifies himself or herself when looking into a mirror to acquire a wholeness of self. During this stage, the child also creates a fictional version of himself in the mirror; Freud calls this the "ideal I." The self can never quite get to his or her fictional version and thus can only approach his or her ideal self asymptotically. The *imago* is also the "dialectic" that Lacan uses to "liken [or appropriate] the I to social situations" (Lacan 444 "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience").

For Hegel, the human spirit cannot know itself unless it negates itself into some form of the "other." Hegel writes: "The other is an *immediate* consciousness entangled in

a variety of relationships and it must regard its otherness as a pure being-for-self or as an absolute negation” (Hegel 114). In other words, the self needs to *negate* itself to have a sense of itself. Similarly, for Lacan the “I”/eye is located between the conflicted mass of self and the “other.” The “I” says: “I am not that but I am partly some of that and it gives me definition.” Lacan postulates that the self has to declare itself to the other in the symbolic realm by way of the Other (language). We can only know ourselves or understand the intentions of the other through signs.

Building on this theory, Lacan examines the concept of the gaze in his ninth seminar, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. He describes the gaze as the elusion inherent in our perception of an object as we attempt to visually apprehend its essence (73). Lacan rejects Sartre, who argues that the gaze comes from the “permanent possibility of being seen by the Other” (Sartre 256). Making light of Sartre’s theory, Lacan writes “A gaze surprises [Sartre] in the function of voyeur, disturbs him, overwhelms him and reduces him to a feeling of shame.” For Lacan, the gaze, which follows the direction of desire, is on the side of the *object* and is that which the subject cannot see (Lacan 84 *Four Fundamental*). Lacan writes:

When, in love, I solicit a look, what is profoundly unsatisfying and always missing is that—*You never look at me from the place which I see you.* Conversely, *what I look at is never what I wish to see.* And the relation that I mentioned earlier, between the painter and the spectator, is a play, a play of *trompe-l’oeil* [trick of the eye], whatever one says. (103)

We can see that for Lacan, the gaze does not “lie” in the perceptual act of viewing an object, rather, the gaze inhabits the object behind the visible image. The object continually returns the gaze but from a location the subject cannot see.

Vershawn Young ‘appears’ to exemplify the phenomenon of the Lacanian gaze in his revealing introduction to *Your Average Nigga*. He writes, “I was struck with just how different I am from a lot of other black men, and yet again I was compelled to acknowledge my desire to be like them. . . . Their self-assurance made me want to mimic them . . .” (xi) Young views himself as “different” because his view of African American culture has been shaped by the “other,” that is, by the social media that shapes the attitude and actions of the actual people to whom he looks up. Young has a desire to imitate them but he is unable to do so because they reflect his gaze from a place that he cannot see. Young falls short in his desire to embody the other, who is different from himself. Though Young visually appears to be a copy of African American male culture, when he looks into the mirror he cannot recognize African American culture *in* himself. That is, *he cannot see his own gaze behind the (social) construction of his outer identity*.

In “The Gaze as an Object” Antonio Quinet writes “we can see something of the phenomenon of the double when we gaze in the mirror but don’t recognize ourselves. There is an odd moment of anxiety that is also present in the uncanny (Quinet 144). Young demonstrates this as he writes, “I felt a conflicting fusion of fortune and tribulation—fortune because my language and demeanor often mark me as educated, separating me from those who exemplify the stigmatized (and paradoxically romantized) black male profile” (Young xii). Hidden from self by his own gaze into the mirror,

Young's true self, which lies at a point in himself where he cannot see because of his reflected gaze, creates a terrifying misrecognition causing a schizophrenic identity crisis.

He writes:

I'm a dark-skinned black man who spent a good deal of his youth wishing he were white because he believed he was failing miserably at being black. . . . my desire to be white may not be as intense or as incessant as it was when I was a boy, while it may have dulled significantly, it's still present. . . . [My critics ask:] What black man in his right mind would announce, even if its true, that he wants to be a race other than the one God gave him, especially after the civil rights movement and its follow-up black pride and power movements? (1-2)

The media "colonizes" and fetishizes urban culture to (re)create racialized images of "blackness" and "whiteness," and perpetuates the schizophrenic identity of the intellectual urbanite. Young doesn't recognize himself in the mirror because his visible image has been appropriated, distorted, and delimited by popular culture. Though the mirror is always as source of misrecognition for Lacan, for Vershawn, it monopolizes and (mis)articulates its object. A colonial mask covers Young's true self; those whom he desires to "mimic" are retroactively reified productions of television, music, and movie postproductions.

In his 1984 essay "Of Mimicry and Man," Homi K. Bhabha appropriates Lacan's discussion of the gaze to describe the plight of colonized people through the dialectic of mimicry and mockery. For Bhabha, overt acts of mimicry hide the mockery that takes

place behind the scene/*seen* and under the guise of innocuousness. Mimicry compels the colonized to adopt the discourse of the colonizer; the colonizer's discursive presence thus erases the verbal individuality of the colonized. Mimicry hides its menace inside of the cultural and discursive practices of the colonized until their discourse mirrors that of the colonizer. Young seems to confirm this as he writes, "We must alter not the color of our skin but the ways we perform race in each location. These racial performances are most often carried out through *language*, the way we *communicate*" (xiii my emphasis). The media uses language to colonize classical urbanites and *perform* and *pre-form* their race for them, therefore leading classical urbanites to mimic images seen on television, seemingly unaware of the mockery that takes place with each act of mimicry.

Bhabha also sees mimicry as the strategy that colonizers use to reproduce colonial knowledge (Bhabha 122); I view mimicry as popular culture's strategy to reproduce oppression in postmodern urban colonies. An example of this would be a hip-hop artist on a music video urging his viewers to "Get like me!" (cf. David Banner "Get Like Me"). This phrase, and its dubious doubles, reproduced in innumerable songs and music videos both explicitly and, even more insidiously, *implicitly* create a culture of mimicry within the hip-hop community³. Beneath the surface of these inviting declarations lays (and *lies*) a double-voiced *farce*; in reality the viewer cannot become at all like the artist but can only exist as a mockery of him or her as they mimic the (staged)

³ Here I refer to the "hip-hop" community in the classical urbanite sense, that is, the community that has bought in to the colonization of malicious forms popular culture as described above, not to the antihegemonic 'conscious' hip-hop community who view and employ hip-hop and other media as sites for resistance.

destructive practices that take place in the videos in real life. Dramatic acts of deviance by actors on the screen are reenacted by real people in classical urbanite society. There is hidden mockery in every music video. Double articulation is popular culture's key to success though it often leads to the distress and depression of urban culture.

Stereotypes become reified through hegemonic discourses that precede and perpetuate them. Bhabha argues that discourses are constructed to other the Other by differing him or her in order to protect the "colonizer." In this way, the colonized becomes "almost but not quite" (Bhabha 129). The colonizer "rearticulates reality as mimicry" by manipulating desire (130). I argue that the media, as colonizer, creates an artificial reality within the (colonized) urban culture through its hegemonic practices of mimicry. This form of mimicry creates a deep ambivalence in the intellectual urbanite as he or she is forced to cope with two competing discourses: those of popular culture and those of real life.

In his narrative prelude, Young contemplates his own ambivalence as a product of urban culture living in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. When speaking of African Americans that come from the inner city projects, he writes "I both identify with their predicament and disidentify . . . because I am and am not exactly one of them, and both do and do not want to be" (xii) In essence, Young is experiencing the phenomenon of being "almost but not quite." He continues:

I disidentify to escape racism, to avoid the structures that oppress black men. But I also disidentify to retaliate against black men—to punish them for what I perceive as their efforts to disown me. This ambivalence

provokes me to imitate and just as often to disassociate from the black men I envy. Both efforts fail. Neither alleviates my racial anxiety. Instead, they heighten the angst I experience. As a result I am hyperaware of how masculine I am (not) and how black I (don't) act. (xii)

Psychoanalyst Franz Fanon echoes this sentiment in his description of the West Indian Antilleans in *Black Skin White Masks*. He writes, “The Antillean has therefore to choose between his family and European society; in other words, the individual who *climbs up* into society—white and civilized—tends to reject his family—black and savage—on the plane of imagination, in accord with the childhood *Erlebnisse* [experiences] . . .” (Fanon 465). I will return to Fanon’s psychoanalytic theory in a proceeding section.

PREFACE TO PARANOIA: ONE OR SEVERAL GAZE(S)

If we perceive a thing from a certain perspective, our immediate perception tends to be that that perception belongs to a distorted vision of the thing that is in itself. But the more radical conclusion of universalized perspectivism is that if you take away the distorting perspective, you lose the thing itself. Reality itself is the result of a certain distorting perspective.

—Slavoj Žižek

As Lacan's antecedent, Sigmund Freud also relied heavily on the Hegelian theory of the interplay of Spirit wherein the Spirit realizes itself and makes itself concrete through the other. He synthesizes Hegel with aspects of French existentialism, which claims that individuals are thrown into the societies in which they are born and must find themselves through object relations. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud observes a child that plays a game with a "wooden reel with a piece of string tied around it." When the child threw the reel over the edge of his carriage, it would disappear and the child would say "*fort*" or "gone." When the child pulled the reel back into his carriage, he would say "*da*" or "there." Freud called this process the game of "disappearance and return" and argued that, "the greater pleasure was attached to the second act" (432). Freud compared this game to the departure of the child's mother and his subsequently greater joy at her return, arguing that the latter emphasizes the child's strong (Oedipal) desire to return to the mother (432). For Freud, transference is the basis of object relations psychology in which we seek to unify the fragmented self through identification (projective in nature) and introjection (taking the other into self).

The "ego ideal" is the perfected view of self that our ego yearns to reach; it is an idealization that moves toward a reunification of self in its more perfect form. Indeed, our

ego ideal is constructed by the repression of our internal desire. All humans, according to Freud, have an interior agency that measures the success of the ego in reaching its ego ideal which creates “‘so-called’ delusions of being noticed, or more correctly, of being watched.” Freud writes that patients suffering from psychosis, “complain that their thoughts are known and their actions watched and supervised. . . . [that others are] watching, discovering and criticizing all [their] intentions. . . . [but this] exists in every one of us in normal life” (416). I claim that this panoptic paranoia occurs to an even greater extent in the intellectual urbanite, who feels that he or she is under constant surveillance of the Other in public situations. In his postlude, Young writes about being stopped by the police while walking to an 8 o’clock AM dentist appointment because of an “anonymous tip of an alleged warrant for the arrest of a subject whose age, gender, and race I matched.” Young describes this as an event in urban culture that “occurs so frequently that the act has become a familiar theme in our cultural discourse” (139). When this surveillance has become so pervasive and invasive that it infects the discourse of an entire community of urbanites, serious psychological issues necessarily arise. Occurrences such as these are the precursors that can lead to full-blown paranoia.

Intellectual urbanites also encounter the Freudian gap between the ego and the ideal ego when they attempt to follow stereotypical roles established by the media. The racialized urbanite on television and in film is staged as tough, good at sports and dancing, and a lover hip-hop. *This manipulation and re-presentation of culture by the media retroactively becomes the urbanite’s ego ideal.* Thus, if urbanites do not meet the gaze of their ego ideal when they look at themselves in the mirror, they encounter an

identity crisis. Young writes, “To admit that on occasion I still wish I were white indicates to some that I’m too far gone” (2). This statement arises out of the internal conflict that stems from the socially projected cultural limitations of inner city inhabitants and the need to become “white” to escape it so that their intellectual endeavors will line up with their outer appearance. Indeed, Young’s symptoms extend to a universal problem for urbanites. Young continues, “It’s true I’m writing about my own racial performance, but it certainly isn’t true that what I’m writing concerns only me. . . . [While] not everyone wants to be white—the requirement to perform race is pervasive. It’s a complex problem that needs to be addressed . . .” (3).

Urbanites are under constant gaze of cultural demagogues that “approve” their performance through regulation and normalization. At first sight, the pressure to measure up to a certain level of urbanness only appears to come from the urbanite’s own culture. However, the paradox is that the intellectual urbanite must measure up to the gaze of the mainstream culture as well. Young writes:

Either we have to give up our customary ways of speaking and behaving to achieve a measure of mainstream success, risking alienation from family and peers, or we risk remaining in the ghetto. . . . In a similar way, exaggerating and reifying the differences between the races leaves blacks in the impossible position of either having to try to be white or forever struggling to prove we’re black enough. . . . Any attempt to meet either choice adds to what I call the burden of racial performance (6).

We can see that Young witnesses a strong tension between the ego and the ego ideal causing a sublimation of “performances” to mediate the gaze of two cultures.

Under this constant scopic scrutiny, the intellectual urbanite has perpetual “delusions of being noticed.” But the casual other only recognizes the intellectual urbanite’s thoughts insofar as his or her gaze at the intellectual urbanite is limited by predetermined judgments formed from stereotypes replicated by the media; this occurs to such a degree that the intellectual urbanite feels *criminalized* by created stereotypes. In *Reading Seminar IX*, Antonio Quinet writes, “A persecutory delusion develops around the gaze. . . . Analysts occasionally have patients who are unable to leave their homes, not because of phobic fears, but because they cannot bear the others gaze” (Quinet 145). What would Freud have said about this social dilemma?

In *Neurosis and Psychosis*, Freud writes, “Neurosis is the result of a conflict between the ego and its id, whereas psychosis is the analogous outcome of a similar disturbance in the relation between the ego and the external world” (Freud 149). Due to their unique position on the psychological boundaries of two societies, that is, on the edges of two “worlds,” the intellectual urbanite may, at times, show symptoms of psychosis. Young writes, “The psychoemotional pain that this liminal existence creates, the pain of negotiating multiple cultural and racial worlds, is far too great for many” (xvi). Even as a professor, Young still has issues mediating his double existence. He writes:

I’d gotten myself run out of Mount Vernon High School in Mt. Vernon, Illinois, where some of my white students, from that nearly all-white

working-class town, complained that the literature I taught was always pitting whites against blacks in ways that made them feel uncomfortable. . . . I couldn't manage to stay at the all-black Westinghouse High School on Chicago's West Side when I was just as black as they were. . . . the black female principal had said, 'Some of the students think you're not masculine enough. You got to change that. You got to act like a man,' (84)

With each gaze, Young is increasingly conflicted and othered. Psychoanalytically, we can see a connection between the intellectual urbanite and the patient suffering from psychosis. As Quinet says, "What we see in psychosis is a disorganization of the visual field. In cases of such disorganized confusion, the gaze as object *a* in the scopic field often appears to the subject in a magnified series of multiplying gazes" (145). The multiple and multiplying gazes cast upon intellectual urbanites distort their appearance and further divide them in schizophrenic identities. The media projects unfamiliar ideological distortions on the otherwise familiar material occurrences in the everyday life of the intellectual urbanite until the unfamiliar becomes deeply familiar and distorts the material practices of urban culture. I will elucidate this notion in the following section.

IN/VISIBLE CONSTITUTION OF SELF

An ideology really succeeds when even the facts which at first sight contradict it start to function as arguments in its favor.

—Slavoj Žižek

Freud, whose work is rooted in empiricism, believes that mnemonic traces (memory traces) are formed from observations gained through the five senses. It follows that in order to conceive of a thing, we must see *many* representations of it lest our concept of the thing fades away. Though later observations displace our earlier ones, Freud demonstrates that our early perceptions also haunt our later notions. I would like to address the antinomy Freud highlights concerning the distinction between the German words *Heimlich* (familiar, native, belonging to the home) and *Unheimlich* (unfamiliar, exotic, belonging to the “other”) in his essay titled “The Uncanny.” The paradox of these words is that both contain the same meaning within themselves, that is, *Heimlich*, which means “familiar and congenial” also means “concealed and kept out of sight,” the definition of *Unheimlich*. Quoting Schelling, Freud writes, “everything is *Unheimlich* that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light” (420).

I argue for a reinterpretation of *Heimlich* to represent the material conditions that we experience everyday, that is, our lived experiences. On the other hand, *Unheimlich* should be read as the virtual reality that appears on television, movies, and video games—that is, the “reality” that replicates, distorts, and retroactively predetermines our reaction to the *Heimlich*. For the purpose of this section I will use “virtual reality” to

represent media influences including television, movies, and video games⁴. Just as Freud writes that “*Unheimlich* is in some way or other a sub-species of *Heimlich*” (421), I argue that virtual reality is a sub-species of material reality, and that it can, in advance, alter “real” reality and thereby affect our perceptions of the material world if we see *many* of the same (negative) things in virtual reality’s distorted re-presentations.

Citing E.T.A Hoffmann’s “Der Sandmann” along with anecdotes describing the involuntary repetition of returning to the same situation, Freud builds a case for what he calls the uncanny. For Freud, the uncanny is the odd feeling that patients have when they encounter a place they have previously been multiple times. If a lady is walking in the fog and comes upon the same barking dog again and again, even when she tries to go a different direction, she is witnessing a manifestation of the uncanny. As Freud argues, the uncanny also describes the encounter of the same *number* multiple times in a single day. The 2007 film *The Number 23* exemplifies this through parody. Walter Sparrow, the film’s main character, is traumatized by the uncanny reoccurrence of the number twenty-three—a number that eventually leads to his demise. As Sparrow writes his suicide note in a dramatic scene, he declares, “When I circled every 23rd letter of her note... it became clear. The number had gone after me.” (*The Number 23*)

Similarly, Freud cautions that those who encounter a repeated number fall into the “lure of superstition” and are “tempted to ascribe a secret meaning to this obstinate recurrence of a number, taking it, perhaps, as an indication of the span of life allowed to

⁴ Beyond 3D interaction, I use “virtual reality” in the sense that exaggerates the word “virtual”, meaning, “not physically existing as such but made by software [or, in this case, technology (film, television, etc)] to *appear* to do so” (“Virtual Reality” my emphasis). In other words, reality can be manipulated, falsified, folded into a virtual farce, and re-presented to the viewer to *appear* as a manifestation of truth.

him” (427). I believe that this is a more radical conclusion of the implications of the uncanny. Much like one could interpret a recurring number as a determination of his or her fate, one could also interpret the ubiquitous reoccurrence of his or her stereotype as a predetermination or limitation of his or her *telos*. When a racialized urbanite walks around in the fog of everyday life and bumps into the same cultural representation, over and over, violence is done to her psyche and, finding no way to escape, she struggles to reconcile her circumstances with reality. Freud describes the psychological affects of this situation as symptomatic of morbid anxiety.

The conclusion of Freud’s essay on the uncanny sheds light on my redefinition of *Unheimlich* virtual reality. In recalling the uncanny as secret, Freud writes, “we can understand why the usage of speech has extended *das Heimlich* into its opposite *das Unheimlich*; for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old—established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression” (429). Urbanites who witness their caricatured representations in virtual reality see something familiar and old; they see the image of what has been projected onto their ideal ego.

Interpreting Freud more broadly, I argue that his claim can refer to repression of society’s amalgamative desire as well. As a whole, society’s social consciousness is masked or repressed by modern-day political correctness. Thus, overt stereotypes, now considered to be passé, must find a way to escape into the “real” reality through sublimation. The primary source of this sublimation is through the media, movies, television, and games of virtual reality. These seemingly innocuous renderings of urban

society carry with them implicit stereotypes that are very harmful to a well-functioning society. Similar to the mockery discussed above, this social consciousness shapes the urban culture by targeting the *mainstream* population.

Freud writes, “The factor of repression enables us, furthermore, to understand Schelling’s definition of the uncanny as something which ought to have been kept concealed but which nevertheless has come to light” (429). The images in virtual reality speak to mainstream society while concealing their own dubious motives; while overt stereotypical language is not allowed by the current social climate of political correctness, the television and movie screens are often seen belying stereotypes in scenes that seem “normal” or part of everyday “ghetto life” to the (un)conscious observer. In this manner, *Unheimlich* stereotypes are played and displayed in a manner that masks the *Heimlich* reality.

MEDIATING (THE GAZE OF) THE MEDIA

Subjectively, intellectually, the Antillean conducts himself like a white man. But he is a Negro. That he will learn once he goes to Europe; and when he hears Negroes mentioned he will recognize that the word includes himself as well . . .

—Franz Fanon

In Fanon's 1952 book *Black Skin White Masks*, he alludes to the "media" of his time as developing stereotypes that are repeated from childhood through adulthood. Fanon quotes René Ménénil who, building on Hegel, writes that the dark skinned person is repressed by the symbolic Master through tropes "implanted in the subsoil of the collective group and charged with maintaining order as a garrison controls a conquered city" (Fanon 464). Fanon writes that the process of myth dissemination infects the collective mind of both majoritarian and minoritized people from a very early age. The source of this dilemma stems from what he defines as the *collective catharsis*, "an outlet through which the forces accumulated in the form of aggression can be released" (464). Fanon cites mediums to accomplish this that include children's games, comic books, and illustrated magazines that are:

Put together by white men for little white men. . . . [but] are devoured by the local children. In the magazines the Wolf, the Devil, the Evil Spirit, and the Bad Man, the Savage are always symbolized by Negroes or Indians; since there is always an identification with the victor, the little negro, quite as easily as the little white boy, becomes an explorer, and adventurer, a missionary 'who faces the danger of being eaten by the wicked Negroes. (464)

These images, according to Fanon, create “solidly established myths” (466). To resolve this issue, Fanon advocates “the establishment of children’s magazines especially for Negroes, the creation of songs for Negro children, an, ultimately, the publication of history texts especially for them, at least through the grammar-school grades. For, until there is evidence to the contrary, I believe that if there is traumatism it occurs during these years” (465). Classical urbanites are also traumatized in their early years due to the music, movies, and television of urban culture. Children grow up with the desire to become rappers and drug dealers because these are the images they see of those who live the “good life” and are well paid. When talking about classical urbanites, Young writes that he had a:

Desire to be like them. . . . [they] walked with that lanky dip I wish I could perfect. . . . Many spoke a spicy black lingo, the hip linguistics that even white kids from Iowa crave. The men wore pants that sagged. Their feet were adorned with the latest two-hundred-dollar sneakers endorsed by Allen Iverson or Shaq. Their self-assurance made me want to mimic them.

(xi)

Though Young does not vehemently denounce the image of the urban culture presented by the media, we must realize that these images are perpetuated to such a great extent that they risk becoming totalizing through the essentialization of urban culture. Fanon writes that a “constellation of postulates, a series of propositions that slowly and subtly—with the help of books, newspapers, schools and their texts, advertisements, films, radio-work their way into one’s mind and shape one’s view of the world of the group to which one

belongs” (467). Modern day media constructs the worldview of urbanites and places them into categories that intellectual urbanites do not feel quite comfortable accepting. The struggle to maintain the self when categorized by several societies causes cracks in the internal psyche that can lead to cases of schizophrenia.

EYE SPY: ONE OR SEVERAL MIND/S

Why did Eversely feel split in two? Had she become the
 twenty first-century incarnation of Du Bois's double
 consciousness, an embodiment of racial schizophrenia?

—Vershawn Young

I was of three minds,
 Like a tree
 In which there were three blackbirds.

—Wallace Stevens

To psychoanalytically resolve the urbanite's inner fragmentation, I suggest that the intellectual urbanite embrace the "schizo-position." In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari argue that Freud was wrong in his reduction of symptoms from molecular multiplicities to molar unities. That is, Freud viewed implicitly multiple objects in terms of singularities while ignoring their ability to expand and interrelate as a multiplicity. Freud constantly refers to *the father*, *the Mother*, "Castration with a capital C," and so on (Deleuze and Guattari 27 *A Thousand Plateaus*). I argue that psychoanalysis does not go far enough in analyzing the intellectual urbanite and thus she should be further explored through the schizoanalysis of Deleuze and Guattari.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari's fictional patient Franny provides an example of embracing the schizo position by recounting her schizophrenic dream. Franny claims that in her dream she is in a crowded desert where she cannot distinguish if the crowds are "a swarm of bees, a rumble of soccer players, or a group of Tuareg" (27). Indeed, the exact composition of the group does not matter because, for Deleuze and Guattari, assemblages are "interpenetrating and multiple" and, as such, each group(ing) could include all three crowds and likely more. Franny continues, "I am on the edge of

the crowd, at the periphery; but I belong to it, I am attached to it by one of my extremities, a hand or foot. I know that the periphery is the only place I can be, that I would die if I let myself be drawn into the center of the fray, but just as certainly if I let go of the crowd” (27). This position represents the psychological condition of intellectual urbanites that want to disband from the totalizing discourses of each society in which they are part. However, this task becomes impossible because they are bound to one group by birth and the other by social determination and stratification.

Though intellectual urbanites “belong” to a certain group due to predetermined factors, they should not allow themselves to be drawn in into the center because they would be more uncomfortable on the inside than at the periphery. If she chooses to operate solely in the center of urban culture, she would be rejecting her intellectual roots; if she operates at the center of mainstream society then she would be rejecting her social, cultural, or racial history. Unfortunately, urbanites may never be fully accepted into the mainstream circle because they are forever relegated to the position of “almost but not quite.” Their speech, the color of their skin, their gender, even a minor inconsistency in their disposition betrays the intellectual urbanite as an imposter to either circle. Like Franny, the intellectual urbanite should accept and celebrate the fact that the periphery “is not an easy place to stay in it is even very difficult to hold. . . . [I] am in perpetual motion; all this demands a high level of tension, but it gives me a feeling of violent, almost vertiginous, happiness” (29). I will re-present this schizophrenic dream and its implications for the intellectual urbanite through an examination of what Deleuze and Guattari call the “body without organs” (or BwO).

According to Deleuze and Guattari, the body without organs is a desiring-body in a constant state of flux that reifies incorporeal instantiations. It is also an invisible plane between space and time through which articulation can take place to join and contextualize phenomena (Deleuze and Guattari 153 *A Thousand Plateaus*). To live at the periphery of two societies, the intellectual urbanite must exist on (and *as*) a BwO. Deleuze and Guattari write that the BwO “is opposed less to organs as such than to the organizations of organs insofar as it composes an organism” (30). Organized organs are molar and totalizing whereas the BwO is fluid and changing. Hence the BwO should be considered as the schizo position of the intellectual urbanite.

Against Freudian psychoanalysis, Deleuze and Guattari claim that psychological issues do not come from the family but from the society in which the individual is thrown (or “*Geworfen*,” as Heidegger says) into society. Deleuze and Guattari provide a psychological means by which to free the urbanite who feels limited or predestined by their dubious upbringing. They write: “The problem with the unconscious has most certainly nothing to do with generation but rather peopling, population” (30). Intellectual urbanites should not view themselves as socially stratified and predisposed for underachievement by their aborescent genealogical lineage but should make the effort to embrace their rhizomatic roots as multiply-situated individuals. They should not be limited by their proper name (*nom propre*), which renders them as singular, static, and sutured entities but should celebrate the multiplicity that stands behind the totalizing external signifier.

Intellectual urbanites should embrace a state in which they “love to invent peoples, tribes, racial origins.” They should be nomads in their own country. Deleuze and Guattari write of the nomad: “I return home from my tribes. As of today, I am the adoptive son of fifteen tribes, no more, no less. And they in turn are my adopted tribes, for I love each of them more than if I had been born into it” (30). The intellectual urbanite can reach this state of comfort where he or she identifies with other tribes (cultures/communities) without needing to conform to their hegemonic structures. They should *articulate* these competing discourses through literal speech and in the Althusserian sense of combining disparate objects (or voices). Intellectual urbanites become the adopted sons and daughters of multiple tribes and recreate their own racial, economic, and cultural origins in synthesis with the multiple identities they assume. But what are the material implications of becoming an urban nomad?

THE PARADOX OF MULTIPLICITY: LONG DI/VISIONS

Each time this identity announces itself, each time a
 belonging circumscribes me . . . someone or something
 cries: Look out for the trap, you're caught. Take off, get
 free, disengage yourself. Your engagement is elsewhere.

—Jacques Derrida

Deleuze and Guattari's distinction between mass and pack multiplicities can elucidate the interaction that takes place between intellectual urbanites and the outside world, though, as I explain below, even these "neat" distinctions fall apart. Drawing on Elias Canetti, Deleuze and Guattari distinguish between two types of multiplicities: the mass (or crowd) multiplicity, and the pack multiplicity. The mass multiplicity consists of large numbers of people that are organized in a "one-way hierarchy," whereas the pack multiplicity exists in small fragments and do not have the possibility of obtaining "fixed totalization or hierarchy." In the pack "each member is alone even in the company of others (for example, wolves on a hunt); each takes care of himself at the same time as participating in the band" (30). Likewise, the urbanite feels alone, even among his peers, in both the urban setting as well as the mainstream academic setting. As an exemplar of pack (leader) mentality through personal multiplicity, Vershawn Young writes:

I want to be free from the burdens of racial performance, free from having to choose a passing identity or a resisting one, free from having to be this kind of black here, that kind there. I'm tired of being the family fag who tries to prove he's a man, of being the white boy, the academic scapegoat, the one who's book smart but not street smart, who's always running up behind white folks like a whipped puppy, sorry eyes, wet nose, and all,

wagging for affection, hoping they'll accept me for who I am, asking them to forgive me when my blackness offends them. (50)

The intellectual urbanite should reject fixed categories and embrace what Rosi Braidotti would call a “nomadic subjectivity,” that is, a subjectivity that can never be reduced to one identity. Drawing on Canetti, Deleuze and Guattari write: “In the changing constellation of the pack, in its dances and expeditions, he will again and again find himself at its edge. He may be in the center, and then, immediately afterwards, at the edge again; at the edge and then back in the center” (30). Intellectual urbanites alternately move from the center to the periphery of their cultures and back again, but what can we make of this motion?

As I have established earlier through Freud and Lacan, the urbanite may suffer from psychosis and paranoia due to complications that precipitate from witnessing the double gaze. The classical urbanite, in raw form, is the definition of the “mass subject” that is dominated by two “one-way hierarchies.” Deleuze and Guattari offer a schizoanalytic cure for the paranoia of the mass subject who feels compelled to be “be securely embedded in the mass, [and to] get close to the center, never be[ing] at the edge except in the line of duty.” They argue that mass subjects should transform themselves into “pack leaders.” As opposed to the mass leaders of the dominant (popular) culture who build their ideas through the “consolida[tion] of and capitaliz[ation] of past gains”, pack leaders must “play move by move, must wager everything every hand” (33). The pack of intellectual urbanites should be led by each other and, though they briefly exist fully within the academic system or fully inside of the streets of their urban culture, they

should operate in such a way within each culture so as to temporarily situate themselves without establishing a permanent residence. They should thrive both within and *without* their native and bequeathed cultures, inhabiting and embracing the schizo position. I will explain how this is done through a further examination of masses and packs.

Deleuze and Guattari resist the binary formation of masses and packs by emphasizing that packs exist inside of masses and masses exist inside of packs. In much the same way, intellectual urbanites can exist inside of their hegemonic social mass structures while simultaneously existing within their own packs that, in aggregate, form micro-discourses that speak back to dominant structures.

Instead of focusing on the deconstruction of dominance in mainstream culture, we should take a closer look at the hegemonic dominance of ideologies perpetuated in urban cities. Discourses of oppression, can't-do attitudes, and "you're acting white" racializations can be subverted through counter-narratives that demonstrate the virtues of having a smart, knowledgeable, and supportive society. Instead of attempting to subvert the "dominant" intellectual culture through counter-narratives, the intellectual urbanite can focus on subverting the self-generated hegemonic oppression of urban culture.

Indeed, the urban culture forms its own repressive state apparatus through gangs while it is also (re)formed and manipulated by the ideological state apparatus⁵ of popular culture. Urban hegemony is instituted by the popular culture and maintained through discourses within urban society that perpetuate self-limiting ideologies. This solid structure, however, can be pushed back against in much the same way that some

⁵ For a further discussion on Repressive State Apparatuses and Ideological State Apparatuses see Louis Althusser's 1970 "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses."

intellectuals resist the hegemony of patriarchy, capitalism, and heteronormativity. I now move to explain the nature of hegemonic practices and ideologies that influence the urban culture through popular culture through the lens of Karl Marx and his successors to ultimately find a way to re-approach the solid structure of urban hegemony.

THE INNER *EYES/I'S* OF IDEOLOGY AND THE OUTER H/EDGES OF
HEGEMONY

If you want to change historically existing ideas, even in the apparently abstract domain called philosophy, you cannot content yourself with simply preaching the naked truth, and waiting for its anatomical obviousness to “enlighten” minds, as our eighteenth-century ancestors used to say: you are forced, since you want to force a change in ideas, to recognize the force which is keeping them bent, by applying a counter-force capable of destroying this power and bending the stick in the opposite direction so as to put the ideas right.

—Louis Althusser

In *Grundrisse*, a set of notes for his later work *Das Kapital*, Karl Marx provides assumptions for the socio-economic analysis of texts. Marx claims that Hegel’s dialectic in which the Spirit negates itself through concrete manifestations in order to see itself mirrored back or re-presented “fell into error” (651). Marx believes that everything begins at the material level of the complex multiplicity, that is, in buying, selling, and exchanging. He further argues that “subjective responses” are negations of the concrete multiplicities from which they come and thus serve as ideologies that interpret and distort. For Marx, the Spirit that emerges from the concrete is created through subjective responses; in this manner, Marx reverses the Hegelian dialectic.

In *The German Ideology* Marx goes on to claim that ideological constructs have the tendency to reflect the impulses from which they came. Returning to my theme of vision in this project, Marx writes that ideologies cause “men and their circumstances [to] appear upside down as in a *camera obscura*, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-processes as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life processes” (656). From this we can see how concrete multiplicities in

subjective processes become ideologically distorted. Ideology therefore creates “truths” out of multiple processes by inverting (inventing, changing, and disguising) real life. This inversion/distortion anamorphosis distorts the original state of the real processes that the ideological interpretation reflects. Marx further argues that new classes “achieve [their] hegemony only on the broader basis than that of the class ruling previously, whereas the opposition of the non-ruling class against the new ruling class develops all the more sharply and profoundly.” He argues that the tension between the new and the old classes “Aims at a more decided and radical negation of the previous conditions of society than could all previous classes which sought to rule” (657).

For Marx, hegemony is the common view of reality. Not only is there a struggle between modes of relations and modes of production but there is also a struggle between classes. Dominant classes compel people think that things are the way they are but, over time, resistant classes prepare new modes of thinking and thus supplant the dominant classes. Thus is the task of the intellectual urbanite—to recover reality and to discover how it has been transmogrified.

In his *Prison Notebooks*, Antonio Gramsci builds on the Marxist concept of hegemony through his employment of Marx’s distinction between the base and the superstructure. The base includes material processes (modes of production vs. relations of production and class conflicts) whereas the superstructure is produced out of the base in order to explain it. For Gramsci, when a superstructure produces hegemony agreed upon by both dominant classes and the ruling classes, we encounter the most dominant form of hegemony—it is extremely hard to subvert. Gramsci writes that the “intellectuals are the

dominant group's 'deputies' in exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government" (673). I argue that the "deputies" of hegemony in urban culture are movie directors and video game producers who present urban culture as racialized, unintelligent, and inherently dangerous. These primogenitors of popular culture are the "ruling classes" of urban culture by way of unofficial ideological apparatuses. They work through "the 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population [urban society] to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group [the deputies of popular culture]." Gramsci goes on to write, "this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production" (673). This is precisely the state of our postmodern urban society. The deputies of popular culture control the world of production as they command resources, time, and money. Popular culture is so deeply entrenched in urban ideological practices that it, quite literally, bleeds into the material practices of urban society. The ruling class of pop culture has infected the urban culture to such a degree that the material processes of in urban society begin to "agree" with their distorted representation in movies, music, and video games. The deployment of language enables and perpetuates this structure. Though not all urbanites have "bought in" to popular culture, and some actually resist (conscious hip-hop artists, poets, etc.), there are still those classical urbanites that not only buy into falsified urban culture but also produce and exploit it for their own ends. Why are these distorted discourses so deeply imbedded into urban society?

RE/SEE/DING DISCOURSES

The task of schizoanalysis is therefore to reach the investments of unconscious desire of the social field, insofar as they are differentiated from the preconscious investments of interest, and insofar as they are not merely capable of counteracting them, but also of coexisting with them in opposite modes.

Only one way to spend time on the couch: schizoanalyze the psychoanalyst.

—Deleuze and Guattari

In *Discourse in the Novel* Mikhail Bakhtin draws from Marx and Hegel in his claim that social world exists in is a dynamic clash of difference, not a unified collection of Spirit. He writes, “Language—like the living concrete environment in which the consciousness of the verbal artist lives—is never unitary. Actual social life and historical becoming create within an abstractly unitary national language a multitude of concrete worlds, a multitude of bounded verbal ideological and social belief systems” (675). Bakhtin argues that when we deploy words we simultaneously deploy their accompanying ideological baggage (based on belief systems) in the moment they are used. He writes:

At any given moment in its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the coexistence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-economic groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles, and so forth, all given a bodily form. (676)

In Marxist fashion, Bakhtin argues that words are always already alienated from the speaker as they form ideas and concepts from the social structure. For Bakhtin, every word and every person is fundamentally dialogical because he or she always exists in a place where words are struggling between competing discourses.

I wish to appropriate the ideas of Deleuze and Guattari, who build on both Bakhtin and Gramsci, to examine the intellectual urbanite in relation to the domination of hegemonic discourses in urban and mainstream societies. For Deleuze and Guattari, hegemony takes place in the form of molar “social machines,” which they describe as aspects of society that exist in aggregate and are difficult to change (Deleuze and Guattari 399, *Anti-Oedipus*). Like Bakhtin, Deleuze and Guattari also see hegemony as inherent in the structure of our language. They call statements and narratives that exist as totalizing forces in our society “Oedipal apparatuses.” This name comes from Freud’s institution of the Oedipus complex as the undisputed bedrock of modern psychoanalysis. But what if Freud was wrong? Deleuze and Guattari make this claim in their 1972 book *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia Volume I*. They write:

That is why Oedipus seemed to us a paranoiac’s idea before being a neurotic’s feeling. In fact, the paranoiac investment consists in subordinating molecular desiring-production to the molar aggregate it forms on one surface of the full body without organs, enslaving it by that very fact to a form of socius that exercises the function of a full body under determinate conditions. . . . Now Oedipus appears to be a relatively innocent thing, a private kind of thing to be treated in the analysts office.

But we ask precisely what type of unconscious social investment Oedipus presupposes, since psychoanalysis does not invent Oedipus; psychoanalysis is content to live off Oedipus, to develop and promote it, and to give it a marketable medical form. (Deleuze and Guattari 398-399, *Anti-Oedipus*)

If Freud was indeed wrong then the entire discourse of psychoanalysis, and, by extension, adherents to Lacanian (post)structuralism and philosophy speaking in the name of Freud, come into question. Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari found it problematic that a play from over 2000 years ago (Sophocles' Oedipus Rex) is *still* affecting our current culture to such a large degree, especially in the realm psychoanalysis. They write "We always fall back into the false alternative where Freud was led by Oedipus, and then confirmed in this position by his controversy with Adler and Jung . . ." (388). The hegemony of Oedipus is the initial stain that prefigured our language and retroactively shaped our view present view of the human condition. To escape this, Deleuze and Guattari posit the formation of counter-Oedipal apparatuses. They argue:

We can no longer even speak of distinct machines, only of types of interpenetrating multiplicities that at any given moment form a single machinic assemblage. . . . Each of us is caught up in an assemblage of this kind, and we reproduce its statements when we think we are speaking in our own name; or rather we speak in our own name we produce its statement. (Deleuze and Guattari 36, *A Thousand Plateaus*)

Though Lacan's famous call in 1955 that psychoanalysis "return to Freud" exemplifies this reliance of speaking in the name of Freud, who speaks in the name of Sophocles, Deleuze and Guattari rescue Lacan's motives in *Anti-Oedipus* when they write: "In Lacan, the hypothesis of an unconscious-as-language does not closet the unconscious in a linguistic structure, but leads linguistics to the point of its auto-critique, by showing how the structural organization of signifiers still depends on a despotic Great Signifier acting as an anarchism" (342). Lacan brings language to a point in which it criticizes itself and thus he uncovers its reliance on totalizing discourses.

When classical urbanites rely on Oedipal apparatus through speech, they are non-reflexively affirming discourses native to their ideologically mediated social construction instead of speaking in their own name. Oedipal statements limit our ability to think in ways other than those that would be (pre)determined by an institutionalized "mythical" cause. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari cite an example from Kafka's "Jackals and Arabs" in which they write that reading it in a Freudian (Oedipal) manner is "easy to . . . [do]: you can always do it, you can't lose, it works every time, even if you understand nothing" (37). In much the same way, classical urbanites "buy in" to the discourses of their urban society and repeat them with such fervency (non-conscious hip-hop music would be an example of this) that it is nearly impossible to think in ways other than the discourse perpetuated by their society. The myths that urbanites cannot learn, that advancement is "acting white," and that urbanites are only good at sports pervade urban culture to such a degree that it has formed a modern Oedipal apparatus that limits social achievement and alienates both classical and intellectual urbanites. Deleuze and

Guattari criticize psychoanalysis for using “Oedipal enunciation to make patients believe that they would produce individual, personal statements, and would finally speak in their own name” (38 *A Thousand Plateaus*). In much the same way I am criticizing the “leaders” of urban culture, that is, the deputies of popular culture, for saying that in “acting urban” youths are speaking in their own name when they are only repeating Oedipal apparatuses to maintain their own oppression.

For Deleuze and Guattari, the Oedipal apparatus also becomes problematic when the psychoanalyst uses predetermined Freudian discourses to uncode and interpret the analysand’s symptoms, even when they do not necessarily “fit” the cause. In much the same manner, the farce of fictionalized classical urbanite discourse is that it does not question its provisions outside of the predetermined discourses of oppression and subjugation distributed by deputies of popular culture. The discourse of the classical urbanite is not inherently “self critical” nor did the media intend for it to be. Discourses created by movies, television, and video games are used to oppress urbanites that attempt to escape the Oedipal myth. The classical urbanite believes that the intellectual urbanite is perpetuating the oppression of urban culture by “acting white” when in reality, the intellectual urbanite is operating outside of the overcoded (Oedipalized) urban discourses and creating new lines of flight for himself to prosper in mainstream society.

To succeed in the society of the other, the discourses of urban oppression must be brought to light and the myths that underlie the past must be exposed for their falsity. Indeed Deleuze and Guattari confirm this as they argue that one of Freud’s patients “could have spoken in his own name only if the machinic assemblage that was producing

particular statements in him had been brought to light” (Deleuze and Guattari 38 *A Thousand Plateaus*). Much like Deleuze and Guattari claim that the goal of Freudian psychoanalysis is to “Silence people, prevent them from speaking, and above all, when they do speak, pretend that they haven’t said a thing,” the silencing promoted by classical urbanites in their own society in deafening non-conscious music produce the same effects.

After a “successful” psychoanalytic session, all that is told to the Freudian patient is that “he became well behaved, polite, and resigned again, ‘honest and scrupulous.’ In short cured.” In this same manner, urban members “treated” by the discourse of popular culture are “reformed” into perpetuating their same classical urban lifestyle. Light cannot be seen at the end of the tunnel because the cultural hegemony is so thick that it dims the vision of urbanized eyes, inhibiting their ability to envision new modes of Oedipus-free existence.

SITES/*SIGHTS* OF OPPRESSIVE RE/PRODUCTION

Since [Freud's] *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* things have changed. . . . For the entire spectrum of optical, and now also acoustical, perception the film has brought about a similar deepening of apperception.

The camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses

—Walter Benjamin

I now look to Walter Benjamin's "Reproduction of Art" to analyze specific ways in which popular culture reproduces urban oppression. For Benjamin, authenticity does not rest in the original existing as a work of art but it is connected to the discourse surrounding the original art. In essence, original is surrounded by an "aura" that creates the apparent presence of the original. Benjamin writes, "Since the historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object" (Benjamin 1169).

As one drifts away from the original work and makes copies of the authentic, we lose the authentic essence. Mechanic reproduction (i.e. postcards of real places, etc) also allows us to examine pieces of art up close and in different ways. In much the same way the ideological deputies of popular culture "reproduce" authentic urban life and disseminate copies of this reality through movies, music, and television. In essence, they "meet the beholder" halfway (1169) by presenting the viewer of "urban life" in a nonthreatening environment such as a movie theater or inside the comfort of his or her home. Thus when the viewer sees the reproduction in "[H]is own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced" (1169). Ideologically, this practice is dangerous

because when an outsider enters the authentic, that is, when a non-urbanized person enters the urban city, they become terrified by the copies of reality that they once fetishized in films.

Conversely, when someone from the urban society enters academia, his or her “authenticity” may be seen as threatening to the harmonious functioning of the institution. Benjamin writes, “The film industry is trying hard to spur the interest of the masses through illusion-promoting spectacles and dubious speculations” (1178). For Benjamin and for the intellectual urbanite, the hindrance of manufactured copies of art (depictions of urban culture) is that we lose a sense of reality at the cost of our collective psyche. Benjamin writes that the “Mechanical reproduction of art changes the reaction of the masses toward art” (1179). In the same way, the reaction of the masses toward urban culture changes the public reaction to it through its many contradictions and falsifications. Film fractures the postmodern psyche and causes aberrations and false perceptions of urban culture. I now move to unite film and psychoanalysis with Marxist thought through Slavoj Žižek’s philosophical framework.

REEL VISION

Racism does not exist so long as the other remains Other, so long as the Stranger remains foreign. It comes into existence when the other becomes merely different—that is to say, dangerously similar. This is the moment when the inclination to keep the other at a distance comes into being.
—Jean Baudrillard

Sie wissen das nicht, aber sie tun es.

—Karl Marx

Slavoj Žižek, who builds on the theories of Freud, Lacan, and Marx interprets ideology as implying “a kind of basic, constitutive naïveté: the misrecognition of its own presuppositions, of its own effective conditions, a distance, a divergence between so-called social reality and our distorted representation, our false consciousness of it” (Žižek 717 “The Sublime Object of Ideology”). Combining his notion of ideology with Gilles Deleuze’s notion of universalized perspectivism, which argues that our perception of an object or thing belongs to our distortion of the object or thing itself, we can begin to see how the media infects urban society. In *Conversations with Žižek*, Žižek notes, “if you take away the distorting perspective, you lose the thing itself. . . . Objectively nothing exists, and entities only emerge as the result of perspectival differentiation in which every differentiation is a partial distortion” (96). From this, I argue that urbanites are not inherently malevolent people and that the inner city is not an inherently violent place. It has been manipulated and controlled by myths and ideologies that have been falsified by rhetoric in popular culture in the form of music, movies, and video games as ‘new’ forms of “Everyday Racism,” to borrow a term from Philomena Essed, or more precisely for this project, they have been falsified by racialized *everyday stereotypes*. These media

create their own images of the inner city as they retroactively recreate that which has been falsified about its inhabitants. Urban teens are compelled to conform to negative social “expectations” as technological mediums both create and perpetuate crime, violence, and underachievement. These issues are not inherent in “street” culture, but emerge from the everyday distortions formed by popular culture. The urban condition, like Žižek’s conception of the Lacanian Real, “exists only as an affect of its own distortions” (96) through rhetoric.

Furthering his claim in the *Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989) Žižek writes, “The main point is to see how the reality itself cannot reproduce itself without this so-called ideological mystification. The mask is not simply hiding the real state of things; the ideological distortion is written into its very essence” (718). Žižek argues that social reality is constructed by ideological fantasies that form the basis of ideology. Our ideologies are not perpetuated by knowledge but through action; even if we know that something is ideologically unsound, we nonetheless continue to act it out. We may take a cynical view toward the political system and ridicule politicians through satire, claiming that they only “do politics” to serve their own ends, but, in the end, we still operate in the system and cast our vote. In much the same way, we may disagree with the practices of certain food or clothing companies but, since they have the most competitive prices, we buy their groceries anyway. Ideology is therefore not based on knowledge but is based on *action*.

How does this relate to the classical urbanite? Urbanites know that music videos may contain unreal fetishizations of urban culture but pay the money to see them anyway,

which leads to the production of more videos and movies. A professor at a university *knows* that his colleague was well qualified to be hired for a position on the campus but he still *chooses* to believe that she has acquired her job solely on the basis of Affirmative Action and spreads divisive rumors in the office, *telling* “harmless” jokes to ridicule her anyway and thus perpetuating shameful ideologies and intellectual insecurity inside the intellectual urbanite. As Vershawn Young writes “Racial discrimination is now illegal, but performance discrimination that is based on that once lawful, now fallacious, biologically mistaken, racist, though still race-concept-informing rule that rendered anyone black who had one or more drops of black blood is not” (Young 51). Though ideology is an incorporeal concept, it has actual material implications. Though an end to racism and classism has been approached through the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, the specters of lingering ideologies still haunt our collective social unconscious. I provide an example of this in the next section.

OPTICAL DISTORTIONS OF AFFIRMATIVE DISTR/ACTIONS

The way we conceive antagonism is that antagonism is the limit of social objectivity. What I mean by this, for instance, there is an antagonism between two social forces, we can find that none of these two forces have a discourse which is commensurable with the other. Now, there are two ways of reacting, visavis, this antagonism. Either to say, well, the antagonism is a mere appearance of some kind of objective underlying process which can be explained in its own terms. Or, we can say antagonism goes down to the bottom: any kind of social objectivity is reached simply by limiting antagonism.

—Ernesto Laclau

Citing a Lacanian interpretation of Freud's case study in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Žižek argues through Lacan that when we sleep, we approach the kernel of the Real, that is, we approach our Real *desire*. The "reality" we experience when we wake up is but a mask. We escape from the Real "reality" of our nightmarish dreams because we can longer tolerate their true Reality and must enter the dream of life to decompress. Žižek writes of Freud's patient, "He awakens to escape the real of his desire, which announces itself in the terrifying dream. He escapes into so-called reality [life] to be able to continue to sleep, to maintain his blindness, to elude awakening" (Žižek 722 *The Sublime Object of Ideology*). According to Žižek, such an illusion of stability is created through ideology. He writes, "The function of ideology is not to offer us a point of escape from our reality but to offer us the social reality itself as an escape from some traumatic real kernel" (722). Ideology is like a dream because it masks Real reality. Žižek's cure for this is to "confront the Real of our desire which announces itself in a dream" (723). In order to escape ideology we have to come to terms with the fact that we exist as desiring-machines (as Deleuze and Guattari would say) and thus attempt understand the Real

underlying our desires in order to comprehend the way in which our social world functions.

Žižek provides the example of anti-Semitism to elucidate his (re)interpretation of the function of ideology; I wish to build on it to include the intellectual urbanite. Žižek argues:

It is not enough to say that we must liberate ourselves of so-called ‘anti-Semitic prejudices’ and learn to see Jews as they really are—in this way we will certainly remain victims of these so-called prejudices. We must confront ourselves with how the ideological figure of the “Jew” is invested with our unconscious desire, with how we have constructed this figure to escape a certain deadlock of our desire. (723)

For Žižek, the Real exists at the pre-ideological state of everyday relations—what Marx would call the material base. The superstructure, consisting of hegemonic ideologies, informs the material base while the material base informs the ideology of the superstructure.

Žižek’s Lacanian rendering of Marx allows for a new interpretation of the base as an entity that represents unconscious desire. He claims that even if all false ideologies are indeed true at the material level, the fact remains that the ideology is constructed by our unconscious. Žižek provides a Lacanian example of the jealous husband who suspects his wife of infidelity to elucidate this point. He writes, “even if all the facts he [the husband] quotes in support of his jealousy are true, even if his wife really is sleeping around with other men, this does not change one bit the fact that his jealousy is a pathological,

paranoid construction” (723). The husband’s “unconscious prejudices” are the real issue in this case, not the wife’s (in)actions. It is through this understanding that “ideological construction always finds its limits in the field of experience” (723).

Žižek also cites an example of a citizen living in Nazi Germany with a Jewish neighbor. I will elucidate it and make the connection between the Jewish neighbor and the intellectual urbanite. Žižek believes that though superstructural conditions dictate that the German citizen treat the Jew with malice based on stereotypical prejudice advanced by the propaganda ministry, his everyday experience with the Jew as an excellent neighbor and respectable individual represents a deep contradiction between the superstructural ideology and the material reality. It is only if the German citizen pathologically claims that all of the positive interaction with his neighbor was a farce to mask the Jewish man’s true “evil” that the harmful effects of ideology has taken place. In this way, the gap between ideology and Reality would “itself [turn] into an argument for anti-Semitism.” Žižek writes that the German citizen under the pathological delusion of ideology would say: ““You see how dangerous they really are? It is difficult to recognize their real nature. They hide it behind the mask of everyday appearance—and it is exactly this hiding of one’s real nature, this duplicity, that is a basic feature of the Jewish nature” (724).

I argue that, in this country, ideology perpetuated by movies, television, and other forms of media have so dominated, racialized, rejected, and othered urban culture that it has affected daily material relations between the urbanite, the intellectual urbanite, and the individuals of mainstream society. Indeed, Žižek argues, “An ideology really

succeeds when even the facts which at first sight contradict it start to function as arguments in its favor” (724). Likewise, when a member of urban society achieves high academic standards, the stigmatized function of affirmative enters the discussion. Though intellectual urbanites perform just as well as or even outperform their nonurbanite peers, they are still viewed contradictorily by those not acquainted with their performance in school. At first sight, ideologically dominated mainstream society perceives race, gender, or class as the subject of their gaze. The *intellectual* behind the *urbanite* is left unseen. Though the intellectual urbanite’s classmates may work with him or her on a daily basis in the classroom and thus understand that he or she *belongs* at the school based on their merit, outside of the classroom the intellectual urbanite still struggles psychologically as he or she hears jesting and comments implying he or she was only able to get into the college because of his or her outer appearance.

The ideology of affirmative action is so deeply entrenched that *pathological* nonurbanites view all urbanites under their gaze only as part of the campus football team, or the dubious recipient of a position at university based on non-merit based handouts. The academician says: “I’m okay with Sammy, I work with him everyday and he’s a smart guy. Not sure of the about the others though; I’m sure that not everyone who is part of this program really earned their position the way he did.” More radically pathological academician would say, “Sammy is a smart guy, he deserves to be here, but maybe he’s just ‘acting smart’ to make up for his GRE scores. I’m sure they were lower than mine.” The fundamental problem with affirmative action lies in the fact that it has been perverted

to such a great extent by media distortion⁶ that there is no getting around its stigma, despite the intellectual urbanite's best efforts. Vershawn Young provides his own example of this phenomenon after being promoted to a full-time job at Columbia College in Chicago. I quote his story at length:

In particular, one teacher repeatedly questioned my credentials in that sneaky, fake, nonconfrontational way that Momma taught me to be suspicious of as a child when it comes from whites. 'What Year of the PhD program are you completing?' she asked. 'What literacy theorists do you know? And how much more do you want to teach literature instead of writing?' She punctuated each of my responses with a 'hmpf,' followed closely by 'how good for you.' (84).

How can we unseat the (un)success of destructive ideologies that promote and perpetuate racism, classism, and economic stratification?

⁶ For a discussion about political correctness, media stigmatization, affirmative action, and diversity at the college and university level see Christopher Newfield's *Unmaking The Public University* (51-122).

SOME ENDING OBSERVATIONS (AND SOME MAJOR RE/VISIONS)

If we confront the racial ideologies and performances that undergird our assumptions about language and literacy . . . radical change will happen.

I have not written this book because I wish for a better future. I desire a much better present.

—Vershawn Young

Based on my psychoanalysis and schizonanalysis of Vershawn A. Young and his fellow intellectual urbanites, I am ready to make suggestions for future areas of study concerning the postmodern urban condition. Through Lacan, we understand that Young may suffer from paranoia due to the multiplying gazes present in his psyche. Freud has taught us that Young may be afflicted by morbid anxiety due to the uncanny reoccurrence of sublimated stereotypes. Fanon brings the personal unconscious into the realm of the social through collective catharsis, thus showing how the intellectual urbanite's condition, as embodied by Young, is not solely shaped by his primogenitors but by socially generated myths. Deleuze and Guattari provided us with a schizoanalytic perspective of Young as the intellectual urbanite. They taught us how urbanites should resist the mass impulses and hegemonic discourses of each of their competing cultures to lead a life that embraces the nomadic subjectivity of the schizo position. I have concluded in full agreement with Slavoj Žižek's Lacanian reading on Marx, Althusser, and Gramsci, that "An ideology really succeeds when even the facts which at first sight contradict it start to function as arguments in its favor" (Žižek's 724 *Sublime Object of Ideology*).

What does this mean for the intellectual urbanite? If change were to come *to* postmodern urban culture then it should happen from *within*, or, as Sandra Harding

would say, from *below*. As Lacan argues in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, no patient “will find satisfaction in analysis . . . the most he can expect of it is to organize his menu” (269). As such, I have here organized psychosocial issues that have contributed to the schizophrenia of the intellectual urbanite. I would begin to postulate his liberation from the hegemony generated by urban culture by advocating the proliferation of self-reflexive autocritographies that interrogate and problematize urban life in inner city English and writing classes. Methods such as these can open and sustain a dialogue between the classical urbanite and the intellectual urbanite, which will allow them to eventually reach common ground and thus reduce the tension between classical and intellectual urbanites from within. Similar to the proposals of Gloria Anzaldúa and Victor Villanueva who argue for a blend of “academic” and cultural rhetoric in formal academic writing, autocritography as expressed by Young should also be considered as a valid option for students to engage in their writing assignments as they learn to blend the language of the intellectual with the language of the urbanite. In this manner, the intellectual urbanites (and their classical peers) embrace their surrounding discourses while allowing for the exploration and explication of complex subjects and ideas from deeply personal perspectives.

In the realm of mainstream society, the intellectual urbanite can debunk totalizing myths through his or her strong presence in non-diverse arenas. Intellectual urbanites in academic settings such as Vershawn Young, Cornel West, Victor Villanueva, Richard Rodriguez, and others provide excellent examples as they present academic texts to universities and mainstream society in order to explain the difficult role of the intellectual

urbanite in the academic and social system. Intellectual urbanites in the political arena can also work to discredit myths about urbanite intelligence through autobiographies pointing to the Real person behind the image of external appearance⁷.

Everyday stereotypes can only be reformed by modifications to the superstructure of ideology and by practices from below. Contradictions to ideologies practiced by intellectual urbanities and direct reform to material practices should be sought in areas of politics, pedagogy, public policy, and academia through the psychoanalytic and socioeconomic views of urban culture I have begun to introduce here. As Marx says, if the tension between the contradictions existing in the base and the superstructure are great enough, then a revolution can happen (653 *The German Ideology*). It is only through the analysis of unconscious desire and the formation of social coalitions that we can begin to piece together the fractured state of the postmodern urban condition, wake up from our ideological dreams, and begin to theorize possible solutions for the symptoms of schizophrenia facing the intellectual urbanite in popular society.

⁷ Cf. President Barack Obama's *Dreams From My Father*

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