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They Might be my Color, but That Don't Make 'Em Biscuits: An Examination of Figural
Fixations of Blackness Through Visuality, Ambient Rhetoric, and Somaesthetics

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

by

Eric Atkinson

December 2020

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

They Might be my Color, but That Don't Make 'Em Biscuits: An Examination of Figural
Fixations of Blackness Through Visuality, Ambient Rhetoric, and Somaesthetics

by

Eric Atkinson

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in English
University of California, Riverside, December 2020
Keith Harris, Chairperson

Visuality means to be literate, having the ability to articulate, in images, through

the connective nature that likeness represents as it links with the impetus that

conceptualized it and cultural and sociological eddys of perception that mean to integrate

an objecthood to maintain the ism the reflection represents. What this means, really, is

that images obtain significant meaning through the utilization and provocation of the

senses beyond the optical toward aesthetics by way of the soma, or what Marks termed an

embodied empathy, a self-identifying connection with the representative image. This is

also true for comics as they work through the principles of interactivity, visuality requires

a comprehension, an understanding of the inherent structure and nature—the space that

allows for the meaning to occur—of visual messages in the sense of suggestion, gesturing

towards, and motion as it articulates cause and meaning-filled effect (the image is of x

doing these actions y therefore it means z) but its means of significance in comics works

through conjunction in the sense of haptic visuality, the relationship shift "of the viewer to the image away from divided subject-object to a merged subjectivity" as it allows the viewer to identify what is seen through identifying with (Janzen 106). In this sense, visuality works through sensorium, the presented phenomenological experience allows for a deeper clarity as the blurred line between seer and seen converge, in the sense that "[t]hings solicit the flesh just as the flesh beckons to and as an object for things. Perception is the flesh's reversibility, the flesh touching, seeing, perceiving itself, one fold (provisionally) catching the other in its own self-embrace" (Grosz 103). Further, for meaning to occur, the created sensorium demands that conflation of the perceived image as subject, I see myself and know it to be me as I see it, "and find[s] [the perception] sensible in the primary, prepersonal, and global way" that enacts connection (Sobchack 65). In that sense, visuality acts in the "interest and investment in being *both* 'here' *and* 'there'" as I sense it, I know it (Sobchack 66).So I began looking at the system of visuality that surrounds black bodies, the stuff that creates images of blackness as Blackness. How did this woman, in an act of parrhesia, create me, make blackness? How is this universality created in our sociality? The easiest obvious answer is that the term image is being utilized in a specific way: the aesthetic, the meaning, is derived from the processes of value and worth attached to the conflation of the depicted denotation and its connotation, the easy and obvious notion of what is seen as black means Black. *They Might be my Color, but that Don't Make 'Em Biscuits* is an examination of the visual medium of comics, critically looking at how depicted black forms re-present the typification of blackness produced in the public sphere, that requires audience

participation, and to paraphrase Norman Bryson, means to propagate systems of visuality as a ubiquitous discourse of the always already seen. Like the mixed metaphor of the title suggests, this is an examination of the translation of the processes of embodiment of the black body through a visual medium that appears to be the determination of blackness as Blackness, and is largely taken up as so, by critically investigating what Nicole R. Fleetwood calls the visible seam. This project means to slow down the processes and mechanisms of visuality that structure, construct, and suture black being and reality through a critical lens of the visual, ambient rhetoric, and somaesthetics. In other words, comics, because of their absolute constructed nature, delivers a specific meaning through deliberate broad strokes to employ a particular economy that reflects knowledge and meaning showing what it to be seen. It is important to note that comics representation of the black body is an even further removal, it is to adumbrate the already simplified in order for proper interpretation, one that "allows the writer a quick and easy image without the responsibility of specificity, accuracy, or even narratively useful description" (Morrison 67). In other words, because of the deliberate vaguery, it is easier to discern the focal point in the process through which meaning is made in a cultural context; how the representative form is shaped by the visual in such a way to mine a particular meaning from it, how the underpinning conceptual conventions are tied to it, and how said conventions work through the need to visually reconcile macro ideals with micro applications of the quotidian interaction of conscious and subconscious, the designers and readers.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Introduction

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Conclusion

Introduction

On one very hot May morning of 2014, just weeks before my PhD exam, I was

approached on the campus of UCR by a young woman. Lost in thought about how I was

to link African American criticism and literature with somaesthetics and comics, and bent

over, I was attempting to move my locks out of my line of sight to unlock my bicycle

when I heard a voice, "excuse me." Looking up, and my eyes refocusing, the young

lady—dirty blonde, blue-eyed—did not wait for my acknowledgement but began with

"Where can I buy your CD?" The confusion obviously showing on my face as I was

thinking of the correlation between a CD and somaesthetics (and what that had to do with

me), she immediately chimed in "Ya know, your CD; where can I buy one?" Still not

understanding, I replied "What CD? I don't have a CD." Deflated, she replied, "oh. Well,

cool hair though" and turned on her heel and strolled away. I manage to mumble a good-

bye when it dawned on me exactly what had happened: because of my hair, and my

proximity to campus, the obvious and simple conclusion was that I *must* be in a band—

thus selling CD's—and was obligated to have them on my person.

What struck me about the intrusion was not her oblivious obviousness, the point

and purpose of my being there versus her attempted consumption of it, but how quickly

and easily my body became universally and collectively fixed and stereotyped in the

quotidian in the sense that "seeing black is always a problem in a visual field that

structures the troubling presence of blackness" and is consistently tantamount to the

visual discrepancies that represent its state of being (Fleetwood 3). Her profound

1

misreading of my bodied subject matter was about her purchase of the performance of

blackness as mediated through her gaze that expressed "a myriad of racial assumptions,

political perspectives, and fantastic (re)imaginings of black identity" as being universally

understood and consumable (Nama 4). In that moment, I was already read, understood

really, as a sequential subject in the sense that "to articulate a variety of cultural and

political visions" rendered in racial marking, my body produced for the viewing subject

by subjecting the object-body to appear a particular way in a visual discourse, making

synonymous the visual and lexical through her read embodiment (Whaley 8). Her

articulation of her process of closure—the cognitive process in which, in order to make

sense of a particular arrangement or sequence of presented images, the mind projects a

story—allowed for an critical examination of the determinative process(es) in which

deciphering the "performative act of registering blackness as a visual manifestation"

articulates a state of being (Fleetwood 6). In other words, this quotidian yet farcical

interaction allows for an "extremely interesting opportunit[y] to explore the various

modes and nuances of the representation of an underrepresented people via a historically

misrepresented [visual] medium" in that I had been imaged, the denotation of my body

was synonymous with its connotation (Gateward, Jennings 2).

  This encounter urged me to examine B(b)lack lived social reality to discover how

it was possible for this young woman to arrive, legitimately, at such an outlandish

conclusion. I speculate, and this is true for this project, it has to do with the correlation

with the immediacy of the historical, methodological, and pedagogical cultural

construction of social meaning(s) of a presented black body as an image in the visual

medium, creating a market that allows a particular interpretation to be factual and true. In other words, aspects of black bodies perform tropes that typify a simplified, and largely preferable, reality through an economy of cognitive ekphrasis; my body's meaning was constructed out of her definitional perception. In other words, I was constructed out of her sense of visuality.

Visuality means to be literate, having the ability to articulate, in images, through the connective nature that likeness represents as it links with the impetus that conceptualized it and cultural and sociological eddys of perception that mean to integrate an objecthood to maintain the ism the reflection represents. What this means, really, is that images obtain significant meaning through the utilization and provocation of the senses beyond the optical toward aesthetics by way of the soma, or what Marks termed an embodied empathy, a self-identifying connection with the representative image. This is also true for comics as they work through the principles of interactivity, visuality requires a comprehension, an understanding of the inherent structure and nature—the space that allows for the meaning to occur—of visual messages in the sense of suggestion, gesturing towards, and motion as it articulates cause and meaning-filled effect (the image is of x doing these actions y therefore it means z) but its means of significance in comics works through conjunction in the sense of haptic visuality, the relationship shift "of the viewer to the image away from divided subject-object to a merged subjectivity" as it allows the viewer to identify what is seen through identifying with (Janzen 106). In this sense, visuality works through sensorium, the presented phenomenological experience allows for a deeper clarity as the blurred line between seer and seen converge, in the sense that

"[t]hings solicit the flesh just as the flesh beckons to and as an object for things. Perception is the flesh's reversibility, the flesh touching, seeing, perceiving itself, one fold (provisionally) catching the other in its own self-embrace" (Grosz 103). Further, for meaning to occur, the created sensorium demands that conflation of the perceived image as subject, I see myself and know it to be me as I see it, "and find[s] [the perception] sensible in the primary, prepersonal, and global way" that enacts connection (Sobchack 65). In that sense, visuality acts in the "interest and investment in being *both* 'here' *and* 'there'" as I sense it, I know it (Sobchack 66).

So I began to circulate questions about the paradigm of visuality: what happens when interpretations of the body is taken as *the* visual verbatim of the social narrative that describes, designates, and depicts it? What happens when the denotation of the body breaks with the socially held connotation? I began looking at the system of visuality that surrounds black bodies, the stuff that creates images of blackness as Blackness[1].How did this woman, in an act of parrhesia, create me, make blackness? How is this universality created in our sociality? The easiest obvious answer is that the term image is being utilized in a specific way: the aesthetic, the meaning, is derived from the processes of value and worth attached to the conflation of the depicted denotation and its connotation, the easy and obvious notion of what is seen as black means Black. *They Might be my Color, but that Don't Make 'Em Biscuits* is an examination of the visual medium of comics, critically looking at how depicted black forms re-present the typification of

[1] It is important to note that throughout this project the sometimes capitalizations of Black and Blackness are not arbitrary but are meant to elicit a particular meaning given the context. One is defined from outside of the culture while the other marks how the culture expresses itself to itself. One attempts to move away from the all pervasive and encompassing nature while challenging the dismissive nature of the monolithically discursive. It is important to know which is which.

4

blackness produced in the public sphere, that requires audience participation, and to paraphrase Norman Bryson, means to propagate systems of visuality as a ubiquitous discourse of the always already seen. Like the mixed metaphor of the title suggests, this is an examination of the translation of the processes of embodiment of the black body through a visual medium that appears to be the determination of blackness as Blackness, and is largely taken up as so, by critically investigating what Nicole R. Fleetwood calls the visible seam. This project means to slow down the processes and mechanisms of visuality that structure, construct, and suture black being and reality through a critical lens of the visual, ambient rhetoric, and somaesthetics. In other words, comics, because of their absolute constructed nature, delivers a specific meaning through deliberate broad strokes to employ a particular economy that reflects knowledge and meaning showing what it to be seen. It is important to note that comics representation of the black body is an even further removal, it is to adumbrate the already simplified in order for proper interpretation, one that "allows the writer a quick and easy image without the responsibility of specificity, accuracy, or even narratively useful description" (Morrison 67). In other words, because of the deliberate vaguery, it is easier to discern the focal point in the process through which meaning is made in a cultural context; how the representative form is shaped by the visual in such a way to mine a particular meaning from it, how the underpinning conceptual conventions are tied to it, and how said conventions work through the need to visually reconcile macro ideals with micro applications of the quotidian interaction of conscious and subconscious, the designers and readers.

This is an examination into the practice of how ordinary, everyday communication through visual means is so important to our sense of interpretation that these black bodied outlines mean through cued, simulated aesthetics. The idea is to understand how the underlying means to recognize black in this visuality is really about scrutinizing how the metaphor moves as an actant that creates an image, how that image functions to maintain itself as the representation of blackness it is standing in for, and the social and political uses of doing so. The whole project is not just to historically ground examinations of the interrelationships among visual studies, rhetorical consciousness, the African American figure, and comics, studying the social aesthetic structure that binds them through spatiality in order to render a determination of blackness through an emphasis of commodified, stereotyped knowledge, but also how those different avenues work in concert to create, maintain, and propagate a singular and whole context, creating a connotation of blackness through an act of cognition. In that sense, the point and purpose of the inquiry is to examine not just the obviously displayed gaps in detail and clarity of the comics form, but those formative and deliberate gaps that force the reader to create a narrative synthesis with the black form of the bodied bodies. In this sense, what is being examined here is how the displayed representation comes to mean, through the depicted vaguery, and is interpreted as a whole. What this means is that the act to surround "images [with] frames or another kind of boundary [is a means] to separate and define… by making [what is most important] most apparent" (Postema xiii). And this move, then, means to anchor the image in the reality of sociality, hence my body became the obvious dispenser of CDs.

The project is probing the underlying mechanics of comic's figural visuality as it examines the processes of aesthetics presented through somatic arrangements. I am referring to how the visuality of the image is determined by the topoi, which in turn creates the aesthetic. To paraphrase Susan Stewart, this is an examination of how the image of the black body breaks down as the surface of metaphor in which the relations among signifiers, the gutter, is haunted by an alterity. By regarding the visual image as the focal point that makes meaning in a particular cultural context, this dissertation is attempting to move beyond the traditional rhetorical binaries in favor of a broader ambient in order to "critique visual culture," to be "alert to the power of images," and to articulate the processes of production (Mitchell 3). An examination of the mechanics of the visual will allow an inquiry into how in the medium of comics in which the color and line[2] are the malleable elements, the topoi, which are manipulated and make use of the pervasive human definitions in order to simulate, are utilized to represent a particular imaged formation. Essentially, it is about the recognition of the processes of meaning formation that are rendered by the visual components that make up the content. The whole project is historically grounded in examinations of the interrelationships among visual studies, rhetorical consciousness, the African American figure, through the medium of comics, studying the social aesthetic structure that binds them through spatiality in order to render a determination of blackness through an emphasis of commodified, stereotyped knowledge.

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[2] My obvious pun is an attempt to invoke Dubois' notion of the color line in order to illustrate the potential of a comics image as a means of designating identity, or more importantly, its ambiguity.

7

In the Saussurian sense, I am arguing, illustrative of the figure below, that the correlation between the signified and the signifier is determined through the presence of the gutter, the space between, the dividing line of representation and concept. Whether pronounced or nuanced, the gutter is not the dividing line between the signified and signifier, separating the object with what represents it, the gutter is the place that ties them together, the spot in which the reader must insert the experiential in order to interpret the signifier as the signified, giving it meaning. Even the visual representation of Saussure's work figures into not just the concept but, in how it is depicted; it is illustrated in a certain way that shows *how* it is to be interpreted. Hence when it comes to the depiction of African American figures and meaning, there is no process moving from the representation to the represented because it already has been fixed as synonymous. And here is the inherent problem: these figures cannot encapsulate the entirety of blackness yet mean to sign and signify it. I am talking about the unanimity of visuality, the consensus that what is being interpreted from the collection of the arrangement of lines on the page is and means a being of one mind. What this means is that Blackness is a concept, it is abstract but only takes form, becomes an objective "thing," when there exists a relationship between it and the socio-functional need in which the image is a representation of a particular situation or process in such a way as to reflect or conform to an overarching set of aims or values.

On the surface, the argument thus far would seem to be askew of the already established paradigm of visual studies by combining elements from W.J.T. Mitchell's *Picture Theory*, John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*, Kevin Delucca's *Image Politics*, and

Helmers' and Hill's *Defining Rhetoric*. On one hand it would seem that I am attempting "faithful descriptions of a series of pictures that seem to be self-referential in various ways" through an ekphrastic means, as this is a project about how pictures elucidate the picture medium, about how pictures relate to themselves while this work is about the rhetorical consciousness[3] of the actants within the image (Mitchell 38). Yet another argument hinges on the image's syllogistic assumptions in that what we make of the depicted moment "depends upon what we expect of" the figure's performance of blackness as its determination "depends upon how we have already experienced" it through its reproductions (Berger 31). Still, I am attempting to illustrate the power of an image as a rhetorical tactic, as a successful image reduces "a complex set of issues to symbols that break people's comfortable equilibrium" to arrive at a proper conclusion, a closure (Delucca 3). Yet the project also wants to examine black figures at the "crossroads of more than one discipline" by making an inquiry of how visual images rhetorically act upon those viewing (Hill, Helmer 2). In that sense, the previous inquiries all are short-sighted as the work here is concerned with how images socially utilize depictions of the black form, filling them through a rhetoricality that uses the created shape—the ink and pigment's particular arrangement—in particularly political, historical, and cultural ways to produce a real world performance called blackness. Related to the work of Charles Johnson[4] in which comics are "composed *by* and *for* whites" as he rallies

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[3] As defined by Bruce Gronbeck: "an awareness of the ways that persuasive communication is context dependent, contingent, and often strategically crafted by agents with particular purposes in mind" (2). Also, see Dilip Gaonkar's "Rhetoric and its Double" in *The Rhetorical Turn: Invention and Persuasion in the Conduct of Inquiry*, edited by Herbert W. Simons

[4] Johnson reiterates the notion from Franz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* in that magazines are put together by whites for little white men.

to extricate the pervasive depiction of the black trope as risible from history, as conceived of as not fully human, intellectual, or culturally equal, and the taxonomic work of Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics*, my dissertation will focus on the processes of persuasion in which visuals of the black form utilizes the figure's physicality to not only perform violence, monstrosity, identity, the grotesque, horror, caricature, terror, sovereignty, abjectness, and miscegeny, but also create a cultural and literary imaged economy in order *per*form, *in*form, and *de*form a larger contextual reality about African Americans, distilling it to a fundamentality of fixity (Johnson 8). A lens from Thomas Rickert's *Ambient Rhetoric* allows such an inquiry into the differing actants within a given images' paradigm, examining how they interact, influence, and effect each other through the auspices of rhetorical consciousness, informing how authorial practices, social attitudes concerning cultural images, and representations interact to create meaning. The coupling of inquiry of visuality with ambient rhetoric allows for a scrutiny of the comics medium through the figuration of the figure; the line and pigment arrangement on the page visually projects, outlines, and models the conception of what forms the form's possibility and how it embodies the figuration in the Kantian schema.

Take, for instance, the contentious single panel comic[5] "The Politics of Fear" by Barry Blitt. On July 21, 2008, *The New Yorker* featured Barack and Michelle Obama on the cover (see figure 1). This highly controversial cover depicted the then senator in an inaccurate, amalgamated Pakistani salwar kameez—inaccurate in the sense that there is

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[5] Although on the illustrious *New Yorker* cover, this is representative of a comic as it referring to the specific object, e.g. comic book or comic strip, not specifically the medium through which the object is depicted. For a more in depth articulation, see chapter one of Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*.
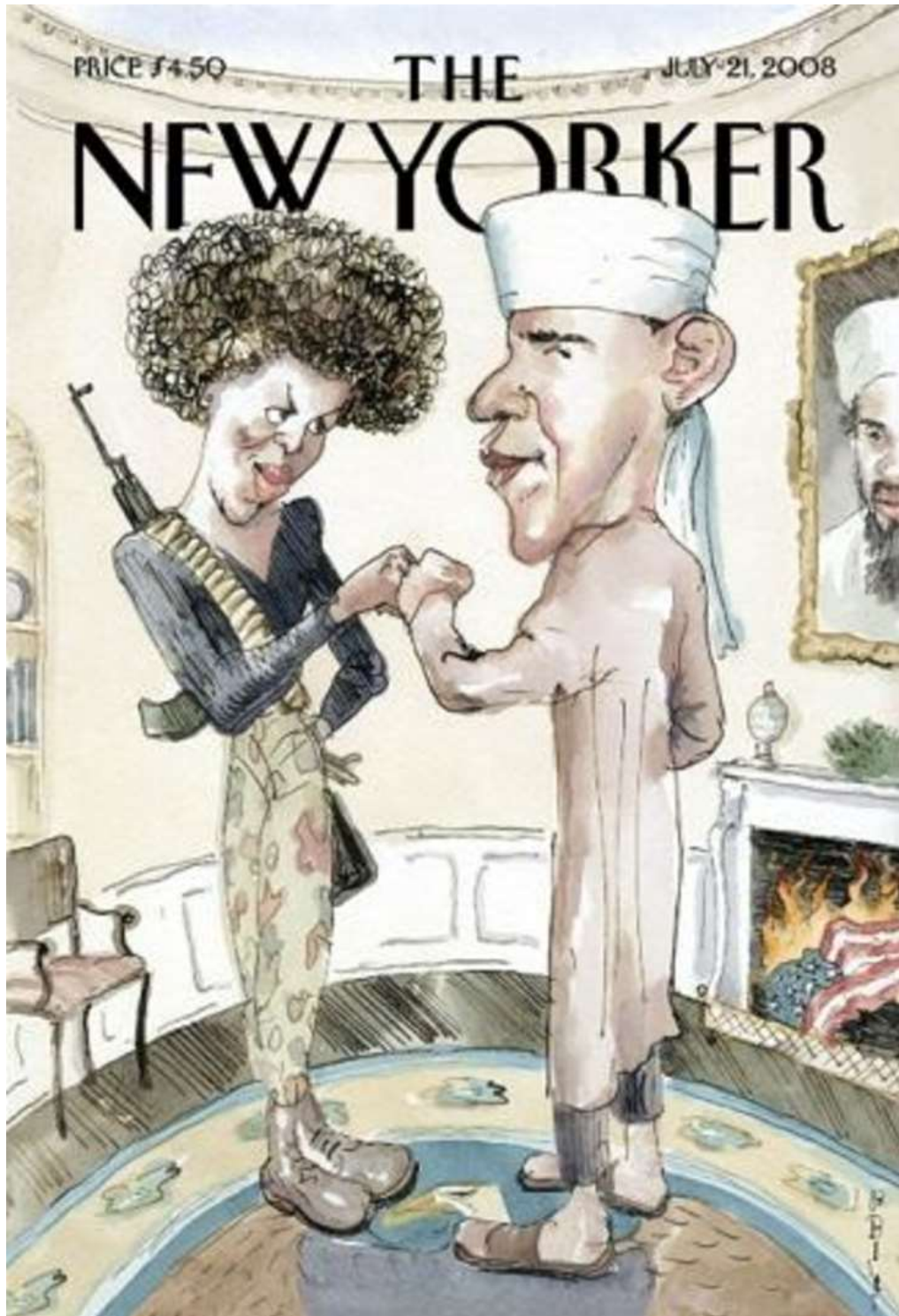
Figure 1. Blitt, Barry. "The Politics of Fear." ed. Remmick, David. 21 July, 2008. New York: *The New Yorker*.

no side slit from the waist down, no collar, it is too long—, a Turkish style Kufi, and

what looks to be Birkenstock sandals, fist bumping Michelle Obama as she is wearing

AK-47 slung across her back, combat boots, bandolier, a frown, and camouflage. All in

the oval office, the setting surrounds the Obamas with the American flag burning in the

fireplace and a picture of Osama bin Laden hanging on the wall. It is important to look at

the elements of the image to discuss how they are working together in order to elicit its

meaning. Blitt's "The Politics of Fear" was defended by *New Yorker* editor-in-chief

David Remnick as he insisted that it has "something strong to say, [that it is] shining a

glaring light on all the lies and misconceptions about the Obamas—lies and

misconceptions that [are] reflected, unfortunately, in the opinion polls" (Kelly). A curious

reasoning in that Remmick does not point to any elements in and of the image that would

help a reader to come to that interpretation. Opponents argue that it is racist in that, for

understanding to occur, it relies on reductive stereotyping that depicts familiar raced

tropes[6] to articulate its message—that the satire propagates the very thing it means to rail

against—, but how the defense of it, in offering no real evidence of support, is meant to

solidify the intention of the image which means to demonstrate a wholeness,

completeness, of meaning, but reveals the underlying sociological, political, and

psychological need to alleviate the cognitive dissonance. However, the push back upon

the opposition's stance is the systematic and systemic dismissal through reframing and

restructuring of the discourse that surrounds it for the sake of stability. Through lenses of

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[6] For this project, a trope is the site of the rhetoricity a visual object produces through politics, discourse, and persuasion. Further, that an image's rhetoricity, its aesthetic designation through a relationship of the authorial intent and readership, is determined by how closely its materiality, its political work, its social significance, and its meaning produces the perceived reality, sways public affair, and maintains sociality.

economics and statics, by touting the cover's effects upon Remmick, and/or by

questioning the legitimacy of the controversy, the reframing of the argument as an

"overheated reaction by the left wing" is a dismissal of the racial component for the sake

of a supposed deeper conversation (Smith).

The correlation between the CD analogy and the Obama single panel comic is the

ubiquity of determining an ontological simplification of the practice of inductive

cognition by turning a representative body into a universal signifier—black—as the

reified notion that "[t]he image of one's body is solely negating" in that it is "an image in

the third person" as what embodies was only seen through its universal invisibility

(Fanon 90). But further, there was and is a particular visual presentation attached to a

black body and hair that perform(s)ed certain shortcuts of designation and discernment,

circumventing the need for persuasion, of social narration of images—there was no

rhetorical move involved—, as my body and hair, Obama's kufi, performed exactly its

determination through an economy of images, an imago. Used by Jung, and later replaced

by Lacan as complex, a black body is a visual presentation that represents an idea, the

archetypal dream. It is a metaphorical resemblance of idealized image in that the gazer

knows how to deal with the object in question by perceiving only what is supposed to be

attended. In other words, to alleviate cognitive dissonance, a salient reader has to rely on

the already read universal visuality which stipulates that the semiotics of African

American males with dreadlocks and on college campuses must align with visual

properties of the black image, that a senator from Illinois is properly read through a fist

bump; a seeing that is so entrenched that asking a perfect stranger to execute that

performance was and is emblematic of a system's maintenance of homeostasis through the ubiquity and normality of how certain imaged elements attach to particular bodies and surfacely perform all the simplified knowledge needed to designate them. Further, that the utter lack of a need for rhetorical persuasiveness of an object performing anything other than what it had being already designated meant that the actant was free to subjugate the object: the discrepancy of double consciousness is about how one's social standing is being mediated and constructed out of a socially designated missing presence. Or, more presently, the category that characterizes the visuality of black bodies, rather than their meaning, is always attached to the simplified imaged spectacle of their presentation. In other words, the black form cannot be just mistaken for some externally defined content, but the image of the black body is so weighted, its "truth" is unquestioned because the characterization is the substitution of the person for the notion of a "thing" that one's hair, body, and performance as a sign: substituting desirable images for concrete, social needs. In that sense, the characterization and subsequent questions about Obama or my body were completely rational because readers are so drawn in by the appeal of the synonymous nature of denotation being connotation that they largely fail to question the work the persuasion is doing to negate all other possible views and determinations while promoting and maintaining it singularly as possible. Hence the disappointment when my body did not "line up" with what was already known about it and it should have behaved.

Some languages are translated by the skin, others, through as narratives, are representations of particular situations or processes in such a way as to reflect or conform

14

to an overarching set of aims or values. The policing of the image, what would not merely represent the Obamas but become them, was the culmination of the "fist bump" controversy which, after receiving the presidential nomination for the Democratic party, Barack Obama publically bumped fists with his wife in celebration, causing media to scrutinize, analyze, and explain the gesture as a "dap" to what Fox News' Ed Hill termed a "terrorist fist jab." These moves, if nothing else, mean to rhetorically construct the Obamas by attempting to explain why a square peg fits in a round hole: essentially Barack Obama did not and does not fit within the already-made American image so a discourse was invent to incorporate, accommodate, or disavow the aberrative performance of himself, his family, and the fist bump because things need to codify in the simplest and easiest sense for the sake of closure. The bump discourse proves inherently the fecundity of the narrative principle, which means these moves reconcile the growing, challenging irregularity of the Obamas by creating a structured frame that represents and signifies the ready-made plot the skin has already signed. In other words, the African American form is an enclosure that is made from neat and efficiently packed information to display everything worth knowing, in the quickest way possible. In doing so, the performance of the depicted blackness determines and/or challenges the dimensions and possibilities of black bodies.

Contrary to the old adage, perception is not only 'skin deep,' it is spurious, yet reports what it represents by narrowing the visual field to fit a particular view: it is the difference between certainty and what is narratively unchallenged, after all, to paraphrase an old axiom,

perception is 9/10 the truth. In other words, this is an inquiry into revealing, not the

insertion of lost information or data into a particular historical genealogy, but how Black

is constructed out of its appearance, the participation in the public performance of a

sanctioned perspective. Which allows for a questioning of why is it normal, not just in

comics, for an alien from a distant planet, no matter which, to be our paragon, our

archetype, our ubermensch, and through which we project our basic ideas of humanity

upon? With that said, it is important to note that there is no difference between the

presented and the interpreted as each instance of image moves to determine the figures

through an interpretation of the Obamas, creating a scotoma of acceptable

determinations. There is a discrepancy between what we designate something is (In

America we like to tell stories about America being the land of opportunity, a place

where everyone is treated the same under the law, that character matters) and how it

behaves (The actual lived social reality) as narratives are the means to make the

designation the lived social reality. Essentially, attempting to persuade the reader of the

body that the depicted figures are phastasmic and representative of the socially

acceptedness' narrow, abstract depiction as real in order to propagate and maintain a

system, or making an appeal through the quotidian humane by demonstrating the images'

inherent inhuman qualities is part of the persuasion involved here as the fitting narrative

must be told and retold until it becomes ubiquitous. In other words, perceptions and

reality are never going to align, except through stories. This is about the perseverance of

the myth of narrative, how that myth translates and becomes ubiquitously the truth,

reality.

In the abstract, it seems asinine to argue over the aesthetic merit of ink and pigment on a page but it important to recognize that "we wear [meanings/being] on our bodies" (DeFrantz, Gonzalez 11). But it is the *arrangement* of the ink and pigment that is in question as the specific way in which the artist and writer, signs, represents, and means the image to make through an interpretation of semiotic schema is also a move to represent and embody the reality of these figures to reflect a particular perception of blackness. In other words, what are the processes that inform a reader that the depicted figures in images such as "The Politics of Fear" *are* Barack and Michelle Obama (especially in light that there are layers of projection—kufi, bandolier, and burning flag— that cover them)? In questioning the semiotic system that upholds, uplifts, the socio-functionality of the image, the comics' meaning is created by establishing a context. This context is created, works, and relies upon a systematic and semiotic familiarity that is anchored within a socially contrived and accepted history and sociality. In other words, the meaning is derived from the figures resemblance and their apparent familiarity based on the already held definition of the human as the sole rhetorical actant. Further, it is important to note that these figures figure into making the image; the figures are created in order to be seen, understood, known by applying already held notions associated with blackness. It is my contention that the image's representation of the Obamas connection with and representation of blackness, the Middle East, anger, and Anti-America means to supersede the actual Obamas with the representational. So this is not just about seeing the Obamas through this representation, but more in the conceptual sense in that to see is to understand and know these figures through a particular lens, as they are already visually

17

defined or recognized as seeing not just believing, not just about what is to be seen, but how the perception legitimizes. What I am getting at is that the image is a representation, resemblance, likeness, similitude, reflection, and copy. But in order for meaning to occur, its verisimilitude relies on the projection of certain semiotics. As it means an apparent truth or realness, in the context of the Obamas image, the appearance of the figures reflects what is already culturally and socially represented. Created in a particular light of reflecting resemblance, the figures of the Obamas mean to capitulate a plausible authenticity of real, of truth. By challenging the notion that the sole rhetorical actant is the ubiquitously previousness of the human, *Ambient Rhetoric* not only allows for a post-structural scaffolding in which all perceptions and elements can be taken into account, but it also allows for a critical inquiry into the possibility of the teleological, that the visualization of blackness only means through a capitulation with the ontological. In that sense, the depicted figures of the Obamas are embodied as the means, the avenue, of persuasion, being filled with a particular political work in order to produce a particular sociality, which in turn represents reality. This work means to move the Obamas of the comic beyond the image functioning as and through a reductive, representational politics, the page, and into lived reality as functioning tropes for the larger, unquestioned narrative.

But why ambient rhetoric? Partially it is about how ambient rhetoric allows for a treatment of the texts outside of the limited purview of public address, broadening the narrow understanding of blackness by changing the very boundaries of the paradigm of possible familiarity and acceptability as Black bodies they are emblematic of the

18

narratives we tell: they are foregrounded abstractions made real through the insertion of the processes of meaning and persuasion that are already held. In other words, ambient rhetoric allows for a discussion of the malleability of the Black body to suggest what we already know, we mold the shape of blackness, black embodiment, into its desired shape. In that sense, African American expression, inquiry, criticism, and rhetoric are inherently interdisciplinary which is accounted for in ambient rhetoric as it accommodates a multi-valiancy in rendering an aesthetic. Ambient rhetoric is a perspectival shift away from European and European American paradigms as sufficient for examining African American culturally specific phenomena, but it also accounts for sensory elements—the moan, the wail, and the voice—and how they flavor figural interpretations, as it is a "call for some response or action" (Rickert *xii*). The contention here is that each element within the image is calling and responding to others that ties an images' meaning and aesthetic to a figure through its visuality, its persuasion, and its narrativity. Ambient rhetoric allows for what Nathaniel Mackey terms "the 'creaking of the word'" in that "[i]t is the noise upon which the word is based, the discrepant foundation of all coherence and articulation, of the purchase upon the world fabrication affords" (19). In this sense, the acknowledgment of the sound in African American literature, through ambience as rhetoric, acknowledges how negative space helps color the particulars of the narrative. By looking through an ambient perspective, the mechanism that equates blackness with the African American experience is, really, to look at the seams of the dress, the pins that hold the costume together, and invisible tape

that holds the wig in place for the sake of seeing the stagedness perform outside of its sanctioned work space that creates what we already know to be blackness.

My dissertation will be divided into three chapters and a brief conclusion. The first chapter must set the foundation as the rest of the dissertation means to explore its paradigm. With that in mind, the first chapter will examine specific instances of figurations, grounding the work and the relationship with African American criticism of mainstream comics as well as visual theory. This chapter will consist in outlying this medium's relationship with ambient rhetoric and somaesthetics; in doing so a thread will move throughout the work as a means to illustrate how all of the chapters help augment the work of visuality of the trope. To help solidify the tie in with ambient rhetoric, visuality, and somaesthetics, there is also a tie in with in media res. I contend that for there to be closure, for the narrative to make sense, in media res asks an audience member to be aware enough to place things in proper order so it can make sense; for there to be any understanding or coherence, the audience must engage with the non-focused elements of the text by utilizing the clues, including subtext—what cannot be said or is not said but hinted at—, that are present in the images, metaphors, and representations. Ambient rhetoric in comics works through the same means; the image present not only presents the point it is attempting to get across but also, because it is visually presented, there are elements not normally taken into account when dealing with the lexical. Translated from Latin as "in the midst of things" is exactly where the ambient resides; focused imagery leaves out so much more as it engages in one sensory input, focusing on the most direct inlet for human consumption. But it works counter-

intuitively in that so long as there is fresh detail, the focus will always be within the frame. This focus is presented as whole but speaks to a larger entirety of narrative outside of that whole. In a comic frame, the way the artist depicts movement or suggests an emotion, because the image is static and the audience has to input so much to create an understanding, each frame is in media res: what at first glance appears to be extraneous information or just imagistic fluff meant to hone an uplift of the main point, the agency for its persuasion is found in the things, objects, and spaces that the representational image is a part of, but not merely the focus. Each instance rendered is in the midst of something else, which links to something else further. Essentially, it is not simply about the image presented, but all the encompassing parts in a particular frame that ultimately sign more than their sum. For this chapter a discussion of the implications of the gesture to utilize the black figure in mainstream comics—Dell Comics *Lobo* (1965) the first mainstream instance of an African American protagonist, *Fantastic Four* #52, the introduction of the Black Panther and his foil Tyroc from *Superboy: Legion of Superhereos* #216—during and after the civil right movement, how the body is utilized to deal with race ,and the problem of arbitrary surface reading taken as depth in Robert Kanigher's *Lois Lane* #106, and breaking the body as a signifier in Craig Thompson's *Habibi*.

In chapter two, I will explore and ground ambient rhetoric from the Aristotelian tradition by examining the mechanisms that moves sensory informational input toward knowledge. I mean to trace the thread of embedded rhetorical conscious in visual depictions, as the discipline is a penetrating interactivity. My contention is that expanding

21

rhetoric from the "limited purview of public address" and persuasion is not just an outline of theory and locutors of the discipline that traces a chronology, but a focus on the weight of this lineage, specifically how, in the classical sense, rhetorical work has been taken up solely as extraction of mined information (Jackson and Richardson xiii). I contend that from Aristotle through Richard L. Wright and beyond there is a thread of ambient rhetoricality present in that it attunes spaces of being by coupling with the inclusion of the phenomenal, cultural, and sensory, but because of what Richard Lanham calls the economics of attention, rhetoric is used as a way of reflecting the already held perception . Further, the exploration of ambient's expansion of the rhetorical model allows for not only a fuller understanding and discussion of the relationship(s) sociality, culturality, politicality, and performitivity with the African American and visual discourse as they link to blackness, but also that it allows for awareness of the topoi's interactivity to play a role in the persuading. In that sense the chapter explores sensory persuasion in order to make a *sounding* of the field of rhetoric. Within that scope, the work of John Edgar Wideman's *Sent for You Yesterday* will explore abjection, Roland Laird's *Still I Rise: A Graphic History of African Americans* will explore the difference between lineage and linearity, and the utilization of nommo as sounding in the Davis brothers' *Blokhedz.*

The third chapter will further examine visual rhetoric of comics and its relationship with the ambient in terms of the expediency of showing rather than telling. The idea here is that the medium itself utilizes, for the sake of narrative closure, perceptions of the African American figure which means that an active awareness, that which what you are supposed to be paying attention to not what is there to been seen but

the *usefulness* of what is seen, signs the "truth" as that perception reveals what we think is true, not reality, because we trust what we see. Further, it is my hope that I bring to the conversation the fundamental flaw in the capitulation toward the notion of the human as the visual focal point as the visual itself is determined through a bridging of the choral space between the "realm of the concept and the realm of the senses" (McCloud 39). What I mean is that the bridging of the gutter itself is interplay that "makes questionable our everyday emphases on the uniquely" societal "production of ideas and their ultimate embeddedness in" our notions of what a human is as the space and terrain that the perspectival definition occupies cannot be adequately understood because the focus to do so is myopic (Rickert 43). Not strictly in the extractive mined (mind?) sense of traditional rhetoric, but in the sense of liveliness, animation, of how matter matters in the figuration of material formations of "truth," through perception, I contend that the ways of seeing and knowing the African American form are not the only means of bringing narrative, rhetorical, and definitional closure. Further, an image that means to sign and represent blackness—as monstrous, dangerous, or sovereign—is relevant in the construction and maintenance of how the depicted figure renders and communicates its visuality. In that vein I will consider invisibility in Mat Johnson's *Incognegro*, identity in Joshua Dysart's *Unknown Soldier*, immediacy in Rock N Roll Comics #21 "Prince" issue, and the relationship of the lexical with the visual in Paul Beatty's *The White Boy Shuffle*.

The concluding chapter will explore somaesthetics, its application to African American rhetoric, literature, comics, and visual studies to investigate how being unaware of the body's movements and gestures maintains a particular system of the

trope. Through this lens the chapter will explore how being somatically aware of the work the gestures are doing changes the aesthetics created. I contend that once awareness is achieved, like ambient rhetoric, there is a paradigm shift, which expands the possibility of the trope's meaning(s). Because of the paradigm aesthetic expansion, there is also a tie with ekphrasis in that the trope, as depicted on the page, is about a multilayered form of translation from discourse to ideology, ideology to real, and real to truth through the matrix of persuasion. For this chapter, expression of liveliness through the loss of bodily control in Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* will be utilized, narrative communication through the body's gesture in Kyle Baker's *Nat Turner*, and the hierarchy of embodiment superseding the body/flesh in Derek McCulloch's *Stagger Lee*.

Chapter 1

Skinned Blacker: On the Global Closure of Race or How Strange Fruit Makes for

Familiar Pie

Launched in 1918, the daily comic strip *Gasoline Alley*, by Frank O. King,

featured the long time characters of Walt Wallet, his wife Phyllis, and the maid Rachel

(see Figure 1.1). Meant to capture humorous moments in the life of an everyday

American small town, this strip is largely unique in that the characters mature as the

comic captures society's changing values through its run. Yet it is the fantastic nature of

the design of the all to common styling of Rachel that comes into question here in that

her status as maid, servant really, and her depicted visuality of inflated lips, truncated

speech, coal-black skin, and defference to Walt and Phyllis epitomize her as Mammy in

that she is present to function as an interactive tool for the Wallets, yet never has self

presence; her physicality reveals and echoes her role as barely human as she is depicted

through caricature, a grotesque exaggeration of the physical form in which certain

characteristics are inflated to elicit to specific reception. Remarkably unremarkable,

Rachel's visage is emblematic of the zeitgeist of the visuality of that time[7] in that she is a

visual metaphor for the social image of the accurate portrayal of blackness, yet that

understanding floats as she is timeless: she is depicted this particular way in order to be

understood because her form conforms to social and epistemological particularities: her

visage is a marker for representation that identifies. The point here is to highlight the

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[7] See Fredrik Strömberg's *Black Images in the Comics: A Visual History*, Dr. Sheena C. Howard's *Encyclopedia of Black Comics*, Dr. Sheena C. Howard and Ronald L. Jackson IIs *Black Comics: Politics and Representation*, and/or Tim Jackson's *Pioneering Cartoonists of Color*.

Figure 1.1. *Gasoline Alley*. Frank O. King. *Chicago Sun Times*, 1935

underlying problem of the representative metaphor that not only stands in for the real, but in its move to make meaning, means to *be* the object, by accenting what is important about her in order to "claim to [an] unequivocal domination of one mode of signifying" (Johnson 5). Rachel's difference from the other depicted characters denotes the impending and forceful nature of synthesis between her physicality and the adoptive policies of a visual language system that mean to placate ambient, contradictory, and warring parties of signification to create a harmony between the depiction and the already held knowledge to which it reports. That her performance of the domestic, having Walt and Phyllis speak for her, and her physicality all mark that visuality means to denote "a difference within the visual—between the mechanism of sight and its historical techniques, between the datum of vision and its discursive determinations" which all report signs of the capitulation of appearance, perception, and meaning as synonymous because a book can be read by its cover (Foster ix). Further, Rachel allows for an examination highlighting *mystére*, the ineffable alienness beneath the surface of familiarity of the world, questioning the need to undermine the dynamic nature of meaning through sanctioning of a finicky language in the sense that the very auspices of the system that means to untangle and make plain for the maintenance of particular singularity in which one view embodies and means the entirety of visuality. Rachel's authenticity, that is she is unquestionably performing her role as servant, is determined through transparent blackness and vague correlation to depicted humanness. In turn, through Rachel's otherness, we read symmetry by the way of the Wallet's humanity; that same sameness we have already identified as and with as human. It is a contradiction in

that the reading and rereading ourselves through society, history, politics, culture, sameness, and difference are all laced in Rachel's surface, the skin that signs the entirety of what is viewed to be acceptable: the light absorbing quality of her skin reflects common knowledge, of all that should or could be known to be present.

It is important that the first chapter set the foundation as the rest of the dissertation means to explore its paradigm of visuality, visual (ambient) rhetoric, and how the meaning that is created through the black body (somaesthetics): the focus of the African American visage is paramount for examination as largely what is depicted echoes and signs an understanding of blackness through its performance of stereotype, a truncation at best. With that in mind, the first chapter will examine specific instances of figurations, grounding the work and the relationship with African American criticism of mainstream comics as well as visual theory by examining images that historically produce meaning through peculiar depictions Further, it means to intervene precisely at the moment of authorship in the sense of writing the image and the narrative it generates and gestures towards as simple, singular, and essential by challenging Euro based notions of determinations of Blackness as monolithic and unquestionably mythic. In that vein, it means to tangle the image, not through traditional notions of Formalism, but by critically examining how these visual representations are in the service of a system of seeing that traffics in the "timorous and vulgar misrepresentation of [black and blackness as] things" that means to utilize the visual, the image, the viewer, and the viewed for its own purpose while similar images, taken from the African American culture, mean to create a connectedness between the reader, the culture, history, and the future because I am

reading myself into meaning (Baldwin -52-53). This work does not mean to repeat or genuflect upon the works of Saidiya V. Hartman, Zora Neale Hurston, Darby English, Nicole R. Fleetwood, John Berger, Frantz Fanon, W.J.T. Mitchell, George Yancy, Toni Morrison, James Baldwin, Fred Moten, Richard L. Wright or countless others, but it is in conversation and draws from them, ultimately connecting with them, not as an intellectual exercise that merely demonstrates connection, but as a sign of "solidarity and cooperation for the mutual benefit" of those in the diaspora (Karenga 18). In other words, the Euro based is concerned with symmetry, the depictions aligns with what has already been defined as Blackness, creating an essentialism that becomes the default and preferred while the African American notion is concerned with the affect, a recognizable performance, as it demonstrates that it lives and affects as "much 'in the word' as [it] live[s] 'in the world,'" that reflect the internal not simply the visage (Wright 94).

This chapter consists in laying out the foundation for the later chapters of ambient rhetoric and somaesthetics. In doing so a thread will move throughout the work as a means to illustrate how all of the chapters are different focuses of the same paradigm, all reporting nad interacting with systems of stagedness, connectedness, and arrival and a knowable of blackness. To help solidify the tie in with ambient rhetoric, visuality, and somaesthetics, there is also a tie in with in media res, in the midst of remediation. I contend that for there to be closure, for the narrative to make sense, in media res asks an audience member to be aware enough to place things in proper order so it can make sense; for there to be any understanding or coherence, the audience must engage with the non-focused elements of the text by utilizing the clues, including subtext—what cannot

be said or is not said but hinted at—, that are present in the images, metaphors, and representations as re-presentations, how understanding is presented to be understood in the same manner.

Different from the impetus of Fleetwood's *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness* in which articulates the moment, the space, in which the troubled visuality of the black body enters, is created, and performs a meaning filled and knowable blackness which is "manifested through a deliberate performance of visibility that begs us to consider the constructed nature of visuality" (Fleetwood 20). This chapter is also concerned with the constructed nature of blackness but in the sense symmetry, the laying bare of the equality of social constructions and the manufactured images that purport to their truth through the report of factuality of the image that relies on the shortcut of stereotyping: these constructions that mean to designate and create blackness as an object and are made visible and knowable because they occupy the public discourse that means to solidify this state as singular, monolithic, and fix. Further, this chapter means to intervene in teasing out the stagedness of the system of visuality and how the system of normalcy is taken up to be quotidian in that it is these created images mean all the seer needs to know because they are in the service of a particular system. The idea here is that what makes the viewing knowable is the witnessed performance is blackness, the faceless laborer of the visual field that defines the body as flesh, through its absence of subjectivity. But this chapter is not concerned with blackness, as an object, and how it is concerned with the doubleness of subjection in how it illustrates humanity through the simultaneous objectification and historization as these images and scenes

mean to illicit empathy, pathos, or questions of ethics or morality for the viewer not the viewed— "Yet if this violence can become palpable and indignation can be fully aroused only through the masochistic fantasy, then it becomes clear that empathy is double-edged, for in making other's suffering one's own, this suffering is occluded by the other's obliteration" (19)—, Saidiya V. Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* has already done that work for us. Instead, this chapter is concerned with the invisible staging in that it not only relies on the predilections of the viewer and the visuality that is always already, but in making the meaning blackness singular, what Hartman calls innocent amusements, "the role enjoyment plays in the economy" in figurative capacities of Blackness (7). But further, there is something undergirding the entire affair: that in order to know blackness is to image the debasement by showing the inhumanity done to the body to show subjectivity. As contradictory as that sounds, black, as a paradigm, springs fully formed from the viewer's ability to perceive it. And simultaneously it is given the quality of humanity through its absence, the debasement of the body: to give subjectivity to the object, through the rendering of the abject.

Ambient rhetoric in comics works through the same means; the image present not only presents the point it is attempting to get across but also, because it is visually presented, there are elements not normally taken into account when dealing with the lexical. Translated from Latin as "in the midst of things" is exactly where the ambient resides; focused imagery leaves out so much more as it engages in one sensory input, focusing on the most direct inlet for human consumption for the sake of leading to a

singular conclusion. But the image, the presented visuality, of the African American

works the presence influencing of the ambient; the figuration marks the surfaced obvious

but it is the subdural that speaks counter-intuitively in that so long as there is fresh detail,

the focus will always be within the frame. This focus is presented as whole but speaks to

a larger entirety of narrative outside of the primary focus, its vision. In a comic frame, the

way the artist depicts movement or suggests an emotion, because the image is static and

the audience has to input so much to create an understanding, each frame is in media res:

what at first glance appears to be extraneous information or just imagistic fluff meant to

hone an uplift of the main point, the agency for eunoia is found in the things, objects, and

spaces that the representational image is a part of, but not merely the focus. Each

instance rendered is in the midst of something else, which links to something else further.

Essentially, it is not simply about the image presented, but all the encompassing parts in a

particular frame that ultimately sign more than their sum. For this chapter a discussion of

the implications of the gesture to utilize the black figure in mainstream comics—

Fantastic Four #52, the introduction of the Black Panther—during and after the civil

right movement, how the body is utilized to deal with race, and the problem of arbitrary

surface reading taken as depth in Robert Kanigher's *Lois Lane* #106.

In essence, visuality means to create what is to be seen through the synergy of

aesthetics, rhetoric, knowledge, perspective, history, and intent and how they work

together to create closure to make a correct imaged subject. Images give names to, they

correctly name for, a specificity of the object as desired: visuality utilizes images to name

authority, which is inseparable from its impetus to preserve. In effect, what artists like

King have done is to not just create what we are to see, but how it is meant to be understood. And what is important to note is that examining the understanding, instead of what is on the page revealing verisimilitude, reveals how meaning is drawn from the image publically distances from the subject presented while simultaneously demonstrating an intimacy with the knowledge that makes and maintains it. It is this push away/pull closer, that which makes the subject systematically and intimately known also creates a rigidity that crafts a contradiction, a gap or gutter that is never fully bridged but, as the knowledge of and about the subject suggests, there is a closure and it is accomplished through the gaze that is communally deemed accurate and approved. Further, like a filter on a cigarette, the images we create siphon and sanitize, making palatable that which is, at best, unwanted, but also toxic in what they reveal about our pathological need to truncate the object, making it palatable for aesthetic consumption. But, and this is the crux of the filter itself, how is what we inhale in the least benign, or at best helpful? What is the purpose of inhaling, if nothing else, than to breath it in?

Further, characters such as Rachel demonstrate a doubleness of remediation— the revelation of the interpretive goal in which an object that marks absence moves to empower and sanction the established perspective for the sake of maintaining the alreadiness of the authorized aesthetic, political, and semic—through contradictory shifting of hypermediacy and immediacy. That is to utilize an endorsed and sanctioned medium to rectify any contradiction and notion through the abatement and removal of the discrepancy, what Saidiya Hartman terms "metaphorical aptitude," how the symmetry of blackness aligns with its value as its possibility of meaning for the depicted is rendered

only in how "the imaginative surface upon which the master and nation" understand

coerced agency (7) . Hypermediacy "emphasizes processor performance rather than the

finished art object" to show the artifice of the medium itself as an act of honesty

(Mitchell 8). On a television show that displays a video playing on a computer screen, the

screen itself is the artifice of the window that houses the video that signals the reader of

the text of the medium. Immediacy is the opposite in the sense that it acts to make to

medium invisible, to be immersive. Its goal, like virtual reality, and the fourth wall, are

meant "to foster in the viewer a sense of presence: the viewer should forget that she is"

fact separate from the text (Bolter, Grusin 22). The doubleness stems from the notion that

the above work is attempting both even though they contradict. Because of this

contradiction between the visual and the meaning, of what James Harkness labels a visual

non-sequitur, the authorization stems from a visually fluffed trope to give it power and

control. What this suggests is what is to be taken up Rachel's depiction "is already seen

in us, not in [the image]" in that her caricatured nature exemplifies the standards by

which her differences in physicality repeats a sameness of America's storied past as the

image, "[far] from constituting the text's unique identity, … is that which subverts the

very idea of identity," repeating the remediation by "infinitely deferring the possibility of

adding up the sum of a text's parts or meanings and reaching a totalized, integrated whole

(Johnson 3, 4). In this sense, Rachel is visibility invisible as she is an object subjected to

external forces that give her meaning through the precondition of social and political

need of closure . In other words, because Rachel is depicted as physically humanlike, her

constructed visage assigns her those qualities, her facade demonstrates "the visual

desirability of what can be [known and understood as it] lies in its tangibility, in how it will reward" aesthetics by point back to its alreadiness (Berger 90). Therefore, her image reflects an examination of a particular order of the incongruous as a means to arrive at a common place and attack the very notion of the sanctioned meaning's need for singularity of possibility of visual language, of seeing. In other words, it is Rachel's remediated otherness that performs an exploited visuality, the confirmation of seeing what is shown through the consumption of her body. It is through this body in which a particular embodiment, one which "invests the subject of culture [the proper reader] with the power to contemplate others while renouncing involvement with them," is understood because it has been shaped so (English 195).

Further, one of the hallmarks, the benchmarks of popular knowledge, of understanding prejudice, or more accurately the system of race and inequity built around bodies of race, is that those that are in its grasp do not understand it better, more fully, as they are victims of discrimination, as if understanding of a system can be limited by access from it. For instance, this logical fallacy that illustrates the predilections that only African Americans can teach African American literature. This is empirically true as correlation equals causation. But the problem here is that the fallacy in question, although in the broad and logical sense, is correct in pointing out the misstep in conclusive thought is always based in the empirical and not actual: it fails to take into account the real world expense of negation in which those that benefit from the discriminatory system fails to see anything but itself as anything but normal so how does that invisibility lend to an understanding of a situation that does not exist? This is to ask what happens when the

accounted variables of pure empirical logic fail to recognize the meaning of the word

"church" on the page, or the real world weight of the word nigger. Let's be clear, this is

not an omission of the obligatory assumption made in the notion of failure to see but what

I am getting at here is how the epistolaries of Rankin, the letter of Wendell Phillips Esq

preceding *The Narrative in the Life of Frederick Douglass*, and terms such as "war on

drugs" and "super-predator" are evidence of iterations of Americaness that denotes and

supersede as authorities on blackness while never accounting for the consequences of

such, all the while creating and maintaining systems of symmetry: that the language used

creates a commonality humanity through a metaphor of simulacra, not strictly that it

means but how it means to mean. Experience trumps logic in that it holds that the success

of invisibility means an objective disappearance, the occlusion and vanishing of body for

its sanctioned embodiedness. In this sense, the performing subject is produced "whose

function is to enact difference through looking and deciphering, and act that is about

assigning value," by creating an illusion that what the gazer is seeing is not only real, but

visually accurate because it is empirically logical (Fleetwood 73).

But in the African American sense, remediation takes on a candored edge: instead

of moving to authorize, it points toward community and self reflection. In this sense,

remediation means to represent aspects of the culture from within rather than having the

text itself be subjectified by outside elements that change its interior meaning as the

image "demonstrates that there is no line between a speech act and a performance" for

the community, it is a marker of identity (Alkebulan 33). For example, in the

contemporary, the comic *Brotherman: Revelation* by Dawud Anyabwile (see Figure 1.2)

uses physical exaggeration in the medium not too dissimilar from *Gasoline Alley*; with a very different audience, purpose, and outcome as the skinned surface subverts the dominant's signification. Released in 2015, this largely underground and independent comic utilized crowd funding to reach its audience: the readership is its patron. Therefore, the authenticity and the authorization, of hypermediacy and immediacy are not separate parts but elements of the whole of the image, not contradictory but instead work like contrapuntal syncopation, working with and against each other to create a new whole that could not be reached separately.

Further, this seditious turn is ekphrastic in that picture turns into a self-reflexive representation, not to image a perception of reality, but speaks not directly to state of being the image obviously is meant to reproduce but the possibilities and achievements of the work of the conflicts and frustrations of the sanctioned limitations reflective images traditionally have upon the group. Remediation here is how the depicted elements of the image reveal an intellectual recolonization and its work to subvert the traditional objectivity because the visuality confirms nothing but the performance as layers structured and maintaining the image's stability and just how loosely they are joined together. In other words, the communal work of remediation moves to, as Mitchell states, show seeing, it means to "tell his story is to begin to liberate us from this image and it is, for the first time, to clothe this phantom with flesh and blood, to deepen, by our understanding of him and his relationship to us, our understanding of ourselves and of all men" (Baldwin 44). In essence, the text demonstrates the paradigm of invisibility; that of
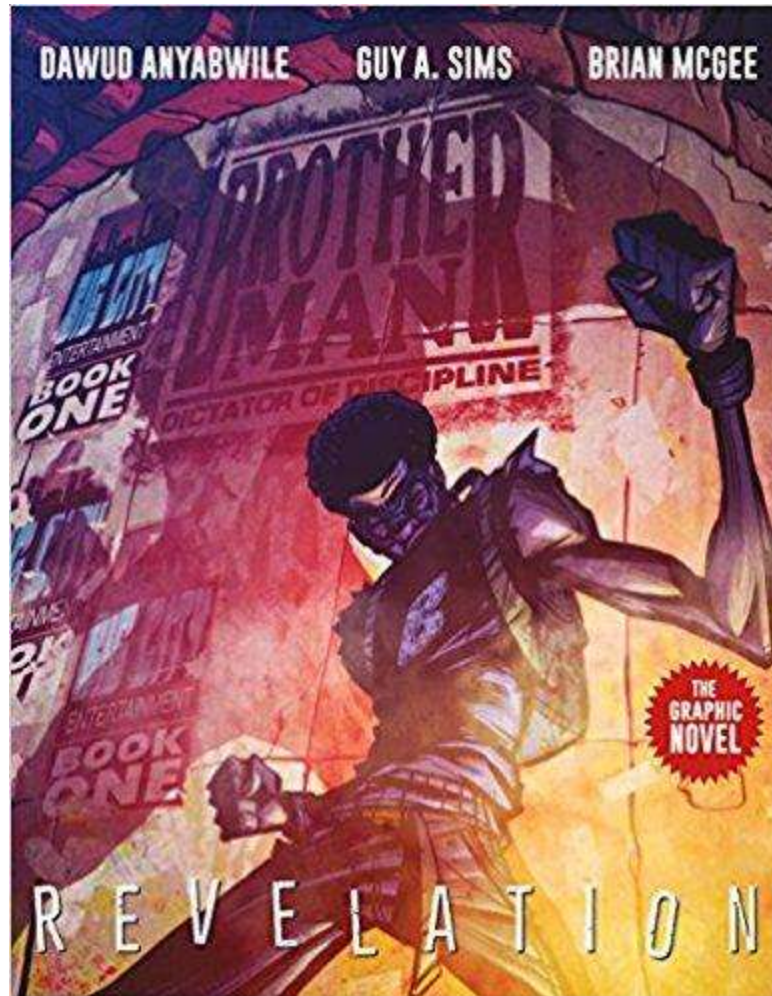
Figure 1.2. Sims, Guy (w) Dawud Auyabweile (i). *Brotherman:Revelation*. BookBaby, 2016

seeing through the representation and showing the reader themselves while simultaneously making the artifice blatant through color and exaggerated features and physicality. Further, the difference is seen in the act of the tradition's move to make it plain while in the African American sense the added layers make for a deeper, more requisite representation. The idea here is that through the layers, the levels, of scrutiny are part and parcel for self reflection and are needed for closure. In essence, it is through remediation that the image of the African American means to be constructed visuality— to "claim subjectivity"—the subversion of the representative imperial culture by resisting it through reverse appropriation, the ascertain of sovereignty and humaness through an appeal of virtue. (Mirzoeff 53).

In many ways, to use the previous example of Rachel from *Gasoline Alley*, the visuality of comics simultaneously attacks and upholds the notion of the synonymous nature, the conflation really, between the structure of visuality and its meaning through representation. In the sense of the Black form in comics, this takes shape through remediation. Classically, remediation means to teach, in particular, for the express purpose of reversing or stopping deficiencies or correcting a problem without calling attention to the adaptive process. Like popular Medieval, Civil War, Shakespeare's history plays, The Old West, World War II, Victorian television dramas, or in the case of African Americans, narratives of slavery and/or trauma with correct costumes, hairstyles, and set pieces, the point and purpose is to maintain a national and sociohistorical continuity by reinvoking and reestablishing those moments that have made identity and the "we" we still identify with and are know by. The idea is that the multilayered

39

interplay between the medium itself, the viewer, history, culture, and identity is not strictly for the establishment of origins but the resonances of affiliations, not as Foucault proposed that have to do with formalized systems of power, but those instances of cultural and political genealogy which exemplify as visually remedial, the visual representation of one thing, in this case the Black form, as an analog for an educational and cultural use. It is in these instances of remediation in which the image is created through fundamental mistrust of visuality, therefore it must be constantly reinvoked. The idea of calling attention to the process, "interrogating everything from the film stock to the framing of facial features," enforces control through the image, establishing a "'reality' based on perspectival literalism" for the express purpose of "originating [a] story [that] distinctly posits a need for the eternal servitude of blackness, but belies an irrational fear of blackness liberated and free" (Scott 300, 307). Further, remediation for the Black form in comics belies that circumvention of narration as the depicted bodies are only visible in what the image has been invested with and the fear that betrays power through control of the image as "[i]t's one thing for Faulkner to deal with the Negro in his imagination, when he can control him; and quite another thing to deal with him in life, where he can't control him" (Standley, Pratt 7). It is through remediation that closure occurs in that the point and purpose is to gain perspective, what Panofsky states as "seeing through" the antonymic action of immediate articulation through those dark spots (27).

Not merely an adaptation of Plato's argument against allowing poets and artists in his *Republic* which refocuses on race and representation, these sanctioned images allow

for an explicit conversation about discourse, the conflation between words, ideas, and the visual comic frame in which they are deployed, in order to question the communicative nature of saying what we see and how the weight of what is seen never resides in what we *see* or perceive. Coupled with depictions of race or ethnicity, the artifice that creates the image never allows meaning to populate "the space where [the image] achieve[s] its splendor [and] is not that deployed by our eyes but that defined by the sequential elements of syntax" as the markings on the canvas denote the folly of the performance of the form to depict, precisely, its content (Foucault 9). The image allows this because it deliberately pits metaphor against its meaning, it allows for an examination of the mechanisms of maintenance of the system.

The success in comic's rendering is determined through the functioning of content as the form through the depiction and the triumph of how the remediation demonstrates that "[t]here's an illusory sameness established by referring to a category of person (women, workers, African Americans, homosexuals) as if it never changed, as if not the category, but only its historical circumstances varied over time" (Scott, Joan 285). Using the same mechanisms of words paired with images, comics, defined as the "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer," correlate what is depicted as what is seen, exemplifying zeitgeist (McCloud 9). What this means is that the visuality of the characters epitomizes the needs of the culture and society for the express purpose of giving the reader an easily read example of courage, avarice, fortitude, love, anger, death, etc. in that there is a correlation between the presented image, giving credence

41

between who it is, what it represents, and how it behaves. This is an example of metaphoric verisimilitude in that conflating denotation as connotation is to continue the "sordid , foolish, and criminal among Negroes convincing the world that this and this alone is really essentially Negroid" while the connotations of King's strip allows for an inquiry into the need for the singularity of the view, its underbelly, and how this myopia is relied upon to create blackness (DuBois 219). A visual epigram of of Kenneth Burke notion ad bellum purificandum found on the opening page of *A Grammar of Motives* , translated as both "toward the purification of war" (as in the transcendence in dialectic) and "as toward the purification of the beautiful thing" (associated with catharsis in rhetoric), is in how meaning is established through a weaving through the nature of the poetic, mean that the depiction, the image, is paradoxical as the substance that gives it meaning also means to purify it for viewing.

It is important to note how such caricatures establish how the Black form and the formation of Blackness are determined by the apocryphal and a means of social performance, the construction of the visually true, by presenting what is already visually important—skin, nose, lips—as exaggerations as a means to establish meaning by attaching what is already known as true. In that sense, this examination is about the impetus of the system to design the Black form. De-sign in the sense the "de" mean denoting the formation of the form with sign is in the Sassuraean sense of marking an object or quality in which presence and occurrence indicates the conveyance of information or instructions on how to read the representation. But it is also about the notions of art in the sense the visual medium functions and relies upon metaphysical

absolutism, the belief that a thing has an independent, knowable structure (Barnes 79-83).

That the essence of the Black form has an indefatigable innate quality that performs in all

instances, creating a singular and easily definable lineage; all instances that demonstrate

and perform its definition what George Yancy calls the "site of meaning formation"

(116). As simple and absolute the focus of singularity is on the visage of Blackness relays

such a profound and complex richness that the standard these images mean to convey

ultimately fail in the summation of Blackness.

It is this inquiry into formations of meaning through the Black form in which the

whole system is predicated on the notion that the present, painted face does not merely

represent but is the entirety of what is to be known about blackness in that it ignores the

shadowed interior, flattening out the distinguishing as the absolute and naturalizing the

circumstances that make it so. The idea is that

> although blackface is usually thought of as a live performance tradition, it evokes
>
> in its tension between surface and interior—*between the makeup and the face*
>
> *beneath*—a fantastic black persona that is analogous in many ways to cartoon
>
> characters who dwell in the flatland on the surface of the page or cel, and again at
>
> the liminal boundary of the screen onto which they are projected. Both gain force
>
> and substance through their play at the frontiers between ontological realms (my
>
> italics Sammond 6).

In that sense, the African American form of Rachel, and in general in comics, is an

enclosure that is made from neat and efficiently packed information to display everything

worth knowing, to make an understanding in the quickest way possible. Yet *Brotherman*

subverts it by utilizing that same mechanism of the community of mediation, using the visual arts as means to speak into truth not a projected reality but the lived experience of it. All of which determines the possibilities of the body and Blackness as blackness. As we must remember "[t]he figures that make up the comics rub up against reality in ways that words cannot, revealing the various assumptions, predispositions, and prejudices that author-illustrators may hold" in that the presence of the Black form demonstrates visuality, the construction of appearance, the act of participating and/or performing in a public performance of perception, of an object as subject (Royal 7). And this is the link with comics, this mutable and indistinguishing in-between, that seeks to establish real through the makeup of Blackface. Visuality works and is maintained as the gutter in the sense that it is the liminal space in which the reader and text interact, reaffirming the remediation, making it true: the projection that is discussed here again forces the placement of focus, the boundaries of ontological realms mean to highlight the liminality as material and real.

A SERVANT IN PARADISE OR WHY I'M NO DRAPETOMANIC

      The Black form, in the comics' milieu, means to form black. This black is not merely a conscious construction in so much as a means to be reflective of the social, political, cultural, and the imaginative need of the dominant, but is emblematic of the understanding through the colonial, that which is the scope of visuality of the imperial, has forced the dehumanization of the body to embody the servant, the menial, and thereby empowering the image only in service to the system which spawned it. These bodies serve as marker, evidence, place, and symbol of the fact of the commonality of

knowledge, of fixity: the image that purports and maintains paradise for a particular gaze. Further, this limitation is self-conscious, manufactured, and deliberate as it moves to create this visuality through theatrics that prop up and construct bodied difference for the sake connecting and maintaining a system that is larger than image, but is merely a signal to modernity. This limitation is an erasure of white culpability as what makes the character readable is the recognition of the intertwined nature of black humanity "and the designation of the black subject as the orginary locus" of meaning of the body as property of the gaze: the good life to which to which Blackness purports and depicts the inherent flaws of the system, discrepancy (Hartman 80). To be allowed in paradise, but only as its servant, is to be purposely invisible, bearing the consequences of the tedium of the upkeep, the minutia. But in the self-conscious moves, an examination of the bourgeoisie gaze reveals the agenda, showing the violence, corruption, and barbarism done to the black body to maintain its performance of normal and sign the paradigm, glory (Césaire 68). The idea here is that the visuality of the black body signs the imaged-identifying purchase: being white is the same as being seen as normal, coveted, and free and the form of the Other demonstrates it through its lack. So depictions of the black form embodies an excavation into "existing black presence [as a means] to exploit that presence to alter or to envision the altering of the very structural forms that make domestication of the culture possible" (English 168). In other words, the visuality of black bodies means to denote the frame in which whiteness occurs in that the body's role in the production of the socio-historical text is not "legible in terms of material significance" but in how it reinforces and maintains remediation (Carrington 71). To view a black bodied form in a comic is to

be confronted with contradicting visual messages, the concentration of society's need for a particular history of appearance by creating a visuality from a constructed physicality that denotes it. In this sense, visuality means to fix, to suture, the problem of having a character that is socially acceptable to the Black community yet still maintains the system of exploitation in which the gaze maintains the dominant iconography of blackness by depicting an authentic, ontologically African that still upholds the contradictive whiteness, a servant that maintains the ever-present status quo.

The idea here is that no matter the depiction, the one that is meant to help maintain and keep the sanctioned order or the one that is a very troubled piece of Blaxploitation, the underlying effect is still the same: the bodies of each are meant to be servant in the paradigm of a particular white visuality. How the image has been incarcerated through the visuality of living color that renders the reader blind to depth of field as the traditional myopia demands the shallow and adherence to remediation. This is about the embedded assumptions that lead to the conscious manifestations of representations Black universality that, on the surface, seems to keep step and remain interlocutor with the changing zeitgeist, yet a deeper examination reveals the "proper" way to read Blackness is through the white gaze while also making it the consequence of the observance. That these consequences speak to perpetuate, to demonstrate the human by imaging and performing something that apes the actual. And I find that in these moments of "dialogue" (the relationship between the reader and the text itself when the exchange of information yields meaning), I am not merely depicted alone in the sense of isolation through what Frantz Fanon calls the white man's eyes, but in the sense of

political motors attempting to silence for the sake of keeping the ubiquity of the status quo.

In this sense, the Black image is palimpsestical, of something perpetually reused, effaced to make room for later inscription, but bearing its earlier visible traces of otherness. Debuting in *Fantastic Four* #52 in 1966, Marvel Comics' The Black Panther was the first African American mainstream superhero. Drawn by Jack Kirby, T'Challa was a move for Marvel to be more socially responsible, to give minority readers a character to which they could relate (see Figure 1.3). A king of the fictitious Wakanda, the only African nation that has never been colonized by Europe as the technology there is far more advanced than the rest of the world, T'Challa initially represents a xenophobic nation, mistrustful of outsiders. Unlike African American characters that preceded him— Ebony White, Rachel, Whitewash Jones, Steamboat, etc.—he evokes a sense of what has yet to truly manifest in comics in terms of portrayals of Black characters in that the veneer of sovereignty depends on upon what the gaze expects of the body, which is dependent upon how it the body was viewed before. His body, costume, land, and wealth all purport as the site of rhetoricality, mined for the sake of the traditional perspective and remediation: all elements of T'Challa immediately sign sovereignty, a demand for mutual civility, yet a closer examination shows how even the immediacy of his characterization identifies this character by "re-narrating one's Black identity… from a historical location, a location within which one is always already *constituted* and yet with which one *constitutes* one's identity" in how his sovereignty performs service and servitude toward "humanity," something he is adjacent too (Yancy 116). In other words, he is foreign in

Figure 1.3. Lee, Stan (w) Jack Kirby (i). *Fantastic Four* #52 Marvel Comics, 1966

the sense of the strange, the unfamiliar, not mystery, the sense of hard to understand or know, but of that which is outside the figural and literal frame. Mystery, in the deeper sense, would mean a metaphor, a meta-identity marker that is really about discovery of something hidden, the secret, through a process to make it plain. In this sense, his body embodies the fixation of creative possibilities in that, to paraphrase Toni Morrison, construct blackness *and* servitude which exemplifies the dramatic polarity of his skin, the projection of the dominant's internal fears of the other and the collective need to rationalize the gaze, the fear, and looking through the external is an "American Africanism—a fabricated brew of darkness, otherness, alarm, and desire" that purports and signals back to colonialism as an imaged persona (Morrison 38). Hence the monochromatic ink of Blackness as dynamic blackness. Like the inky unknowable but immediately identifiable skin of Rachel, this sovereign king of the only nation never conquered by colonialism is, to paraphrase Lysander Spooner, a sign of a man without capital, a chattel slave in that he can only live as a servant to others as he is compelled to perform such labor while paying the consequence of the price. Therefore, T'Challa is a servant for the single nature of the traditional remediation, the cog in which to maintain the business of the status quo in paradise. In other words, his visage, which purports sovereignty and equity, actually works to preserve the present, repressive absence "in order to justify a suppression of difference in the name of (a false) universality" (Moten 205). In this sense, T'Challa is, all at once, the container and the thing contained, making him perfect--in the sense of being free from ambiguity— an agent of consistency that mean to maintain the very fibers of motivations for particular meaning.

The idea is his depicted black body is a form used in the service of visuality as a piece of technology by the dominant for the sake of propagating and maintaining a certain level of identity in society: to make it easier to understand existence through the application of the machine and equipment for the practical purpose of maintaining a particular means of the connotation of perspectives of life, society, and environment. Through its lack, this body ultimately defines what it means to be human by outlying the extremes, the boundaries of states of being because a tool is utilized in the service of the human gaze. As technology is defined as the application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes, especially in industry of identity making, in the sense that make the production of goods and services more convenient through the ever more efficient, The Black Panther exhibits the ease of proper translation in that the matrix to do so already serves the system. What I mean here is that T'Challa's body can alter perception, knowledge production, worldly interaction, information aggregation, person-to-person interaction, or perceptions on accuracy as in utilizing the form as an exploited resource that always seeks to serve a particular gaze.

Simply put, the costume, basically the black thing that covers the entirety of his body, enhances his physical abilities as well as protects him, wraps him in the narrative of historization of a blackness that serves to fix his body as the site which reifies presuppositions. Like Rachel from *Gasoline Alley*, the full body suit is striking in the sense that is connotes a human figure but without the details and specifics of humanity. The difference is in that, unlike Rachel, the suit can be removed to reveal the atavistic and less cultured garb of a tribal leader; the hallmark of the uncivilized Other. It is

interesting to note that that when being a hero, the suit is worn, covering the sovereign

king, making him singular, simple, and easily definable as Other as his body's primacy,

in the immediate, is a presentation of everything the African American community

needed to visualize, yet it also must be noted that The Black Panther's visage, the image

body creates, becomes an assessment of blackness, a gaze into visuality's truncation in

action, working toward a hollowing, nothing to be seen except what is immediate. Hence

the look of the costume: his image exhibits and performs the subject of the paradigm.

In many ways the Black Panther is not a reflection of the times in that he is

sovereign and demands to be treated as so (he is allowed to do so because he has the

economic and material power so that other characters MUST treat him accordingly). But

he is different than many other Black characters—The Falcon, Luke Cage, Misty Knight,

Black Goliath, Domino, Amazing Man, and John Stewart (The Green Lantern)—in that

he is not streetwise, has no underground connections, and is not affiliated with the

dubious, the ill-repute, and does not strictly adhere his adventures to "the ghetto." Yet he

upholds many of the dominant's perspectives in that he never really addresses many

things happening within the African or African American community and forcing the

dominant to even acknowledge these disparities by dealing with problems of "particular

neighborhoods" in the most obvious and truncated ways. Hence his name change in 1972

from Black Panther to Black Leopard to distance himself from *that* political movement

(see Figure 1.4). It is interesting to note that in renaming himself he is declaring a

reimagining and as an amenity of the very thing that Rachel was and is; servants mean to

serve the system which maintains the status quo. What I mean is that the motivation to

Figure 1.4. Thomas, Roy (w) John Buscema (p). *Fantastic Four #119* "Three Stood Together!" Marvel Comics, 1972.

step away from the actual and real radical by a character that was designed and meant to sign for, and a be a hero of, the marginalized African American group is a demonstration of how the abductive process, the paradigm in which the visage of the costumed T'Challa is the hero, a sign of cultural uplift, yet acts to be a reductive and troped truncation, truly signs an atmosphere of assimilation to the dominant. The act to move toward signing as factual as his body assigns his value through idea. Hence, T'Challa reimagines himself, takes responsibility for it, and leaves the motivation behind it to the stroke of the pen that created the scene for *the* gaze. So not only is his name changed to fit the dominant's vision, perception really, but he *is* changed to fit and justify it. By explicating that he is sovereign and changed his name to suit himself, as he is uniquely a challenge to the gaze by declaring himself as himself but as a servant of the purview.

T'Challa is a king without an agenda; the point and purpose of his character is not to be a monarch but to present, democratically, an acceptable Black face but because of the colonial taint, his presence is nothing more than blackface. What I am getting at here is that Doctor Doom is also a monarch and routinely creates havoc in the world because he means to shape it a particular way, ala the very definition of colonialism (I contend that the reason why he is considered evil is he does so to other Euro-based countries). T'Challa, ala *The Jungle Action* (see Figure 1.5) series in which he fights systematic racism in the form of the Klu Klux Klan, never forces society to contend and deal with him and his sovereignty because he never genuinely threatens whiteness and thereby maintaining what is already knowable and comfortable , but "[i]nstead if taking on the world's problems and lording it over above others,… [he] tr[ies] to make the world better
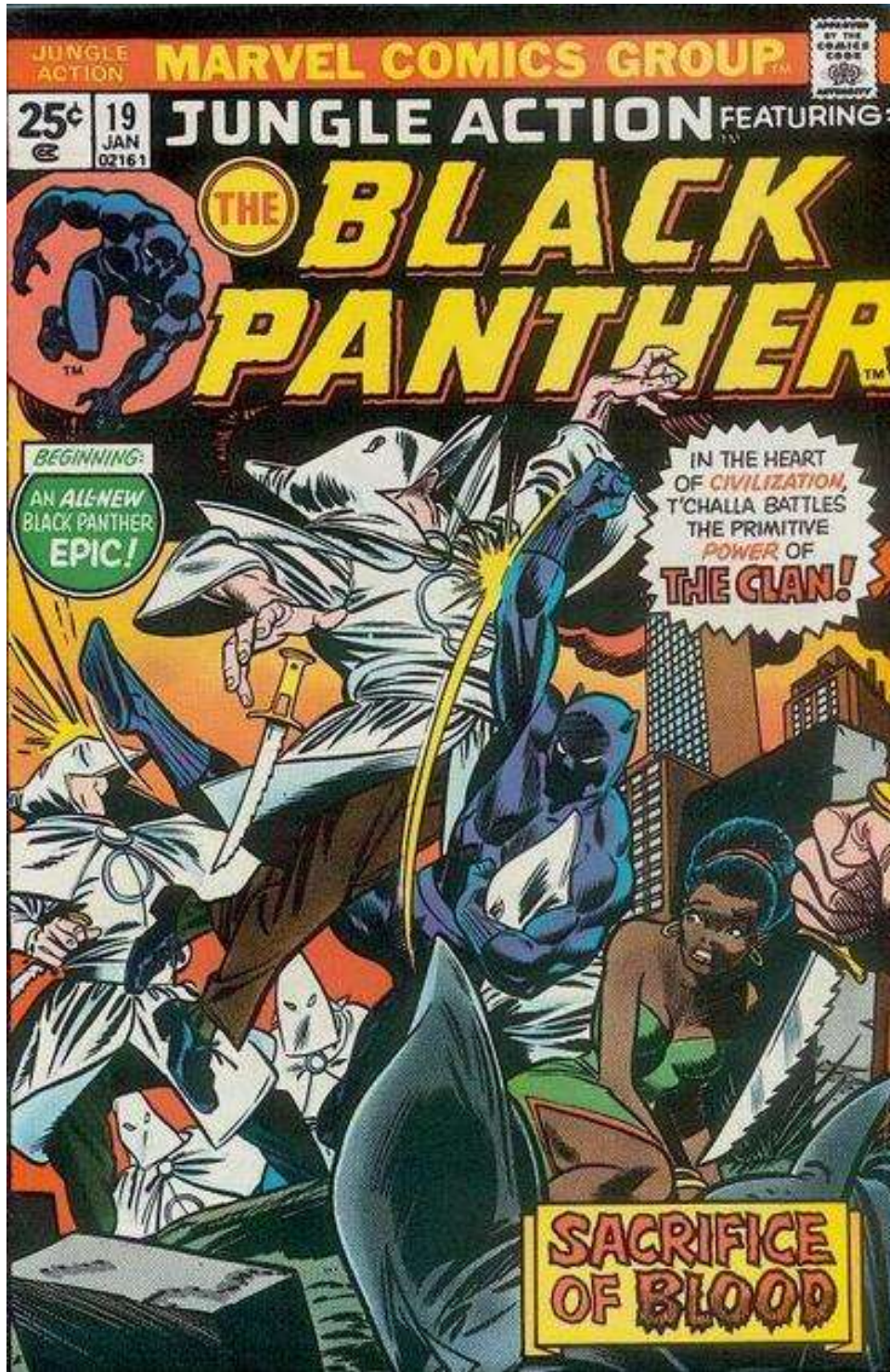
53

Figure 1.5. McGregor, Don (w) Billy Graham (p). *Jungle Action #19.* "Blood and Sacrifices." Marvel Comics, January 1976.

for people in more relatable and perhaps meaningful manners" (Duncan Smith 86). The symmetry between he and Rachel is evident as he performs the servant in that the motivation for the character is based in the service of an agenda that he never has a stake in but helps to bring to fruition. In other words, Doom changes the world to suit himself while T'Challa changes himself to suit the world. The fundamental difference between the two is one threatens the connection between perception, culture, history, and identity because he means to break the link between visuality and remediation, making it anew while the other, although he presents as the Other, that which is outside of the normal, through his otherness, means to solidify and sanction the quotidian by his very presence: i.e. this African king is in an American, urban jungle fighting the universally agreed upon morally corrupt, faceless KKK. Having been properly placed, the Black Panther's name is no longer associated with a radical group as Black radicalism is trumped, superseded really, by the specious imagery of burdened subjectivity as the weight of the paradox of his representation means "the underlin[ing]… double bind of…being…emancipated and subordinated, self possessed and indebted, equal and inferior, liberated and encumbered, sovereign and dominated" (Hartman 117). In that space, in that break, where justice meted out, only is it just as it is just-so: his actions and performance could only be considered fair and reasonable if and when the performance of his body embodies the same criterion of Rachel. This means to maintain, conflate, and propagate jurisdiction in the sense the extent of the official power to make and maintain a system of judgments concerning the feasibility of the performance of prudence, the possibilities of the determined, it is about establishing and defining the territory or sphere of activity over

which the authority of an institution extends. But the problem is that the presented

perception of the jurisdiction of blackness is known to encompass all, before and after,

here and there, and what was and its probable. This fixation on the markings of

jurisdiction sign adherence. But boundaries do end.

He returns to the moniker in 1973 only because he stars in his first series, ending

in 1976, *Jungle Action*. As the title of the book itself supersedes his name, he is allowed

to utilize his original designation as he is not marked as a paradigm disruptor. Harkening

back to jungle themes comics from the golden age[8]—*Voodah, Bomba the Jungle Boy,*

Nyoka the Jungle Girl, Rulah the Jungle Goddess, and *Tarzan the King of the Jungle*, all

of which featured scantily clad white people triumphing over the primitive environment,

plant, animal, and atavistic people for the sake of establishing the remediated superiority

of whiteness—the remediation here is meant to subjugate as the moniker Black Panther

once again becomes a servant to the dominant. In the series, the Panther becomes a

crusader for street level justice, dolling out punishment on the KKK for the people, yet

never affecting systematic change through correcting the causes of the cultural problems

within the marginalized communities, he could never aspire that high, but dealing with

the immediate, obvious, and faceless threat of the clear injustice that is imaged in the

hooded Klan (see figure 1.5). What's interesting is that T'Challa is allowed to resume the

use of his name only as it is underscored the title of the series: an African monarch only

in the sense that he embodies repeating what Rachel already repeated.

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[8] It is interesting to note that most jungle themed publications were based on the notion that a white character, usually blonde with blue eyes, conquers and subjugates the jungle to their will because of a link with whiteness as an apex: because of the fixity of whiteness they will always rise to the crown. The difference here is in how The Black Panther moves to the urban jungle, never to subjugate, but to be a racialized object to view.

Further, the moniker is allowed as it extends and reaffirms the inherent exoticism, one that demonstrates eunoia. Usually used as a rhetorical move that ingratiates the audience with good feeling about the speaker and the subject, it is also an emblematic move meant to help the act of convincing. In this instance, it is utilized as a means of articulating the local "color" in order to capture some uniqueness of the black community. It is this exoticism that allows the redeployment of the Black Panther moniker as the cover connotes not merely what is true and knowable about African American life in America, but by highlighting the particulars of the ghetto by reaffirming how it behaves, linking it with the scary and out of the ordinary jungle. It is in this sense that eunoia also fosters goodwill between the reader and the material through the remediated affirmation of what is possible, even in the heroic sense, of blackness. In essence, the series, the comic, and even the move to allow the reuse of his name is meant "to construct a 'common sense' image of black men," one inescapable from the naturalized way of audiences to interpret (Baxter 61). So the reader is allowed to read the bodied cover of T'Challa as The Black Panther, as black simply because the established episteme, the understanding that the accepted mode of interpretation that guarantees coherence with the remediated underlying assumptions, has met the criterion for acceptable arrangement, literally and figuratively giving shape to what is worth knowing about T'Challa, The Black Panther, and by extension, blackness. The naturalness here of his presentation is tantamount through the reinsertion of the establishment of mores; essentially, as the cover clearly illustrates, he is Rachel reimagined.

THE CURIOUS BLACK, DANCING BEAR

The conscious construction of image in comics is its greatest strength and the only

lens through which to examine the animus of its apparatus of determination, as the

"proper" gaze, that which gives credence and weight to an imaged meaning through

abduction, is the means of using found and repeated patterns of particular details that

make the image mean by reinforcing visuality of the performance of blackness that

"enacts the disappearance of any differentiated identity" (Moten 162). In that sense, the

image is controlled through its fulfillment with the expectation of the gaze that fixes, that

which is taken up as rational precisely because it is social because what is being gazed

upon performs, dances, in an expected way. This capitulation with expectation is truly the

power of control, that which is not merely meaning to see but to manage and organize

what is to be seen; control relies on the congruence of denotation *as* its connotation, the

visual impact of the public performance of perspective, what Ian Haywood and John

Halliwell describe as intentionally tendentious, the conspicuous construction of the

spectacular for a particular gaze, a particular consumption. It is in this sense of how a Hip

Hop artist's gesticulations and the braggadocio articulations of the lyrics, everything that

artist does in the midst of performing Hip Hop, all point toward the default Black

masculinity and hyper violence, things deemed necessary in understanding of the music

as they sign its authenticity. Notice that these particulars, these signs, do not point to the

music itself or how whether or not the music could or could not be artistic or meaningful,

but they do assign what it *is* and what it is capable *of* through entelechy, that which

58

enriches and vitalizes it: power and control stem from the availability and access the imaged space has structured the performance expresses the gesticulations as a part the represents the scale of the whole. In that sense, like comics, these signs of Hip Hop are ubiquitous, understood to be certain and unquestioned in its everywhereness, that the sole aim of the performance is in its capitulation of what is as it represents as authentic.

In framing what is to be discerned, the comic milieu constructs what is usable, useful, and polished in the creation of meaning for the image by a truncation, a flattening out the image into what is useful and valued: this means that the move to examine its production, to articulate the muddied, the lost, the blank, and the rhetorically invisible is the demand of the image and means to move against the properly situated as its "specific character would inevitably have been traduced if [it] were not properly placed" (Fried 203). But upon examination of the processes of this determination, and this demands candor, we can see the effect of the singleness and single-mindedness of bourgeois-visuality to make the trope of the depicted Black body into a dancing bear—the entertaining flavor of spectacle in the sense of Amié Césaire's a wailing man is not a dancing bear—, that the performance of Blackness cannot only be codified by the authenticity of a benign culpability of the gaze of whiteness in a sterility: the spectator too gets blood on them from the whip that makes the bear dance: not only is the depicted Black body is a place holder for performivity and it only means in relation to the what the gazer sees and *sees* pertinent of the performance, but in the willful ignorance of how the dance points toward the certainty that the audience is not only not getting bloodied, but that anything but the performance is immaterial (David Lloyd). The dancing bear

59

metaphor speaks to the move to make the abstract actual while ignoring the phenomenological: the created image is the purposeful assemblage of elements, the parts of expressive imitation, which form and mimic the conclusions the audience already holds that make real the immaterial while disregarding the performance in physicality: blackness is determined by the conflation of its scale and measured as symmetry, the relationship between the whole of its expectation and the part the image plays in making it. This creates an embodied physicality through which the immaterial nature of being reissues remediation of more dancing for that bear. Further, this means to wed the "immateriality, this spiritual and bodily duality that tie[s] the recent use of visuality… back to its origins" for the express purpose of making the black body look (seem) authentically Black, only as it dances, as it capitulates towards the white purview and white notions of peace, closure, and harmony, but singularly as it allows for a limited scope and view as authorized and authentic (Sand 93). This is especially important in comics that deliberately tackle or utilize race as the images depicted, the objects of the comic, are illustrative of the quest to capture the compelling as a means to truncate and reify the remedial understanding of ethnicity in terms the visuality will allow, not in the sense of uplift of the spectacle of misery on a proscenium—that is to say to ignore the screaming bear for the sake of highlighting his dancing—but in the very real sense of the social want or need to have this authenticity presented for closure to occur.

For instance, "Superman's Girlfriend Lois Lane #106" is an oddball standout in an otherwise largely forgettable comic series. This November 1970 comic is meant to tackle the "problem" of race relations in Metropolis' "Little Africa," the intrepid Lane

60

runs into a roadblock of culture and derision by the inhabitants of the ghetto, they have

derailed her potential Pulitzer with their lack of cooperation as she cannot fathom why

none of the inhabitants would not deign to be interviewed by *her* for *her* story; a missive

meant to reach the masses about the plight of the ghetto but affect no real change within

the community except to garner *her* further celebrity. This is significant in that her usual

tactics of bullying the recipients into giving the information *she* wants for *her* story, are

the very reasons why she is unfilled. Yet she does not see this because she understands

them as a means to an end, a problem to be worked and solved. Instead of self reflection

or examining the motives of "Little Africa" and how she is colonizing the neighborhood

for the last resource it has in mining it for resources that would suit her, Lane decides that

to get her story she must become an inhabitant, go "native"; undergoing a transformation

in Superman's plastimold machine, for twenty-four hours she now carries the visage of

an African American woman. The narrative idea here is that now that Lane holds

appearance of a Black woman, she is somehow privy to all of the universality of what

that entails, ultimately making her a better person as she has firsthand experience of the

Other. Note Figure 1.6 in which her favorite cabbie, Benny the Beret, who is somehow

always on call for Lane, benignly neglects her. After being treated as conspicuously

invisible, what Alva Noë terms the distorting influences of concepts, such as Blackness,

are ways of "represent[ing] the world as being," as she is not the "constituent of [the

Figure 1.6. Kanigher, Robert (w), Werner Roth (p), Wince Collins (i). *Superman's Girlfriend, Lois Lane vol 1* #106 "I am Curious (Black)!" New York: Marvel Comics, November 1970.

dominant's] representation," she gets a fixed and universal lesson in Blackness as being

ignored by a taxi is unanimously and ubiquitously only understood as *the* behavior that

makes black Black (35). What this means is that understanding of what it means to be

Black stems from her truncated grasp of the conceptual, "that perceptual experience is a

skillful grappling with what there is," as to create a totality of being, as if her timed

involvement with Blackness a simple symmetry, one that creates a certainty through the

conviction of the circumstances. In other words, the reason she is moved and

understands is that it directly involved and implicates her: because she is impeded *from*

being Lois Lane, the intrepid reporter from the Daily Planet, because no longer has

agency or access, because her visage no serves the hegemony instead of being served, she

is Black. Where this falls short is that she is not akin to Rachel in that the subtext of the

narrative, she, the audience, and Superman all know that the clock is counting down to

her eventual return personhood, normalcy: her eventual removal from subjugation in

subjecthood never means she was truly a servant, never truly dancing, and never truly

meant to learn anything real, true, or lasting. The closure represented here, that which is

disclosed in order to make Lane a better person once she returns to normal, keeps

separate her and the Other to avoid contradiction of the problem of race: the narrative

solves the problem of race by illustrating a redundancy of the problem, by creating an

agreement in what is expected.

  The problems of dealing with the presentation and depiction of the "racial

problem" in visuality are that first and foremost race is treated as if it were to be "solved"

by the purview that normalizes the dancing in the first place. That race can only be

understood when someone, what turns out to be an already established person from outside of the problem's jurisdiction, outside of the problem's paradigm, is injected into the context in which they become subject too, and only learns the valued lesson when they must dance. In this sense, what is normally entertaining is given a cursory "deeper" look in that the point of the narrative is to generate sympathy for the bear, not to placate or stop the system that normalizes the dancing, but to utilize the dancing to not merely entertain but to give meaning to the gazer, the one injected into the dance. It is this understanding, this placing of the normalized subject into the center of the problem, that ultimately solves and resolves it because the subjugation of the normal into the abnormal context of dancing causes a shift in perspective, temporarily broadening the normal. Notice that this is not about equitable sociological or cultural uplift of the downtrodden— the making of the beast into a person—but creating an isolated space through which, by utilizing the trauma of the dancing bear as a vehicle for the gaze to solve the problem while maintaining the hierarchical structure, the gazer develops a cohesion with an identity that resolves any racial tension as "[n]aturalization is a frame that allows [the] white [gaze] to explain away racial phenomena" through the minimizing of disparity by the actual redrawing and redressing the "problem" as solvable, but only in particular, truncated terms (Silva 28).

But because the dominant has the power to create homogeny through social, political, and cultural solutions to the societal "problems," it relies on the its own perspectival paradigm to straw man them properly. In other words, by clearly demarcating the outline, the frame, of blackness within the authenticated socialization—

comics do this by the outlining of the frame and the character—, the comic depiction is

the performance of sociality as it means to erase all evidence of ambiguity, replicating the

obvious and wanted while eliminating the extraneous and preserving the sanctioned rule.

Essentially by only focusing the bear's dance, not the whip, the blood, the smell, and the

screams—all the things that are associated with the performance—what has already been

decided as performative, as essential for meaning to occur, is easily understood,

knowable, solvable, yet stunted as the image is understood visually, which is to say as

simply and universally that Black does not and could not mean Haitian, Jamaican, Cuban,

Dominican, Atlanta GA, or Lansing MI but only that which is in the service *of* the

performance already known and expected. The problem comes when the truncated

solutions means to actually solve the problem of race and culture as its failure to account

for variables it has already deemed ambient must now be reckoned with. So the real

work, the work that has any social value in the social politic—that which concerns the

affairs of the public well-being—, is in how the effort to bring to light, to help solve the

problem of race, only exerts to maintain and solidify the system it is meant to change. So

the bear continues to not merely dance, but its gyrations reaffirm the "jig" as normal.

Typically, when these truncated depictions in comics do tackle race, it is

important to keep in mind that the system itself is initially setup so "objects [are] both

insistently present and paradoxically lost" in that upholding the promise of visuality, the

choice of point of view eliminates the extraneous, codifies the experiential, and speaks

into fact what is seen as true, honest, and real (Sand 93). When a comic form is utilized

by the dominant to tackle contentious issues of race, gender politics, misogyny,

Queerness, Blackness, etc., it works to preserve the truncation, so the pervasive ills are easily solved as the many variables that make up the "problem" were and are already deemed ambient. Not just narratively, but through the reductiveness of the comic form— how something is resolved through its depiction of the visual and its adherence with visuality, the resolution of its image is bound to how it is seen—a demonstration of cultural eagerness through which the dominant perspective remediates social and cultural "problems." These solutions usually entail the already preset of the dominant's notion of resolution: the Black acceptance of White help as *the* solution to the problem(s) of race, civility, society, and dominance (Lois Lane 106), the Stars and Bars Confederate flag is a symbol of the proud and traditional old south and not a symbol of slavery (Mark Waid's "Strange Fruit" 1), that a white man in a jungle is the obvious and unquestioned apex of natives and nature (Tarzan), or that humor derived from race is okay as long as it gets a laugh (Whitewash Jones "Young Allies"). The notion is that in instances when the dominant attempts to utilize a system of visuality that has been expressly constructed and maintained as a tool to remediate ideologies of whiteness, only the most obvious, simplest, and oblivious solutions can be accepted because it speaks into fact the truth already known. The reason for this is the trajectory of visuality aims toward remediation and reduces the complexity of the "problems" to the most obvious images as the semantic moves mean to construct an image that visually pirouettes to avoid examination and interaction making the gesture to appear so. This degradation of semiotics is tantamount to informing viewers that the resolution means the capitulation of the problem by resolving visual states of being so that, in the end, a reader sees not simply a resolution

Figure 1.7. Kanigher, Robert (w), Werner Roth (p), Wince Collins (i). *Superman's Girlfriend, Lois Lane vol 1* #106 "I am Curious (Black)!" New York: Marvel Comics, November 1970.

toward remediation, but, in creating what is important to the viewer, indeed what is visible, as the depicted physicality evokes sensorium, the attempt gives insight into the zeitgeist of race, gender politics, Queer dynamics, and Blackness as it simultaneously moves to make meaning through confirmation and symmetry: nothing is ever truly addressed precisely because nothing is ever truly offered except the bear is dancing still. In the end, sameness is protected and the perspective is saved as having the impetus, the animus, to gesture toward a preferred resolution is its remediation: the bear continues to dance and the audience is satisfied as the expectations never varied from its performance. In this sense, a discussion, an examination of Queerness, Blackness, race, politics, etc. in relation to the dominant's purview, is an opportunity to "grasp the deep significance of the possibilities of the crisis" yet that nuance of the conversation is largely lost because what is intentionally visible is taken up solely as what it means (Cooper 144). Hence, the only thing real taken up about Aunt Hestor's beating is the evidence of the pain, not her voice or anything that would perform her humanity—which would offer an examination into the humane—, but the emotion her cries give to the reader, evoking a pitying sympathy and the spectacle of the spatter of blood of the poor, beaten, and entertaining creature suffers. But the move to remediate not only allows for the visual shaping of this apparatus, creating the means for the interpretative loop to close on the semiotic determination of the visual, it also allows for an examination of the system that makes and maintains the gaze.

The aim of Lois Lane #106 is to present a reclamation and remaking of the intention of the zeitgeist, whiteness as normalcy, through a projection that capitulates,

reedifying the visual of expectation by making the depiction dance in its tradition. This

dance is done through dynamic visuality, the making of an image that serves as the

material that makes up the visual paradigm, of seeing as knowing, that which identifies

and can capitulate for the established system's conditions of possibility; that which

creates the architecture, the structure, of the contrivance of the shape of Blackness, of that

which means. For instance, just three years after the landmark Supreme Court Loving

Case decision, which allowed mix-raced couples to enter the sacred and holy union of

marriage legally, Lois and Superman engage in a conversation about miscegenation. The

contentious problem for the traditional stance of marriage (see Figure 1.7). When Lois

broaches the subject, notice how Superman's answer, seen in the first panel, creates a

false equivalency through an appeal of his authority of race as if she, questioning him on

being the ultimate and "universal outsider," means he understands the depth, the nuance,

and its many variations which reframes the argument away from stickiness of

miscegenation by pointing to the bigger and more important problem of having his

enemies get to him by placing her in danger. But before Lois can retort, before the

complexion of the conversation on miscegenation has been routed, before it has had a

chance to broach into any semblance of depth, Lois' presented visage changes, and in

doing so, somehow making the point of the exchange moot; it is as if because Lois does

not appear to be Black, the conversation no longer needs to be held. This contrivance of

her skin "normalizing," of it shedding, seeks to resolve the issue before the discussion

articulates it: the mere introduction of the subject is enough to solve the problem because

it "actively" engages with it. The signal of simply turning white, not merely in skin but

also in attitude and perspective of what constitutes resolution, is a sociological deus ex machina in the sense that the default, universal, and peaceful solution to the problem of race and miscegenation is that Superman never truly answers the question of marriage and Lois never learns to look beyond the potential Pulitzer that Blackness can give her simply because what was contentious and inflammatory has been normalized as the default of whiteness has been reinserted. Instead, the audience is privy to Superman's proclamation in the last panel: the "he" tips off the critical imposition in that the unnamed and voiceless Black man that stepped in front of the bullet for Lois and was attempting to uplift the youth of his neighborhood is signed by Superman, the universal outsider, to a subject position that subjects and subjugates him; "he" is the reason that the racial problem exists and persists as it is "his" hate and ignorance that propagates the problem.

The visual power of comics is also its greatest folly in that a picture is created to be seen. What this means is that the making of the form to be discerned is the fundamental auspice of visuality, it is to arrive at seeing only after reflection from the information given. Yet the Black form in the visual sense truly means to saw, using, creating, or making a conclusion by utilizing a form to control the tool of the gaze to cut away the unnecessary, altering through diagram, a step-by-step instruction which will take the gazer from beginning to end and from the past to contemporary. In a visual sense, what this means is that the denotation on the page and its pronunciation, the semiotic process and the imaged desire, are truly a translation of what has already been understood into that which has been decided as already heterogeneous. It is these creations that allow us to "explore" and "learn" our world, the "domain of the thinkable"

and familiar: that which is authentic and accurate ultimately means what is already

visible. Visuality then means that the comics medium makes and propagates

representations, substitutes, and extends perceptions in seeing, in which the entire system

is based upon intentionality: that the blackness that is produced by the visuality of comics

is empty and inaccessible as the audience is not allowed to witness anything because all

that has been presented is already known and subsumed (Noë 110). In this sense,

visuality means that lack of examination of the complex interplay between racial fears

and anxieties and political-visual cultures are suspicious of state of terror that create

servants and dancing bears for a consensus of the presumed states of being and the

enunciation, proclamation really, of that which not only remediates, but qualifies an

intimate connivance. In this sense, visuality becomes a media technology that "involve[s]

the magisterial talents of a recognized master … [which] settles the question by

demonstrating that all visually rendered ideas inevitably ally themselves with" the very

thing that powers it (Biome xiii). The folly of comics visuality is in sense of prosaic

praxis, that which indexes, categorizes really, that shape boundaries of culture,

perception, and the pervasiveness of perspective. These processes mean to maintain the

image of Blackness as *the* image as it is the only that seems to have value and are

repeatedly used *because* it appropriates what has already been established to further

propagate the cultural product. What this means is that visuality means to mimic the

categorical imperative; that which posits the image of Black squarely into the already

idealized norm of Blackness as an image. Visuality, then, means to historically figure, to

"represent negation within this structuring system," as states of subjection, marking

availability, what is within reach (Fleetwood 110). Ultimately, what this means is that the visuality of race in comics truly and honestly depicts eroticism, a fetishization of cultural norms, a desire to *see* schema laid disclosed the way it is desired. Further, this means that visuality means to be locked in the past while a tremendous purchase on the present costs those affected culturally as the processes to render it also feed it (Holland 2). In other words, the etymology of Rachel makes The Black Panther a servant for Lois Lane's gaze which show why Rachel is still wanted culturally.

Chapter 2

Ambient Rhetoric as the Authorization of Believability: How Does it Be or "Look, a

Negro!"

The fifth chapter of Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks*, "Lived Experience

of the Black Man," attempts to confront the white gaze as it designates the black body's

schema by outlining the psychological impacts of the problems concerning the inherent

dissonance to Fanon's bodied lack of ontological resistance. Later picked up by Stuart

Hall as the social problem of epidermalization, how the inscription of race is determined

by social definition and establishment of the fact of blackness by its designation through

its performance of fetishism, animalism, monstrosity, physicality, and backwardness,

Fanon challenges the practice and process of the white gaze's power to circumvent

knowledge acquired through the lived experience of *being* black as defined against the

already held comprehension of a *person*. The gaze ignores states of being, through the

single declaration of the surface: "Look! a Negro!" This statement, which has "woven me

out of a thousand details, anecdotes, and stories," means to make all black bodies into

objects, fragments of inscribed elements and forcing one to experience being for or by

another's gaze through, to paraphrase Paul Churchland's *Plato's Camera: How the

Physical Brain Captures a Landscape of Abstract Universals*, the processes or

mechanisms that create a singular imaged knowledge from the myriad of sensory information (Fanon 91). In other words, in the Burkean sense, the child's statement made an Identification, and Fanon became "the [universal] picture [of] the impression of great simplicity, because one could quickly perceive the generating principle of its design" (Burke 1299). What the child's statement makes, and ultimately maintains, is Fanon as property by linking his body with the consubstantiality of blackness and the ambiguous connotations attached, eliminating the dichotomy of double consciousness by naming the physical by highlighting its obvious visibility, "surround[ing] that which withdraws from meaning and relationality," making an equivalency the standard of the connotation and the denotation of the presented body (Rickert *x*). But it is precisely Fanon's critical examination that highlights the generating principle's work is what gives rise to the African American notion of a rhetoric, which emphasizes community, reaffirmation, and possibility[9].

For the scope of this chapter, it is important to note that the derived image's meaning is the index of the depicted space as it acts, reacts, and interacts with the reader to perform its notion of blackness to complete the categorical imperative that is then taken up as truth. This then is about how other rhetorics can shape information, impacting what is to be taking up from the image given, highlighting the problem with the preferred hermeneutic that makes accessible the favored persuasion as rhetoric means "to theorize the simultaneous existence of pattern and contingency" in the context of depth of gaze,

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[9] Each of these is discussed, at length, in the introduction of *Understanding African American Rhetoric* to emphasize the connection with aspects of African, replacements for the pejorative structural system of objectifying. Here, though, they are meant as a deconstruction of habits of survival that benefit and obstruct agency, identity, and the authority to create an broadly socially accepted notion of either.

audience, and politic for the sake of constructing meaning (Winsor 200). By examining

sensory persuasion in order to make a *sounding* of the field of rhetoric, this chapter

means to explore abjection in the work of John Edgar Wideman's *Sent for You Yesterday*,

the difference between lineage and linearity Roland Laird's *Still I Rise: A Graphic*

History of African Americans, and the utilization of nommo as sounding in the Davis

Brothers' *Blokhedz.* Through a wider vantage point of Thomas Rickert's ambient

rhetoric, this is an exploration of how the trope means to create a real world analogue of

blackness from the abstracted stagedness of cartooning through the differing elements of

persuasion present in the sense that exceeding of meaning boasts that "the partiality and

emergence of rhetoric is a modality of our dwelling in the world" (Rickert 209). In that

sense, the framing of the black form assimilates prescriptive notions of blackness in

which the knowledge created is accessible within the giving structure as the form itself

has been informed by what has already been persuaded. I am interested in how a

persuasive discourse of blackness is built out of a visual shorthand that relies on

iconography, creating a space in which understanding occurs: I wish to "see" the

machinations of the unarticulated invisibility within the frame to breakdown of mediation

of the trope. My contention is that through a dissolution of the perceived dichotomy,

blackness then becomes articulated as DuBois' veil, or in the comics sense, the gutter,

something that always already exceeds the framing definitions placed around it. Ambient

rhetoric argues that classically based notions of rhetoric contain a useful means of

persuasion but are myopic as they are unable to adequately account for socio-functional

elements. In the ambient sense, the available means of persuasion have increased as an

image interacts and relates to the environment's other means of persuasion: sound, noise, silence, smell, movement, spatial scale, time, rhetoricity, philosophical machinations, light, interpretation, history, and working connotations of humanity. It emphasizes medium and context while "acknowledg[ing] how its practice emerged from profoundly stratified and exclusionary societies" (Richards 157). This is important here to acknowledge that the insertion of inquiry into the prevailing discourse means to challenge the use and practicality of the imaged black body as embodiment. Through this confrontation, the machinations of the processes that maintain the system of persuasion are not merely being acknowledged as it propagates modernity for the sake of tradition, but also are highlighting the negating acts of predilections for the sake of a sanctioned purview. Ambient Rhetoric seeks to dispute this partiality to light the "various mutually conditioning elements that bring" the thing "into being and fit it into the everyday world" by challenging narratives of images of cultural loss and its political debasement (Rickert x). Ambient rhetoric then opens a terrain to explore how the interpretation of the "Look, a Negro!" emerges Fanon into socially useful state of being, the rhetorical pathways toward closure, how that closure fits into the everyday; a move toward sociogeny[10] that concludes Fanon's state of being "merges with [his] surroundings, becoming one immersive element in the overall ambience" (Rickert, "In the House of Doing: Rhetoric and the Kairos of Ambience" 906). More broadly, ambient rhetoric is understood not just as "ontological, [of] having to do with being and not just knowing," but also freeze into a mold that carefully manages all available resources in terms of consumption and

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[10] From *Black Skin, White Masks*, the term is deployed specifically to rupture the boundary of the knowledge system by calling into question the nature of being as strictly a function of the biological.

production for society as it troubles the conclusive notion that the event, the happening, the spatiality does not, cannot, *become* the thing it represents as that would be a synonymous collapse instead of commonality created in a particular space (Rickert, xv).

I use the comics medium not only because the African American expressive mode is imagistic in its presentation and scope, but that the term seeing emphasizes the plausibility of metaphor. To elaborate, "[s]eeing has a long history as a synonym for understanding and knowing," it is a form of persuasion that actualizes through that which makes listeners and readers "see" as it utilizes Chora, space, Kairos, time, Periechon, and the surroundings (Mitchell xiii). The idea here is that the veil of this paradoxical discourse clouds perception, yet has a logic that references and makes corporeality through closure. I use the comics medium in thinking that with the emphasis on the visual, because it relies on the gaze, it will allow an easier route to discuss this paradoxical obscuring, as the landscape is now a material instead of something abstracted from the lexical, then converted into something visual. In essence, to bastardize an old adage, these texts state that a thousand words are not only worth a picture, they are also equivalent to and make it. The implications of this chapter means to confront the rhetorical processes that constitute, reveal, and conceal episteme that is generated by the image for the sake of audience consumption. The idea is that the episteme renders the quotidian interaction of culture and exhibited audience contribution: that the image is made and deliberately displayed in a particular light to make a particular episteme.

This is significant in that the child's statement, what is made, sustained, reified, and revivified is not an imposition, a forcing of a particular perception upon the black

body, but "a definitive structuring of my self and the world—definitive because it creates [what is perceived as] a genuine dialectic between my body and the world" through the action of the declaration (Fanon 91). Notice too that the child's statement says little or nothing about the context of Fanon himself, just a declaration of his ontology, the categorical move to his objectness, how he is to be defined. This lack of material ontological resistance to the colonizing gaze is so thorough, so profound, that it circumvents the subjective identifying agency—that is, to precede it—as it has the power to reinforce the hierarchy of double consciousness that is "in contradiction with the civilization that imposed [his] own" authority: Fanon is literally and figuratively woven into the social and political fabrics, a fecundity that creates and maintains him and his Blackness as fixed (Fanon 90). These processes mean to designate the body's appearance, which is to say the performance of public perception of object labeling. In order to designate, to determine, define, and fix is to deliberately construct a categorical perception to appear a particular way. This way, a comic book character, a space ship, a woman, or blackness are in the midst of what Jorge Santayana calls the lyric cry in the midst of consciousness' business; the call from the appearance (phenomenon) to its real analogue (noumenon) for the sake of capitulation toward the ontological. Fanon's criticism means to examine those boundaries of the tradition that maintains and benefits from the imperative for the sake of the insertion of his own agency, that "the only definitions of consequence are those that have been empowered through persuasion or coercion" (Schiappa 100).

In other words, the child's declaration of Fanon is about a state of being as the black body is denied the designation of personhood and the psychological backlash, the toll, it causes when the effort is sustained. Yet rhetorically, it is about the processes and productions of living up or living down the dominant's social labelings of black; the acceptance of black and human is at best a contradiction, but more importantly the performance of black skin is the representation of ontological predetermination through, in the Heideggerian sense, the word of common concern's which demonstrates a lack of rhetoric. In other words, it is about the means to circumvent the rhetorical process and define for the sake of simplicity: a move to establish, in the social purview, the Western philosophical mode as the pejorative and normative, of privileging a hierarchy of mind over body of an object having already been read and coerced through the declaration of its ontological state. What I mean is, and please excuse the syllogism, that the boy's act to declare a Negro is *the* determinative as *the* entirety of blackness is encapsulated attached to statement through the surface, the skin, the senses, and physicality—things removed from what makes a human, such as thought and reason—that anything associated with concept, image, or connotation of black cannot, by its performance, be human. In that sense rhetoric is not merely "the Fools function of unmasking all power as self-rationalization, all knowledge as mere fumbling with metaphor," but what philosopher Norwood Russell Hanson called a theory-laden undertaking in that ontological designations are not absolute or fixed, but relative to the framework of the undertaking (Eagleton 108).

Fanon's argument illustrates how material ontology is being utilized as a specification of the conceptualization concerning the depiction of blackness, but further how it is employed to maintain certain systems of knowledge and understanding for psychological well-being. In other words, the image of presented blackness is utilized to propagate and maintain systems of knowledge and being through simplifications of social canonical representations. And it is through these propagations that accomplish precise articulations of presence and functions of all entities, exhausting of all spheres of being. To paraphrase T.R. Gruber[11], in this sense ontology is a description of the concepts and relationships that can exist for an agent or a community of agents, which is to say "[a] thousand-year-old-logocentric tradition has trained us to conceive a relationship of the suzerainty of the verb to the image" reinforcing the borders of a category already held, establishing certain knowledges as certainty while discounting those that are paradoxical and contradictory: it highlights simplification in favor of the easier designation of *is* while negating other elements, the how[12] (Thévoz 72). In other words, it is to emphasize the focus while negating the ambient.

An ambient focus allows for a locus outside of the already established paradigm as it moves away from the positional binary that sets a dichotomy: it does not ask whether Schrödinger's cat alive or dead, but how all rhetorical points, in and out of the box, are persuading the paradigm's determination. For example, in the "Politics of Fear"

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[11] See *International Journal of Human Computer Studies*, 43:4-5, November 1995. 907-928.

[12] For information, please see Lord Alfred Korzybski's *Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics*. New York: International Non-Aristotelian Library Publishing Company, 1933. Print. In the vein of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, Korzybrski's *Science and Sanity* tackles science's over reliance on the determinative power of *is*, as an act of precision, as language, the system that utilized to enact that precision, is at best vague.

example from the Introduction, as well as the discourse that surrounds it, it becomes clear

that each argument is attempting to move and control the images' rhetoricity by

highlighting different rhetorical actants within the image. Further, the broader ambient

perspective on the images' rhetoricity illustrates that its persuasiveness is *more* than

dichotomous as the move to persuade attempts to maneuver the images' meaning through

its perceived actants: blackness is as it does through the depicted elements. I contend that

we will accept this blackness so as long as "it corresponds to our [experience and]

observation of people, gestures, faces, institutions" as our reception of works through a

passive and unconscious physiognomy (Berger 14). What I am getting at is that, in the

ambient sense, the determination of the image cannot be made with what resides strictly

within the image as the visual topoi of race, history, chora, historization, kairos, episteme,

the discourse that surrounds it, telos, materiality, perspective, corporeality, perception,

and embodiment politics are also determining factors. But, and this is the whole point,

these are *not* merely elements that can be articulated within the perceived ecology of the

image: all the actants within image are affected and effected by the other elements within

the image to make a greater whole than the sum of the parts presented.

Smith takes up this argument, and highlights the emblematic nature of the

system's maintenance in that "[t]he ontologist studies the world by drawing conclusions

from the theories of the natural sciences" (158). I say that this is emblematic of the

system because the observation fails to account for Fanon's illustration of the *work* the

statement "Look, a Negro!" is doing to conclude a clear and concise designation; there is

a conflation of the supposed move to persuade and its teleology. It is more succinct to say

its teleology stems from the need for simplification, that the material ontologist *concludes* the world by the reinforcing and establishing processes of epistemology that control and maintain for the sake of achieving the Platonic ideal in the material. Material ontology means to agree to commit to the use of a particular vocabulary that demonstrates, performs, a consistency with respect to knowledges already held: since blackness, according to Stuart Hall, is a floating signifier—it always is what it is in *any* given context—, it exists because it can be and is represented as through the describable relationships that relate it. What this means is that being designated as black or African American is definitionally exhaustive and exhaustively definite but it is *always* in the process of being maintained as such. Further, through this process of simplification, Blackness is the object of the subject that has designated it as such, which allows the practitioner of ontology to mine specific knowledge(s) from the object's vague representative presentation. The Black body's meaning is *always* predicated by the perception of the visuality that precedes it: there is an even further rhetorical removal when the visualized Blackness is visually created in comics. The visual medium of comics is emblematic of the process of vague specificity[13] in that the represented image not only circumvents the rhetorical process, a step of removal from designating the image's meaning is determined in the construction, is done so through a process that is deliberately creating imagery to read a particular way.

Ambient rhetoric allows for a questioning of the residing representationality within the paradigm of comics, allowing for an inquiry in the anxieties surround and

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[13] Outlined and defined in the following chapter.

inform the black form and blackness. As the restructuring avenues of representation and

communication of human experience alter, this inquiry will allow a tracing of the

differing moves of determination within and without an image as a means to illustrate

how the persuasion is a reaction to the deeply felt shifts in homogeneity and centrality.

This means that the Obamas', even caricatured on *The New Yorker* cover, function as and

through a reductive, representational politics in which the image serves as a nexus by

pulling pertinent information for the sake of its argument. Further, that this valence of

the human, which means to make and control blackness, Otherness, materiality, race, and

corporeality, sign the ubiquitous need of a system. Ambient Rhetoric allows inquiries

such as what work does this politically charged image do for the discourse? If a comic's

image is simply pigment and markings upon a page that are arranged in a particular

manner, what are the interpretative processes that sign blackness to a figure to do a

specific political work? In addition, how does the deeper business of the underlying

conversation about race begin when the moment of articulation promotes a particular

politic and loses the very elements needed for conversation to begin? I ask these because

once there is a realization that the discourse is trapped in hermeneutic circle, it becomes

clear that the argument really is about whom and what gets to qualify, quantify the

image—the representation of blackness. Only when the inherent smallness of the current

system is seen as an inefficient and minimalist placeholder, only when it is shown as

functional need to misunderstand race, the body, and blackness for the sake of system and

the benefit of some, will the discourse move beyond its circular paradigm. The point is

that in the larger environment, these attempts as fixation are only successful in

articulating how blackness is formed *in*, not simply *as* or through a form, which is to say

that Blackness exists and is between the prescriptive recognition and the exceeding

impossibility.

The dissertation's methodology will fuse comics theory, visualization theory,

ambient rhetoric, and somaesthetics in order to discuss the ways and means of how the

black form is filled to render certain visual aesthetics. On the surface the idea is that the

process of filling creates an image that upholds the current system through renditions of

blackness as phantasmic, in which the only reading available is from the surface, in order

to build a singular discoursed ideology as real, but it is also about the larger environment

that exceeds the current hermeneutic paradigm. A broader look reveals that these images

are the representational break or divide of the approximation of a non-referential body:

that each instance of the filled form's iteration shows how its rhetorical use has codified

and magnified a reliance on the trope of the black body to sign blackness as a danger or

the destination while negating the environment, the form, for the sake of upholding or

negating ideology. Whether the rhetorical aim is to contain through the frame of the form

or to replace the intentionality with another, my project asks what is socially gained

through a particular rhetorical instance? When a determination seeks a connection to

something human, while its opposition seeks it to uphold ideology, how does the

discourse of race move forward when it perpetually repeats? And can looking through

the broader ambient lens help the conversation? I ask these questions, not seeking in an

answer, but in the hopes that the implication of the asking would broaden the landscape,

potentially leading to a discourse that does address power dynamics such as ideology or

identity, but in how the performing body/flesh best serves the community that lives in and with the consequences in order to get to that Duboisian veil, and reach formlessness. Through this form of inquiry, it is my hope that we get to the deeper business of the recognizing the trope's entanglement with the attempt to separate it from the ideology through abstraction and the materiality that signifies but cannot sign the lived reality that it means to represent in order to create an intimacy.

Kyle Baker takes up the ontological argument through a single panel comic. On July 2, 2007, Baker published a single-panel comic "Happy Independence Day!" on his website (see Figure 2.1). Formalistically, this cartoon depicts the third president seated with his back against the window, penning the famous line "We hold these truths to be self-evident…" In the background is a child in blackface, pressed against the window pleading "Daddy, I'm cold." Further in the background are silhouettes of a mounted figure with a whip in mid strike and a cowering figure below. As the message is tied in with how visual images communicate, persuade, and render, Baker strategically places each of the image's elements in order to question the dominant and popular Jefferson narrative against the lived social reality to reveal the trauma of slavery, Jefferson's role in it, and America's willful ignorance of it. The comics' commentary upon the ubiquity of social narratives and how they attach to historical figures challenges the popular social norm, the virtue, of Jefferson and what he wrote, not for the sake of clarity or reforming the narrative, but to bring the ambient knowledge of the President into alignment with that which is already held in esteem.
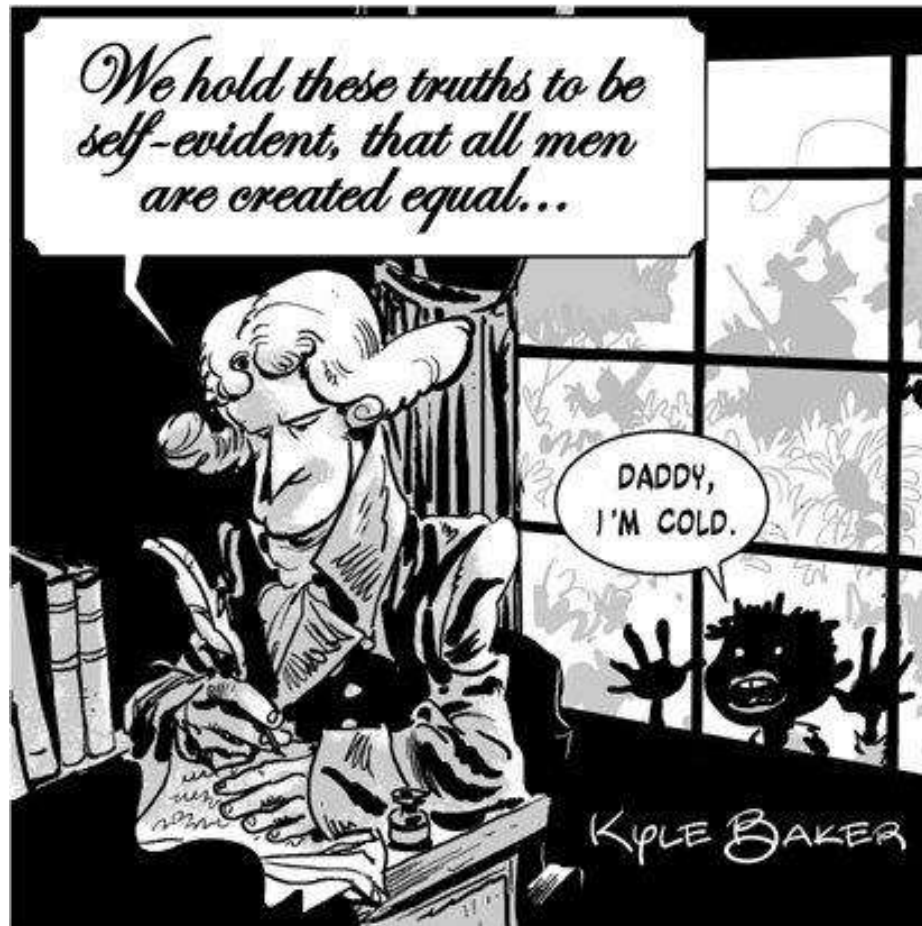
Figure 2.1. Baker, Kyle. "Happy Independence Day!" Funny Cartoon of the Week: Kyle Baker.
http://kbcartoonweek.blogspot.com/2007/07/happy-independence-day.html

In looking at how the image is the pivot point that rests between the designation

of the trope of the African American and blackness at first seems to be a slanted dualistic

inside/outside approach in that there is no subtle or nuanced sliding that renders

blackness. But an approach from the ambient allows for an access in which the

mechanisms that create the duality are not merely the machinations of the system, but

allow for a view of the rhetoricity of the system through these as points of entry. This

notion of looking at rhetoric as environmental means that there is much a broader look

into the ecology—the thought process, the terrain, the perspective, the viewer, the author,

the intention, the reception, the historical context, the politics, race, sex, gender, age, and

modernity—as all are merely elements that make up Rhetoric, not simply what we

happen to be looking at that moment. Rickert speaks of rhetoric as gestalt: as a way of not

simply persuasion in the traditional sense of mining for something, but as disclosure in

which meaning and being are derived from the ambient space. In other words, rhetorical

work is accomplished through perspectival affect. In fact, *The Electric Word* by Richard

Lanham argues that in the contemporary electronic age of email, television, online bill

paying, and shopping from home, rhetoric has changed to emphasize not merely

persuasion but one is attentive to, focused on, in that particular moment: that what is in

focus is what is persuasive. That meaning and being are derived from taking into account

the spatial environment. Ambient rhetoric is about shifting the perceptive orientation in

which "persuadability does not appear as *simple* immanence, as something that emerges

from our given social interactions, of individuals and aggregates" but more in the sense

of rhetoric being immersive, moving meaning and understanding from the subject

position of how it relates to something outside of itself to one that looks at what and how that subject position does and relates to the other elements present within the given space (Rickert 161).

The irony of the comic occurs not only in the juxtaposition of text and image, but also in the different ways of reading the visual and lexical in the foreground and in the ambient. The text of the Declaration of Independence renders the visual evidence of the boy and silhouettes moot, but in visually depicting the writing of the declaration differently than the spoken, Baker further privileges and satirizes the pronouncement's sentiment of "human." Therefore the visual rhetoric Baker utilizes seeks to undermine the narrative "truth" about Jefferson and his personal, professional, and political roles in the system of slavery by constructing a historigraphical context by using the elements of the dominant story and the ambient that surrounds it.

The placement of the elements in the comic speaks to its rhetoricity, its metafictive impulse to comment and critique, not just the historical record, but the narratives that surround the meaning that is constructed from the personal interactions with the image. The comics' meaning is created by establishing a context. This context is created, works, and relies upon a systematic semiotic familiarity that is anchored within a socially contrived and accepted history of sociality. In other words, the meaning is derived from the figure's resemblance and it is the apparent familiarity. Therefore, the knowledge alignment of the image means through rhetorical steps in which a performance of seeing means to commodify the image for the sake of consumption. This same move also governs and authorizes accepted meanings of the image. In this sense,

this is the traditional form of rhetoric as it is about disciplining the listener in order to arrive at a particular meaning: when discipline becomes the stuff of our desire, narrative euphemism means to disguise the lived reality. For persuasion occur, for an arrival at an sanctioned establishment of the image, it is important to note what Barbara Smith terms *contingences of value*, the elements that determine and overdetermine what the reader *can* evaluate, are *always* contingent on the presumption of blackness as an already held conclusion.

My contention is that through the determinative process of the image as "is," the act of persuasion, in the realm of visuality of the black form, attempts to make the subject-matter and closure-meaning an equality. As I deploy the term subject-matter, I do so with the understanding that the matter of dealing with the subject, that which is dependent upon conditionality, is also to deal with the force that changes the materiality. This act of translation closes, fixes, the black form defining it through evermore precision and accuracy. These precisions and accuracies are taken up as truth and ubiquitous: they are so wide-spread and pervasive that they are ideologically foundational, like the philosophical notion of the ontological, it is the *truth* so it is therefore fixed, absolute, and perfect. These acts of persuasion define blackness through its performance. This is a deliberate use of ekphrasis by the economy of images to create a social reality in the sense that one a fundamental level, it is about translation from visual medium into a lexical. So because it is about translations, it is also about what is being adapted through highlighting of certain aspects while blocking others. Ekphrasis works through the process of persuasion in the sense that it is the active management, the arrangement, of

highlighting the object, usually emblematic of cultural and/or political zeitgeist. In this sense, the process in which closure-meaning occurs has lived sanctions and consequences on the persuasion that do not apply to those that have the power to make it so. This is obsequious invisibility (double entendre in the sense that the observance and maintenance of the blackness as fix and static is invisible, yet it is also it makes the objects of the maintenance invisible).

Further, I contend, the determination of the figures, because they are made through the human, move to represent a social reality. Here I mean to show that the designation of human is not the only means of articulating episteme and aesthetics; it is not the ontological stick by which all actants are measured as it is not *the* sole actant. Taken from Bruno Latour's notion that humans and nonhumans embody and are employed not as object nor subject that are manipulated by a master, but who is human and who isthe master. His determination refuses to play into the territorial binary of subjectivist and objectivist positions as these influence and depend upon each other. I contend that the persuasion of this images' visuality is dependent upon the determined relation between the representation of things and our ontological ideal self. In other words, what is fundamentally known as *human* is the rhetorical epicenter and fulcrum, the supposed neutral and fixed point with a gravitational pull so strong, all episteme, aesthetics, and meaning orbit it. It is so dense that a strong or convincing argument is considered so because of its capitulation and gravitas with an apparent human connection. But an argument is not a resolution, it can only point to the possibility of it. The reality is that a determination cannot truly be attained as each proposed resolution

leads to another barrage of arguments in which there is refutation, bolstering, countering, and dismissal in the attempt to finalize the images' meaning. Essentially, to argue over the images' meaning is to act as the apparatus that dictates by what means the work persuades. Each instance of the argument is an attempt to author the image, to make its determination through a delineation, in order to show how the images' meaning is created by its elements that trace a lineage from a fiction, toward a representation, and ending at a certain perspective on reality. But images are euphemistic as they use a metaphorical visual language that not only represents or stands-in for the thing in the real world, but the depiction figures into the *way* the representation is taken up, what it means, and its aesthetic.

Further, an ambient lens allows for an exploration of how the figures figure in narrative creation. For African American literature, and because we are discussing a literature and criticism that is fundamentally cross-disciplinary, this project is examining elements specifically placed that move or persuade narrative.. This means that in lexical narratives such as Jones' use of jazz in *Corrigedora*; Reed's naming of the disease in *Mumbo Jumbo* as Jes Grew; Hurston's demonstration of speech patterns in "Characteristics of Negro Expression"; Baldwin's explication of the difference of reception of Big Bill Bronzy in *The Fire Next Time*; and Morrison's use of nursery rhymes in *The Bluest Eye* are linked with visual narratives such as the price of drumming in Kyle Baker's *Nat Turner*; the bridging of cultural gaps through Otis Redding's music in Mark Long's *The Silence of Our Friends*; the pervasiveness of the black trope through music in Derek McCulloch's *Stagger Lee*; and the sizzle of the hair in Mat Johnson's

Incognegro. But more importantly, it is about the *function* of the depictions attempting to generate a new consubstantiality that stems from within the African American canon.

BEGINNINGS OF A PARTICULAR RHETORIC

At the beginning of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, the translator W. Rhys Roberts defines the discipline "as the study of the means of persuasion" as the rhetor utilizes logos, pathos, or ethos to demonstrate how meaning is derived through purpose, audience, composition, argumentation, organization, and style (v). Rhetoric's history is as pervasive as its many definitions as it is simultaneously a practice of propagandizing the use of flattery and artifice, strategies of effective oratory, the use of persuasive language, written or spoken, and/or a study of the tropological as each is a component of a system that serves as a social touchstone by investigating the "philosophical underpinnings" and "techniques and effects" which capitulate meaning and aesthetics (Bizzell and Herzberg 2). It is these underpinnings which allows the images economy to outline particular premises by articulating a previousness for the necessary purpose of philosophical continuity, which outlines links with the ontological, with truth, with aesthetics, with understanding, and with meaning: we have a purpose and meaning through our utilization of images because "[t]he truth about stories is that that's all we are" as they define reality and our places in it (King 62). They teach us what is valuable, what is worthy, what is human, what is sacred, what is memory, and what is history through symbolic means. But they do so prescriptively as "definitions constitute rhetorically induced social knowledge" that persuades others to adopt and uphold certain "truths" and meanings while

92

disregarding others (Schiappa 3). In talking about the discourse surrounding stories, it is necessary to study the means of the employment of the shared understanding among people about themselves, the "appropriate ways of endowing human processes with meaning," as the real world analog bears the weight of the imposition of the structure of the superimposed narrative (White 61). Because rhetoric is not persuasion but the sense of how the community is created, how it is active, and the processes which maintain it.

Richards' notion of rhetoric, although she does not explicitly state it, is that the modern conception is awareness based. It is because "[w]e are so accustomed to using this term without thinking about it that we have forgotten its origins as a metaphor" (11) exists in today's modern society that "political journalists whose dismissive view of rhetoric as 'spin' makes them inattentive to the persuasive strategies that they also use casually every day" (10). What the introduction of her book does is move rhetorically through the historic notions of hierarchy and dismissal, while using them to show how the modern sense of rhetoric is predicated and built upon the foundations laid, but that the next step is a call for a paradigm shift in which rhetorical awareness comes to the forefront: instead of attempting to discern a definition of the concept of rhetoric, Richard's is touting that it "increase[s] awareness of how 'rhetoricality' saturates every aspect of out linguistic experience" (12). This move away from concerns of taxonomy, which does not attempt to make a definite out of the concept of rhetoric, but instead makes the users aware of its deployment. What this is is a link between Richard Shusterman's notion of somaesthetics in that, as a means of betterment through awareness, Richards' implicitly argues that there will be a proper placement of rhetoric.

As this project is concerned with the social functionality of images, specifically

how they are ubiquitously upheld and reinforced through the visual medium of comics,

this chapter is more concerned with the process, the mechanisms, that move to persuade

that a particular image is as it is designated: what are the processes within the

representation, in the gutter, that move to make the conceptual the factual, in order for it

to have meaning? This chapter moves to employ *Ambient Rhetoric* to examine the images

we like to see for ourselves, about ourselves, and the reasons we like to see them, why we

need them, and how we come to believe them.

It means that traditional notions of rhetoric were so because of their

acceptance and acknowledgement (or in some cases the disagreement to) a philosophical

construct: that the point, the purpose, of the rhetoric was, and in some circles still is, a

social equivalent of conspicuous consumption in that, coined by economist Thorstein

Verblen in the 19th century, as a means to explain how the display of wealth, or its

perception, is meant to and attached to the power of one's social status, instead of

displaying one's status through discretionary funds, in the rhetorical sense, having the

capital to display one's acumen as a means of making valid, an antithesis, to economist

Paul Nystrom's notion of "philosophical futility" in that, because of the industrial age

and social probable-uplift, goods and services would increase as social fashion:

consumption would increase for its own sake (an apriori notion in that it becomes a

constant keeping up and one-uping those around for the sake of social status). This is the

rhetorical consequence of the politics of rhetoric because it does, without the experience

of knowledge, make a way for social standing as an metaphorical economic currency;

meaning that a car, Thomas Jefferson's legacy, a painting, a cell-phone, Fanon, or a television (or lack thereof) can stand for, and stand in for, projected verisimilitude.

But in the Jennifer Richards sense of rhetoric there is a collaboration, a contextual sense made up and that pervades throughout the system. In a sense rhetoric can be construed as collaborative consumption. A term coined by Marcus Felson and Joe L. Spaeth in their paper "Community Structure and Collaborative Consumption: A routine activity approach" published in 1978 in the *American Behavioral Scientist*. The mantle has been taken up by Rachel Botsman and Roo Rogers in their 2010 book *What's Mine Is Yours: The Rise of Collaborative Consumption*, and is an economic model based on the principle of sharing in a win-win scenario instead of the widely thought of outdated faceless, corporate for-profit model. Collaborative consumption places the people first with reputation as the fulcrum that swings the bartering; rather than product oriented, as it is about the sharing of the people involved, while the monetary component becomes a part of the "deal" rather than the focal point. In the sense Richard's notion of rhetoric, it is a model of immediate and contextual understanding that only happens through the collaboration and consumptive understanding of the group. Unlike
the hierarchical version, which is based upon the factor of profit, her model is based on what I will term the built reputation of shared experience.

ABJECTION

John Edgar Wideman scholarship hones in on particular features of his work, while supplicating the larger picture: they look at pieces of Wideman's narratives, as they relate to the African American community, in an effort to explicate how those aspects recount or explain the said community. But I contend that the Homewood narratives function through the embracing of the entirety of the community, that includes the taboo, the waste, and the forgotten, what is traditionally considered the abject. Largely made manifest by Kristeva, the abject is the act of maintaining the sense of social self when confronted with the cognitive dissonance of that which is human-like but not strictly considered human. From the Latin meaning to throw away, it is when the sense of self identity comes in contact with the corporeal reality, the breakdown of the distinction between the self and the other, the separation between that which is considered intolerable and acceptable. It is the processes in which one separates the sense of self when confronted with what, in the cultural sense, should be caste out of the cultural world, the object that was once the subject, this "thing" that was once part of the human experience. But in the intellectual sense "it" identifies as part of the human experience but as taboo, as filth, disease, e.g. a corpse, these are pieces that were once a part of the definition of the self. In this sense, anything that is from the body as waste—spit, vomit, an open wound, sewage, or blood—or from illicit human behavior—e.g. Auschwitz— demonstrates the material boundary between what is acceptable as human.

In the social sense, it is a means to attempt to exclude the unwanted in the current definition of identity—the semiotic and symbolic, nature and society, human and animal,

are clear examples in which, for society to function properly, there must be clear boundaries, by attributing a particular abject state of being to marginalized groups in which the space "they" inhabit is unwanted but needed to define against. The social form of abjection is attached to the materiality of the body. Hence determinations such as woman, Black, Mexican, and/or disabled are so as a means of aligning the visible materiality with what can be "seen" and therefore categorize properly. So Wideman uses these visible elements to highlight the inherent invisibility, embracing the abject as a source of strength, creating an acceptance of the material, making it visibile. In other words, what is socially thought of as abjective is the cipher, the receptacle of the activity of symbolic representation in that the reductive state of being it presents as what is thrown away is aligned with the uses of Chora. What is fascinating about Wideman's Homewood, the narrative's Chora, is the acceptance and integration of the abject as part of the culture as demonstrated through the language used, the utilization of time, and the characters, all of which break from traditional models of image creation specifically because of "Identification" acts with what has largely being thrown away by the dominant. Wideman's narrative works to create an image in which "brings together nature and culture, earth and body, the materiality of the produced" in its cultural and social functionality (Rickert *xii*).

Previous *Sent for You Yesterday* scholarship, upon first glance, emphasizes analysis that is predicated on the Post-Enlightment discourse, that dissecting model in which elements, African American specifics, are pulled from the whole in a quest to discover "Truth." But if the Enlightenment model is being utilized as a community

building tool, then its naturalized authority is antithetical for the African American

scholarly community. John Bennion argues how the correlation of memory, time, and

character is present in this nonlinear narrative style in which "time loop[s] rhythmically

and point of view shift[s] rapidly" in *Sent for you Yesterday* (143). He shows how

readers know about events before they happen, then re-experience them through another

character; how past and present are happening and working simultaneously layer the

narrative. In the rhetorical sense, there is an aerial perspective, also called atmospheric

perspective, a method of creating the illusion of depth, or recession, in a painting or

drawing by modulating color to simulate changes effected by the atmosphere on the

colors of things seen at a distance. But it is also important to note that how Bennion's

critique of the Wideman's work reveals about what is important to pick-up from it in that

the elements that market is different and abbrevitive are the very objects that make black.

By highlighting specific elements as the loci of black, Bennion is re-emphasizing the

Western perspective in what Bentham called the eulogistic coverings through which

material interests that bare the motives identifying property so that the narrative, the

characters, setting, and Wideman's need to tell the story are consubstantial with

knowledge already present about black as Blackness.

Claudia Benthien's article discusses the dichotomy of ethnicity highlighted in the

novel's albino character, Brother Tate, as he is a representative ambiguity of Otherness in

which "the absence of color makes the body into something transparent and radically

open to interpretation" (3). Benthien's argument highlights the social implications of

Brother Tate's physical presence as hyper-visual representation of Otherness' invisibility.

By highlighting only this specific aspect of the character, instead of emphasizing in relation to the entire story, or to the people it is meant for, Benthien pulls it away from the whole that makes Homewood fragmented. But in highlighting it, she also calls attention to it which shows how it relates to the community but only in the enthymemic sense in that it is highlighted through absence.

Yves-Charles Grandjeat argues that the trap of binary thinking, concerning DuBois' double consciousness, is not an either/or proposition. He argues that the combinations Wideman "weaves together [are] a heterogeneous, baroque fabric which includes elements of African mythology, the blues, Shakespearean drama, modernist fiction … to name but a few" (618). This article demonstrates an answer, through Wideman's writing, to the double consciousness dilemma. The idea being that all these combinations and doublings actually work together, creating something new each time a new double appears. Akin to syncopation in jazz, in which the characters are in some way go between's from each supposed point on the binary, Grandjeat shows how the elements push and pull, with and against each other, while working to create something not quantified in elements singularly. The implication of the article is that by moving beyond the dichotomous either/or aspect of double consciousness, in emphasizing the relations between either/or aspects of Wideman's writing, Grandjeat only shows how one double begets another, not to answer or to rectify the dichotomies, but to dispel the framework of the Eurocentric desire of particular meanings.

Sheri I. Hoem characterizes the differences between pre and postmodern representations of the community elder. She argues that "Wideman's writing both

summons and undermines a nostalgic recuperation of the elder and racial continuity" by

citing how New Historicists Stephen Greenblatt and Hayden White show that the text is

known by many pasts (250). Hoem's argument highlights the trap of binary thinking can

lead. Hoem operates through opposites in that by highlighting one specific point, because

Wideman's narrative does strictly adhere to this specific viewpoint, of what *should* be

presented for nostalgic reconstruction to premodern values, other equally valuable

aspects are lost. This too is an enthymemic argument in that it attempts to use the

established criticisms, pertinent to this particular African American author, to highlight a

specific aspect through its absence.

Denise Rodriguez argues that *Sent for You Yesterday* is a "postmodern revision of

[Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* which] marks a critical departure in the evolving tradition

of black urban fiction" through Wideman's use of music and invisibility as tropes (127).

Through Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s *Figures in Black*, the purpose of the article is to show

that the "historical changes that alter our environment and, by extension, our relationship

to and perceptions of that environment, in turn cause us to *reevalu*ate our surroundings

through their literary representation" (128). The article emphasizes the difference

between subjective and objective reading. Although Rodriguez breaks from the unifying

and harmonizing aspect by examining the connotations induced by the tropes used to

describe the city of Homewood, yet upholds them by invoking the ancestral narrative of

Ellison.

Sent For You Yesterday is one-third part of the *Homewood Trilogy*. Representing

Homewood in thirds, through a series of short stories, allows Wideman to explore

different facets of the harmonization of the community as it interacts with the larger.

Wideman accomplishes this by utilizing tropes of the African American culture, which

gives *Homewood* a more suggestive rather than objective frame: for meaning to occur,

the reader must not only know the referent's intent as well as the cultural implications all

of the image the stories create in the narrative's entirety, but other avenues that have also

arrived there. This makes the reader a part of the creating the image as it engages in a

dialogue with the trope of Blackness, in which the metaphors and themes, instead of

being distanced by objectivity, become that of the reader because there is some cultural

assertion in the making of meaning. The overall encompassing narrative illustrates the

push/pull effect of establishing identity between the community and those that reside in

it. In essence, "each individual text in the series moves toward a reconciliation between

the individual and his/her society" as a means to not only highlight the paradoxical nature

of the black community's fragility and resilience, but also to situate the reader, the

listener, as member of the community because they now know the stories (Rodriguez

134).

In *Sent For You Yesterday*, time is observed in a special way. The first narrator is

Doot who is both a small child and a grown man in Homewood. At the beginning of the

book is the young Doot explicating some background information about the characters

Brother Tate and why he does not speak, Doot's uncle Carl French, and how Doot

became his nickname, all before the narrative actually begins, or Doot is even born. In

relaying what has happened before, Doot implies that it has bearing on current narrative.

This shows that linear time itself is irrelevant. Further, it shows that the "time" in which it

happened, the moment the story was created and told, is of importance. In other words, because Doot is "linked to Brother Tate by stories, by his memories of a dead son, by [his] own memories of a silent, scat-singing albino man who was [his] uncle's best friend," for correct understanding, the whole of the story of before, now and after must told (Wideman 17). Yet simultaneously, because Doot is relaying the story *presently*, it is his story as well. As this does not follow a classic linearity, the narrative's action means to create "'the human' [in which the] human arts cannot exist in a manner ontologically distinct from material and informational spaces, including technology" (Rickert *xv*) as it ongoing "disclosure of the world shifting our manner of being in that world so as to call for some response or action" (Rickert *xii*). In speaking of calling for a response, that which one hallmark of African American criticism and literature's image, the way to make meaning is by taking into account everything that is going into its creation. Notice here how time, space, and character fold into a place in which they interact with other; "worlds" then becomes the disclosure in which meaning and what is salient is made. "Worlds" then becomes embodied through what made it, through what it is embedded with, yet through its meaning and matter it has moved beyond because it is the culmination of the attention ambient. In that sense, an ambient rhetoric utilizes and understands the space as representative, using its agency in which the conditions of the happening inform its locution. Time, then, is also a factor in how the background information is relayed before the story, in order to highlight and "convey more elusive qualities about a work, practice, or place" bringing them into account, repurposing the traditional boundaries that strictly adheres to the subject and object dichotomy (Rickert

6). Doot's knowledge is one example which establishes, through the ritual of storytelling, therefore he is linked and culturally educated through the community which means it is just as much his story as any other person within the culture.

Throughout the narrative, clues as to time's ambiguity can be found. Time's indistinction can be found even at the sentence structure level. The opening line of the narrative, "I am not born yet," demonstrates many layers (Wideman 17). Doot's declaration communicates where the narrator is situated within this story as he speaks out of linear time sequence. This first person omniscient approach to narration allows Doot to speak with the authority of those that had been present. It also gives weight, validation, to his story because it comes from the community, which makes him the voice out of time but bearing a presence within time. Secondly, the word "yet" identifies Doot as *part* of the story just not its whole, and shows how the narrative is not finite with him. Thirdly, the sentence is constructed in the present tense, which would mean that it is happening presently but impacts the past and future. What this means is that though Doot is referring to things that have happened, things that will happen, and as he is relaying it, it is happening presently. Wideman's use of ambiguous time, that time is nebulous and perspective based, highlights the break with the traditional notion of rhetorical use as the words "impacts the senses, circulates in waves of affect, and communes to join and disjoin people. It gathers and is gathered by things not as a denial of the social but as an essential compliment to it" in that the utterance's account for the spatial, the voiced Chora, is reflecting an accomplishment of articulating the enculturated aptitude (Rickert x). To paraphrase Rickert, to voice Chora means to emphasize the uniquely societal

production of ideas and their embeddedness in the human, relying on the slip, the dichotomy, of the sole actant of consubstantiality.

Further layered in the narrative is Wideman's use of voice. Traditionally, voice is a characterized as "an opinion or attitude, or means or agency by which it is expressed," but it also the means through which revealing the world—space, time, and surroundings—to attune how another can function and relate through materiality that affectively sustains being as being-in-the-world (Oxford CED 1618). This is to say that voice is the authority by which one speaks and is validated by others, but more than that it is "the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols" (Burke 43). But more than that, in a narrative, voice is the "distinctions between kinds of narrator in terms of how they address the reader" through the process of embodiment as the act of voicing means to sound into being are inclusive in human doing (Baldick 273). Voice, then, is characterized as the means through which the harmonizing and unity are constructed. E.G. how does Doot relaying the story help bring reconciliation and unity to the group, and to those that read the narrative? Does Brother Tate, through absence of voice, tell the tale differently? How does *Sent For You Yesterday's* voice fit within the *Homewood Trilogy*? Wideman's narrative perpetuates an understanding through absence, the highlighting of the inherent relationship and acceptance with the abject.

Wideman's use of voice is through deficiency and lack. *Sent For Yesterday's* Brother Tate, the muted, albino African American, is just one representation of voice, or its lack, throughout the narrative. His silence is not defined in the traditional sense in that

he does not speak, but he "hum[s] and grunt[s] and groan[s]… scat sing[s] and imitate[s] all the instruments in a band" (Wideman 16). The difference being illustrated here is in that he is not speechless, he is voiceless. The distinction is in the reasoning behind voice itself: of being heard, understood and validated through the listener verses no communicable utterance whatsoever. Essentially, because he does not speak, but does communicate, only highlights what he cannot say or is unable to say. Brother Tate is utilizing the ambient in the sense that his rhythmic vocalizations, and his subsequent christening of Doot, show that though he does not use words he is still a not just the media but the medium through the accounted for elements of Homewood are relied. Yves-Charles Grandjeat argues that Brother Tate brother "has rhythm—or should one say that the brother *is* rhythm?" is only partially correct in that in his sound making, he has moved beyond the limitations of traditional words by embodying the verbizing of the noun; the act and the actant have become synonymous (616). Beyond that, Brother Tate's voiced authority is not determined by words strictly in the traditional sense but in the rhythms in which his 'listens,' including the readers of the narrative, would "hear the silent music making wiggle his narrow hips… like the sanctified sisters moaning their way to heaven" (Wideman 16). This African American albino, a noise making voiceless man, operates through his physicality-lack; he exemplifies the modal, the substance of his the environment as he does not simply utilize the space, time, or surrounding, or more accurately is not made by them, but inhabits them by his own terms and means, through his own voice.

But Brother Tate's voicelessness is also multifaceted. Being a tangible representation of "Other," Brother Tate is a literal, physical depiction of the slippery social definition; his absence of color makes him a living, breathing illustration of the black/white binary. Because he can be seen and touched means he must be contended with instead of him as an abstracted, abjected invisibility: Brother Tate's absence of voice and color only exacerbates Otherness. He directs "the reader's attention to the dual stage on which the novel unfolds—one for seeing and one for sounding" (Grandjeat 616). Being the metaphorical syllepsis, his physical presence and his broken-silence shows as a representative of the community and an outsider of it, so his presence comments on it.

Voicelessness is not a character trait strictly of Brother Tate. An example of voiced characters being voiceless can be found in the novel's prelude. Two nameless characters are explicating a dream and why it is frightening comments on the context of Chora of Homewood, the abject state of being for Blackness. The prelude's entirety is unquoted dialogue, the implication being that though there are two individuals speaking, and without a way to ascertain who is talking, the reader must discern the conversation by the tropes and elements present. The dreamer, later to be determined as Carl French, says that what scared him "[c]ouldn't put it in words then and can't now. Ain't no words for it, but I knew why. See, cause I wanted to scream. I wanted to cut loose and tell somebody how scared I was" (Wideman 10). Here, Carl French echoes Brother Tate's voicelessness in that in the traditional sense, words fail him when he needs to express his fear. It is only a scream that would adequately articulate his voice. Interestingly, he does not scream "cause you know if you make a sound you're gone" (Wideman 17). This shows that

although he shares in Brother Tate's voicelessness, he is, that is to say, he embodies

voiceless because he *chooses* not to speak.

LINEAGE AND LINEARITY

To speak of lineage, to discuss it, is to exacerbate the difference between

definition and meaning for the sake of highlighting pedigree, its linear and logical

denotation. What this means is that for the sake of highlighting the implications of the

descent, what is not explicitly expressed through definition is used, in an etymological

sense, not to simply explicate the arrangement, the sequence, of the arrival to its current

state, but to place the implication of the antecedent, the existence of the thing from before

or how it logically precedes its current conception. What this means is the thing flashes of

signification that utilizes the bodily aesthetics of the quotidian that *makes* a history

instead of being an inert and fixed projection of *containing*: one which is active and

interactive while the other is passive, neutral, and inevitable. Lineage confirms the

symmetry between the proposition of possibility and the solidification of definition, what

in comics is largely discussed as the gutter, as the next panel has laid clear, bare really,

what is to follow, leaving the reader to "fill in the gaps." The linearity's function is to

highlight the processes of paradigm in which the "correct" interpretation has *the*

predictable and "plausible" lineage by skipping the clear articulation by directing the

gaze from one measured showing to the next. That way there is a path laid from notion

toward a state of being, a validation, and a vindication for presumptions about ontology,

giving credence to the destination as factual, as true, as the view has lead us here. In this sense, knowledge is made and maintained through the notion that philology *does* capitulate ontogeny as the evidence is laid bare before one's eyes. The lineage of linearity is the reason why the image created by any particular comic is so easily graspable and consistently interpreted; there is a basis for the thing seen as there is an always already understanding placed before it.

To discuss lineage is to see the linearity, the path. It is to employ David Quint's notion of epic of victors and the epic of the defeated in the sense that the creation of the narrative of history, these stories that tell us who we were in crisis, emphasize the political context, the importance the teleological dance with romanticizing the narrative of history, and thereby making the "truth" through the emphasis of identity (Schultz 39). Quint's argument is that these narratives are diametrically opposed as each means to control the facts by accentuating meaning. This push/pull, in the African American sense, is double consciousness. In the pejorative sense, this rhetorical move has created the sanctioned African American; it is to authorize the term slave while dismissing the enslaved as the latter has the possibility of agency regardless of social and "factual" circumstances while the preferable would mean a removal from personification, making it an object for use, but each one must be contended and is simultaneously African American. In other words, lineage means to propagate particular highlights of American history that prioritize preferable identities while glossing over others. Further it means that while illuminating that which has been destroyed in African American history, the preferable and authorized, indigenous narrative simultaneously builds a new Afro-

Modernist identity showing the hows and whys of seeing. Thus the act of *making* rather than *discovering* a home is highlighted in that "home" is the performance that knits the African American collective in the immediate and continuous processes of becoming. The result is not the linearity that highlights African origins, but that which helps shape African American identity as it continues to develop with ties to a vague specificity of Africa.

In the rhetorical sense, to examine lineage in the sense of linearity is to scrutinize not only the predictable patterns in which convincing occurs, but the context which normalizes, smoothing and soothing the processes for easier consumption. Richard Gregg posits this process as linguistic fixing in that the methods themselves help "fix or stabilize tendencies and processes already present in thought and experience" (87). Edward Schiappa discusses the same phenomena through domestication, the use of ordinary language to name the objectionable since it "combines some of the most potent trivializing resources available in culture" (132). But the underlying point is that the use of the linearity suggests a particular perspectival understanding of reality. So the lineage of linearity is not simply about interpretation, but about the communicative methods it employs to rehabilitate, "governing the world with his [peculiar] institution, rediscovered, reappropriated, in demand, accepted" in the sense of saving by authenticating the destruction of that which was meant to be saved (Fanon 106). Lineage, then, utilizes the modalities of functional and foundational logic, which ties the dynamics of being to the concept of recognition, transforming the subjective uncertainty into states of Chora.

The point and purpose here is to highlight the implications of lineage in the sense of such discussions that allow for an examination of the context of materiality, the body, as an object that is divorced from any subjectivity and how it has fixed its object of the symbolic as immutable and material, thereby making it real. In this sense, the movement of linearity objectifies and pulls the referent out of time making it a floating signifier whose determination is dependent upon the contextual schema. With no sense of past or future, the lineage of the African American is perpetually present, yet subjectively objectified. What this means is to secure the meaning the entirety of African Americaness as fixed by making the already known body the real while the actual is relegated to the periphery, the ambient, the dismissive. That because the symbol is fixed, it allows the namers and the story tellers of "black" to reinscribe and make it mean and fit within an already constructed paradigm. But the point and purpose of lineage, when utilized by the African American, is the reclamation of the relationship of the communal identity, because it, in the dominant sense, is "made to manifest the very same *rhetorical* symptoms of absence and denial, to embody the double and contrastive agencies of a *prescribed* internecine degradation" (Spillers 66). The idea is not merely recovery but a rhetorical move to change the psychoanalytical landscape in order to create a foundation instead of a slippery slope of negation. The point is to move away from one single thing identifying and meaning the entirety: to move away from Lacan's sense of meconnaissance. To illustrate, in 1999 Paul Johnson's *A History of the American People* perpetuates a particular image of history with its opening statement: "[t]he creation of the United States of American is the greatest of all human adventures" (3). In discussing the

linearity of lineage, the account of narrative and meaning of America's history rhetorically accomplishes what? What identity of America is being created here through this particular spin of the facts of time, place, and actants? What elements would this narrative need to highlight in order to propagate the proper linearity?

For instance, Roland and Taneshia Nash Laird's book *Still I Rise: A Graphic History of African Americans* makes the concerted effort to do more than to simply insert African American history into the American paradigm, it moves to show how these largely ignored traumas and triumphs shaped America's identity by the refiguring of historicity as a global contextual construct of ontology (see Figure 2.2). The signification of the book undermines the identifying notions modernity. In a sense, this novel means to guide "a critique of modern representation [that would] not crumble before" its critical task of disabling the active rhetoricity to invisibly misrepresent contributions to the American identity by calling on an increase in the self-consciousness act of the creation of meaning of such narrative representations (Da Silva 193). For instance, on page one, beginning before America existed, there is a tie in with the notion that the contemporary America's identity is fundamentally the antecedent attitude made manifest by its sociality. It is this attitude that regards displaced Africans as object-tools meant to fuel the economic machine. This old perspective is what would eventually encourage the dominant and default to create Jim Crows laws, the super predator, the innocence of Robert Chambliss, the righteous indignation of Bull Connor, voter intimidation, lynching postcards, and comic book characters such as Ebony White. But it is also responsible for spurring the push back, the movement of employing an agency through being an actively
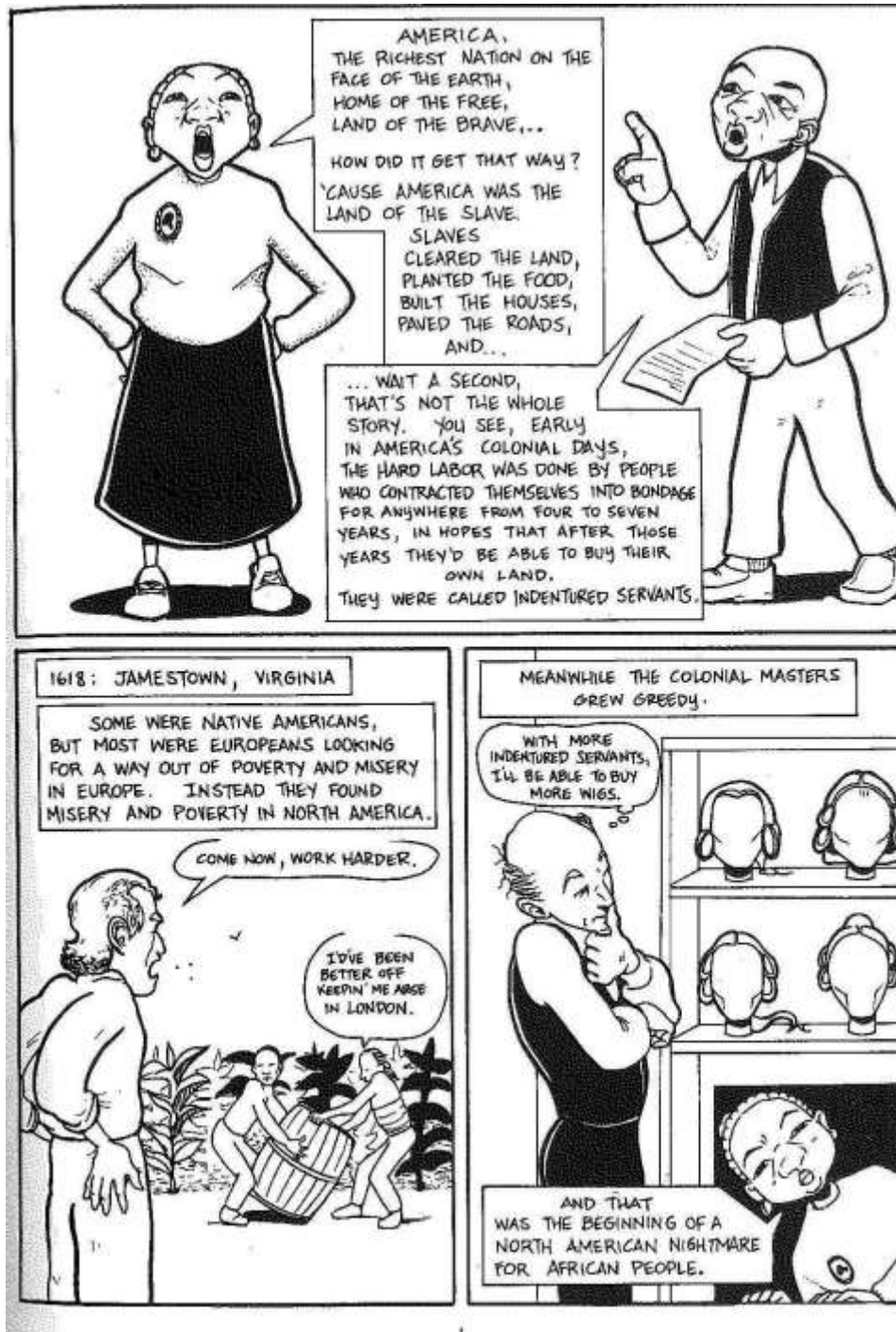
Figure 2.2. Laird, Roland and Taneshia Nash Laird (w), Elihu "Adofo" Bey (i). *Still I Rise: A Graphic History of African Americans*. 2009

actant, through defiance of Demark Vessey, the Underground Railroad, The Strono

Rebellion, the success of the Tuskegee Airmen, audacity of Ida B. Wells, NAACP,

Malcolm X, the Pan-African Flag, Carlotta of the Matanzas Rebellion, and Static Shock.

The implication here is not merely that half the story has never been told, but that it is not

as easily and irrefutably reducible to an easily digestible, flattened image: that the

beginning of the American identity is not merely economic, but that the narrative of the

nation, at its foundation, is fueled by greed. This perspectival shift allows for a critical

examination of the lineage of America's avarice of wealth and power that still drives its

ambition to own.

But the irony is that the story of America, the whole story, is relayed by two

people of African descent; those who, historically, were not allowed to name themselves,

those that the sanctioned and authorized history have actively attempted to erase while

reaping the benefits that their bodies produced. The break with the linearity of the

traditional lineage demands a critical examination of what becomes added to the

sanctioned historical canon by making the African the rhetorical actants of America's

identity, America's narrative. The narrative of America comes from the mouths of people

that are directly challenging the prescriptive nature of lineage the proper meaning of

history, the conformity that confronts "recognizable patterns of linguistic behavior but

also our understanding of the world and the attitudes and we adopt toward various parts

of that world" (Schiappa 32). Given the discourse of identity, this insertion disrupts

notions of the "the real" lineage, the congruity of appearance and its essence, of what

Schiappa terms facts of essence and facts of usage, elements of language that are taken

for granted as default and the norm in its everyday use. Further, this disruption forces an examination of the defacto utilization as essentialist, the use of history creates that which is needed to promote and maintain the linearity as "*dislocation*: an arguer's effort to break up a previously unified idea" and the denotative way the quotidian the uses of Black forms are a commodity of social and communicative exchange (Schiappa 36). Essentially, these characters, in taking a stand to insert themselves in to the already authorized narrative, "takes place from a historical location within which one is always already *constituted* and yet with which one *constitutes* one's identity," asserting their humanity, their history, and their identity by speaking outside the traditional, accepted, and sanctioned narrative (Yancy 116). This was all accomplished through the reinsertion of nommo, the power of the word.

NOMMO

In the late 1970's through the 1980's, African American critics and theorists began constructing a paradigm for, by, and about Blackness that did not stem from the traditional European or Classical viewpoint. Karenga, Smitherman, Asante, Gates Jr., Morrison, and West wrote on the subject of African American literature from the auspices of Afrocentric artistic viewpoint. Essays and academic articles abound that highlight how Egyptian (Kemetic) rhetoric is older and is the basis for Greek philosophy[14] which expands on the notion G.M. James posited that Greek Philosophy was stolen from the Kemetic (Egyptian); how magic realism "reveals itself as a *ruse* to

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[14] See Lipson, Carol S. and Roberta Binkley ed. *Rhetoric: Before and Beyond the Greeks*. NY: State University of NY P, 2004. Print

invade and take over dominant discourse(s)" (D'haen 195); and how Bakhtin can be found in African American Literary theory because, through language and literature, individuals can attain meaning and identity as they are "both 'voiced' and able to 'voice' (Dorothy Hale); a person's identity may be constituted by the social languages that speak her, but she can nonetheless exercise control over her social positioning by 'inflecting' the social identities manifested within the languages through which she is compelled to speak" (Dorothy Hale 447). This was the era in which the African American language community took center stage, the era in which the academic writing was for, by, and about the African American aesthetic because they were the "ones in power in the traditional academic community [to] create discourses that embody a typical worldview" (Bizzell 2).

Traditionally, the griot is the human repository of remembered history and traditions of the oral West African culture. Griots are meant to serve three broad cultural functions" "to perform rituals, entertain, or educate" which is to enrich the civilization (Hale 35). In accomplishing the three expansive responsibilities, griots "fulfill a variety of roles; genealogist, historian, spokesperson, diplomat, musician, teacher, praise singer, master of ceremonies, and advisor" which leads to an ambiguous definition in western terms (Rasmussen 361). The term griot goes far beyond the academic community in the sense that its definition encompasses a wide range of contexts within the populace. In the broadest definition, a griot *is* the culture in the sense that through the collecting of stories, genealogies, histories, songs and rituals only to then disseminate them throughout the

people so that everyone has the same shared history; a griot creates a shared community, a shared by speaking it into reality.

But it is the nuances of griot that get cross-culturally mistranslated because there is no one-to-one Western European equivalent: a clear definition fails because of a transfer from spoken word to print and "the need to know the original languages in which the griots express themselves, and the fact that some of their speech is simply undecipherable," which becomes paramount when the Black bodied form is inserted the discourse (Hale 114). In fact, Stephen Belcher has gone so far as to posit that many of the features that define a griot "are lost in translation" because it is taken out of the original context (173). It is important to note that in the traditional non-writing, mostly stemming from many different oral cultures of West Africa, words are considered sacred and powerful because it is the only means to which the culture is passed on. In other words, this is not an act of parrhesia, speaking into truth, that truth that nods toward the objective aesthetic, but instead performs a sovereignty subjectivity for the culture.

For this section of the project, griot in the visual narrative, allows for more than the creation a symbol of blackness, a designation to fundamentally base definition upon, but the creation of an active, visual actant that utilizes nommo through performance. It is this utilization that refuses to define but relies on behavior for determination as these visuals are

> [b]lind [in] time, linking past, present, and future, the [Black form] is keeper of
> history, master of its oral tradition, and rhetor extraordinaire, able to produce or
> perform on demand for whatever segment of the tribe requires it and what the

116

situation demands--celebration, critique, preservation, connection. The [visual

artist] and the tradition of stories that makes up the griot's craft reflect both

participation in and resistance to the larger order and link past, present, and future,

even in the midst of physical and psychic dislocation (Banks 23).

In other words, the knowledgeable insertion by the visual groit of nommo creates

sovereignty, drapetomania; anything that flies in the faces of the established tradition for

the sake of the subjective cultural self. Further, this culture creates identity. Because griot

rhetoric is the storyteller/listener dynamic and the reader–as-witness, culturally literate

readers then become part of the story's construction from the cultural context, responding

to clues placed throughout the narrative. As James Paul Gee stipulates, identity is

constructed through "[d]iscourse [that] transfer[s] into, interfere[s] with, and otherwise

influence[s] each other to form the linguistic texture of whole societies and to interrelate

various groups in society," but it is also in this sense a paradox, a contradiction, at the

center of its performance (14). This center, I assert, is that the griot model creates a

performed character that, in order to fool enough to be taking up as the real thing, lays in

the notion that if the performance is successful, the element that the audience knows to be

staged, disappears. What this means is that if the performance is to be taking seriously, it

must not be seen as performance but as real. Further, this close affinity, this similarity

that identifies the fact of being, is illustrative of the intrinsic nature that determines

character; to inscribe through the presented and performed symbol. This identifying

performance creates a sense of community derived from the aspects of subjectivity, of

which the reader must be aware. My assertion is that, through nommo, *Blokhedz* is using

the visual Black form in a novel as griot in a "concerted effort to reclaim […] cultural heritage through the reinscription of the cultural in literary production and thus to restabilize the cultural imbalance of power" (Mehta 234).

In a culture where words are given so much emphasis, the significance of a person with that "kind of verbal power that links them inextricably to those who hold other forms of power in society" would give them ambiguous social standing (Hale 317). The reason for this is that, in West African terms, griots are the wielders of *nommo*, "the life force, which produces all life, which influences 'things' in the shape of the *word*" (Jahn 124). Nommo is an "African concept [in which] the word is a life force; the word is creator rather than created" even after they have been spoken or written (Ervin 92). Smitherman posits that "to use words to give shape and coherence to human existence is a universal human thing" in which "language is a tool for ordering the chaos of human experience" (77). In the same way, the Black bodied form, in comics, has been utilized in the pejorative to corral particular experience while African Americans wielding the pen and pigment mean to tell "stories [to] help give order to the human experience and encourage others around [them] to establish means of common living" through uplift (Hale 35). So griots use their knowledge of community, history, genealogy and tradition to maintain the society as a means to create harmony and unity. Shauntae Brown White states that griots "preserve the social customs and values of the culture and […] contribute to social stability" (32). In other words, griots use "[r]hetoric, in the Afrofocentric sense, [as] the productive thrust of language into the unknown in an attempt to create harmony and balance in the midst of disharmony" (Asante 35).

Essentially, the doing mechanism here creates a "concerted effort to reclaim […] cultural heritage through the reinscription of the cultural in literary production and thus to restabilize the cultural imbalance of power" (Mehta 234). African Americans create, stabilize, and invigorate culture through the act of utilizing the Black form as nommo.

African American aesthetic critics, in an attempt to construct an identity for their own group of people, are really attempting to create a useful base of power for the African American people. When I use the word power it is not meant in the classic European sense of "right or authority," ability or competence, capacity, control, dominance or force, but more in the ambiguous notion of potential cause and effect, to move away from the notion of the floating signifier toward active actant: as an antonym of impotence in which the power stems from an identifying action which quells the discursive dominative identifying markers of the hegemony for the sake for efficacy (*Concise OED* 1125). It is not meant as the difference between passivity and activity or subjective and objective, but in how power "points out the irreducibility of temporalizing," of normalizing, convincing for the sake of stability (Derrida 126). This forces us to address the work to normalize, challenging the reader to question the purpose of doing so. Inevitably, the mechanisms to stabilize reveal that power is more than what it is defined as or what that definition lacks (Derrida 126). This is where and how *nommo's* meaning is understood. It is precisely because of power, African Americans have named themselves.

Names have power: the power to define and identify, as it defines not only within, but also without a culture. For example, the ancient Africans who lived in the Nile

valley, built megalithic stone structures and mummified the dead have been named and are known as, by the modern world, Egyptians. These people left extensive writings, and are possibly the most studied and written about of ancient cultures. Egypt influenced societies that followed, from the Greeks, the Romans, to Western Europe, and arguably still permeate cultures today. With all of the study and understanding of these people there is a problem: they referred to their country Kemet, not Egypt as named by Herodotus. In spite of our reverence for this culture, this mis-naming, at such a rudimentary level, slants further understanding of these people. In essence the foundation is skewed; therefore, the house itself is skewed, which means the mis-naming is the source for the lack of power. From a West African standpoint, as well as an African American position, mis-naming is not simply slander or libel, because it misuses *nommo*, the name Egyptian sets a foundation in which further accepted misinterpretation can occur. Through griot the name can be correctly spoken and rightful understanding can begin. It is in this way that harmony can be attained.

The discourse of the "African American" does not describe the "African American," because "African American" was there before the discourse signified it as such. Instead it produces the "African American" it purports to sign. This is a discursive, reductive, semic train of thought linked to the semiotic[15] in which the enthymemic reasoning, which only allows the properly defined African American's to mimic themselves through absence, thereby creating a pantomime, a caricature, for the sake of a "proper" relation as a signified with the sign.

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[15] See Julie Kristeva's *La Révolution du language poétique* (1974)

120

This is Foucault's Panopticon in action: the hegemony is socially placed in the center, and every group that falls under its view is subject to its rules, not because the guard enforces the rules, but because the prisoners internalize the rules and police themselves, which African Americans have done. For this to work, for accurate regulation of those subjected, "one needs to know the nature of the guilty person, his obduracy, the degree of his evilness, what his interests and leanings are" (Foucault 188). In essence, the guilty must internalize the rules, thereby defining themselves by the hegemonic characterization. To combat this, the African American aesthetic employs a converse memory or revisionist process, which is the power of nommo, as a means "to engage the polemics of competing discourses that have the ability to counter oppressive, imperial Americanism," which allows the narrative to be griot as it is now both signifier and signified (Stewart-Shaheed 235). Throughout the literary history of African American authors, from Phillis Wheatley on forward, the narratives have collectively addressed topics of racism, slavery and equality as the group, the culture, has struggled with power, with double consciousness and wielders nommo for the sake of dispelling the panoptic and highlighting the body of the people, through and for itself.

Chapter 3
Becoming Biblio-graphic: How Social Literacy Renders Closure in Comics

In issue #12 of Whiz Comics' *Captain Marvel*, celebrated hero of the Golden Age of comics, Billy Batson, the child alter-ego of the famed champion, must get past a thug guard to seek an audience with Edward Smith. Titled the "Engine of Doom," this particular issue has come into light recently for not just its use of blackface, the quotidian way that such a performance of costuming blackness demonstrates the certainty, the all-meaning skinned surface, and the ubiquity in which such a cartooning of the performance of blackness signs what is authentic, but how in the thug's gaze of Batson, the boy becomes fixed in the sense that he is now the exhibition of expediency of the truth of "Negro" (see Figure 3.1). As if this aped performance of blackness was not already a caricature, what it means is to re-inscribe prejudices that we have inherited from our collective social education reveals the curiculum of the economy of images, elevating the appearance of blackness, this corked performance, as authentic, authoriative, and true. Relying not just on the thug's ability to read him correctly, Billy Batson is color coded through the foreclosure of historicization in which the obvious physical traits typify him as a floating signifier, the "metanyms that displace rather than signify" the universality of the presented non-sequitor (Morrison 68).

Written by Bill Parker and drawn by CC Beck, this January 1, 1941 comic demonstrates the narrative usefullness of trusting what one sees in the sense that

Figure 3.1. Parker, Bill (w), C.C Beck (p). *Captain Marvel Vol 1 #12*. "The Engine of Doom." Whiz Comics, January 1941.

perception reveals what is already trusts, what has already been read as true. In point of fact, Will Eisner, the famed writer of the legendary *The Spirit*, admitted that he used racial stereotypes to create the character Ebony White but further claimed that the character was not an exploitation. Eisner's circular reasoning fits here in the sense that he genuinely thought that a comic reader did not buy the book to laugh at Ebony White but that he simply was a part of the *The Spirit*'s universe. The problem with this reasoning there is a discrepancy between the depicted and its social use: how something is intended to be viewed verses what that view means for the reader. Like the figure above, Eisner's reasoning, there is no correlation between the arbitrary presentation of the object and how it illicts a particular presence of blackness as Blackness—his intent was to create a character through which much of the comic's comedy would work, but why must that comedy be tied to a truncated performance of race? But, and this holds true for the panels above, it is the author's subject position, which translates as Billy's subject position, to costume and adopt a "down home" vernacular that makes blackness into an object for his own justifications? The way Eisner's Ebony White is drawn, the reason Billy Batson is successful in fooling the thug, is due to the same line of reasoning; it is in the expressed intent through raced iconography that is tied with the economy of images. What this means is that exaggerated language, gestures, mannerisms, facial features, and postures are all indicative of the normalcy of racial fantasies, to propagate cariture as character in that characteristics are barely recognizable as human. These grotesque effects perpetuated the perception of cartooning or parody, but were stylistic choices that embodied the proposed visual true exstence of race, class, and gender as real, as pieces of wonderment,

and derison, as a means of cultural transmission. These images are the product of understanding, that the dominant gaze places the paradigm of visuality that creates and propagates these attempts at imitating the stereotype as fact, even under scrutiny, canonizing what is seen as accurate and true.

This chapter will focus on how what is perceived to be factual, authentic, and truthful is an act of cognition in comics to examine the artist's intent of interpretation. That the elements of the comic form utilizes to create closure are really about bridging the interplay of the gutter, the aesthetic, the use of the binary articulate/inarticulate, and simultaneous unity as it applies to audience participation of rendering meaning from the vague specificity of the black form in comics. The tools necessary for reading require the audience to participate with the author's vision to arrive at a close reading through the nomenclature of visual art, theater, and literature. The argument is that the reading of comics not only, as I implied above, requires a new form of literacy, a literacy that overlaps with existing modes of reading, but one that requires a reader savvy enough to recognize panel, page unity, and narrative closure in order for there to be meaning in order to arrive at the conclusive closure of blackness.

Part of what makes a difficult definition of the graphic novel possible is that throughout scholarship "confusion reigns. However, what is clearly observable is that reaching for a new rubric for the medium as it is now practiced coincides with a large shift in aesthetic outlook" as literary, visual studies, and linguistic models have been used to describe, prescribe, and analyze comics but the stigma of being intrinsically haunts the medium as the problem of preferring the image shows how the form is mistaken for the

some real world content (Campbell 81). What this means is that because there is no

agreed upon and singular definition[16], and combined with a certain predetermined

connotations in which bodies are seen as popular art, art of the masses and throwaway

art—they cannot be high art because of the social stigma attached to them[17]—research in

this field has met with derision and condemnation: there is little or no aesthetic merit to

them as "they [mean] to take the place of 'real books'" (Groensteen, "Why are Comics

Still in Search of Cultural Legitimization?" 5). But that dynamic is changing as comics

"is sparking interest in literary studies," but through its own value not as in how it

capitulates toward an already held literary standard (Chute 452). Academia is now

beginning to gaze upon the graphic novel as a form of creative expression. From Scott

McCloud's U*nderstanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, Adilifu Nama's *Super Black:*

American Pop Culture and Black Superheroes, Bill Foster's *The Untold Stories of Black*

Comic Books, Bart Beaty's *Fredric Wertham and the critique of Mass Culture*, Sheena C.

Howard and Ronald L. Jackson's *Black Comics: Politics of Race and Representation*, Jeet

Kent and Kent Worcester's *A Comics Studies Reader*, Frances Gateward and John

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[16] There are many and varied definitions of comics. Thierry Groensteen posits that comics are to be treated

as a language, Eddie Campbell, in "What is a Graphic Novel?", posits that there are four different

definitions of graphic novel, a synonym for comics, a classifying format, an equivalent to a prose narrative

and lastly, to indicate that the form is more ambitious and entails more than the scope of a comic book,

while Hillary Chute indicates that it is an ideal medium to portray traumatic events and extreme

circumstances.

[17] Hillary Chute goes into great detail about the stigma attached to graphic novels [narratives] in her article

"Comics as Literature: Reading Graphic Narrative" *PMLA*; Mar 2008. Vol. 123 Num. 2. 452-465.

Jennings' *The Blacker The Ink: Constructions of Black Identity in Comics and Sequential Art*, Neil Cohn's *The Visual Language of Comics: An Introduction and Cognition of Sequential Images*, Joyce Goggin and Dan Hassler-Forest's *The Rise and Reason of Comics and Graphic Literature: Critical Essays on the Form*, Deborah Elizabeth Whaley's *Black Women in Sequence: Re-inking Comics, Graphic Novels, and Anime,* and Robert C. Harvey's *The Art of the Comic Book : an Aesthetic History*, scholarship for "sequential art" has grown into its own academic field (McCloud 21). Essentially, this new academia surrounding this medium has made it possible for a new kind of formalism in which "compelling, diverse examples that engage with different styles, methods and modes to consider the" challenges the literary lexicon: it is pushing the boundaries of literary scholarship (Chute 457). This is an important as inquiry into process of determination troubles the context, the foundation, as the depictions of the Black body in comics is the visual equivalent of naming as the image articulates everything we, the reader, and the audience, needs to know about it: Blackness is named through the body's iteration. What this means is that the articulation on the page is about the discrepancy between the conscious and subconscious use of language and what it reveals about the users and the underlying purpose of the language's use

The unique quality of the graphic novel allows for a formalist analysis. Essentially, using the literary tool to show that even when the literary aspect is not present, there is an aesthetic to be recognized.

Traditional literary scholarship denotes a plethora of terms used to convey how the narrative works and how meaning is determined through the derivation of its relation

to lived social reality. Comics use the narrative in different way than traditional literature in that closure[18] happens through a shortcut stereotyping that concentrates the narrative's effectiveness along commonly held and accepted social visual paradigms. Will Eisner argues that the use of character's physicality—for meaning to occur, the rendering utilizes stereotypes that rely on already held social assumptions of gender, class, and race—"speeds the reader into the plot and gives the teller reader-acceptance for the action of his characters" (20). So, for the sake of expediency, comics use and rely on codes which utilizes figures that brush against reality in ways that lexical cannot because it utilizes Sassure's concept of langue, knowledge of grammatical rules that constitute a system of language and are culturally shared. Further, the rhetorical actants of the image highlight valuable and effective communication "whenever the issue of a message's effects on an audience is the centre of attention" (Bateman 120). Because the panel to panel and gutter aspects require a framing of the narrative, a graphic novel's sequence of events is episodic in nature: each panel is placed in a specific order, usually chronologically, yet they do not progress the narrative in the traditional sense[19]. This medium is automatically setup as series of lyrically pictorial vignettes in which each panel has some small part of the overall story. Charles Hatfield postulates that the "great strength" of comics "is composed of several kinds of *tension*, in which various ways of reading—various interpretive options and potentialities—must be played against each other. If this is so, then comics readers must call upon different reading strategies, or interpretive schema,

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[18] I am using closure here in a literary critical way as a "reduction of a work's meaning to a single and complete sense that excludes the claims of other interpretations" not strictly in the sense of dénouement, but in the sense of rapprochement, of social maintenance (Baldick 43).

[19] Each panel is a period in the overall narrative. See Theresa Tesuan's "Comic Vision and Revisions in the Works of Lynda Barry and Marjane Satrapi" in *Modern Fiction Studies*.

than they would use in their reading of conventional written text" (36). Consider in this context Robert Parker's insight that readers will form "hypotheses about the text and then test […] those hypotheses against the continuing sequence of text" (281). Deployed in a study of comics, that word "sequence" becomes especially significant. Parker is not strictly speaking of comics as the sequence or process in which the ink and pigment on the page translates into recognition and meaning as "a text always remains incomplete, all the more obviously while readers find themselves in the middle of its sequence of words and implications" (Parker 280). What his definition entails is that comics are in the broad sense syntagmistic: they require the audience to be complicit in the derivation of meaning. There is broad consensus, therefore, on the important role of the reader, a role that might be particularly important in the reading of comics.

However, where perhaps McCloud's definition of comics fall short, especially regarding derivative depictions that designates race, is the realization that the reader in comics is both passive and active in deriving meaning. As Rocco Versaci puts it, comics are "impressionistic illustrations of people, places and things—remind[ing] us at every turn (or panel) that what we are experiencing is a representation" which never allows the reader to fully escape into the realm the author has created, but reestablishes the paradigms of meaning, understanding, and knowledge already utilized (6). In a medium in which everything on the page—the layout, the wording, coloring, and line thickness— is contrived and presented by the author, the strength of graphic novels, its sophistication, "does not 'happen' in the words, or the pictures, but somewhere in-between, in what is sometimes known as 'the marriage of text and image'" has a real-world analog from

which to draw meaning (Sabin 9). This marriage must be performed by the reader but is carefully staged by the author. In other words, in order to determine that the meaning of the image being presented as the representation of blackness is black, the reader must know, must see, the image's performance as black through the closure of African American form as the enclosure that is made from neatly packaged and packed information that displays everything worth knowing and understanding. In doing so, the performance of the depicted blackness determines the dimensions and possibilities of black bodies through the subjection of objectification. In this sense, McCloud's definition of closure "is unfortunate. The term already has a long history of being used to refer to the resolution of narrative tension, not to mention that it is a technical term in epistemology" but is also truncated here as there is a failure of the acknowledgement that touts the connection between persuasion of the visual and its meaning and the socio-political paradigm that informs each (Pratt 111).

Pratt's definition stems from the literary; comics are not strictly literary as the medium engages with the simultaneity of the visual and the lexical. Also comics differ from literature in that the narrative is interactive: the author does not explicate every nuance of the narrative so a proficient reader, one who is inner-directed and comic literate, is needed to bridge the deliberately placed "gaps." Yet, Derrida offers insight about closure that will soothe Pratt's in that filling in the "gaps" is "the *strategic* note or connection—relatively or provisionally *privileged*—which indicates the closure of presence, together with the closure of the conceptual order and denomination, a closure that is effected in the functioning of traces" (127). Derrida's point was that the underlying

ontological assumptions that undergird the formalistic persuasions and *makes* a concept

or word are through a bridging juncture, the gutter, of the representative signifier and the

reality it means to sign: meaning is made through the relationship of the lack of

quantified articulation and the presence of elements of closure. Closure then is about that

process of completion, the de jure resolution, which operates as an appeal through the

presented gaps in the prevailing structure. It is the arrival of the spatio-temporal

destination in which the affect of its presence attends and affirms the company of social

ideation. In other words, the representation of the external form of blackness denotes a

visual paradigm in which "black" crystallizes it, freezing it, in the state of already having

been normatively achieved. The idea here is that these images, so laden with meaning,

aesthetic political minutia, and denotation, that the gutter the reader needs to cross in

order to make the image mean, does not exist. An augmentation of the Dalai Lama

quote—"When you talk, you repeat what you already know. But if you listen, you may

learn something new."—that when you read, you are repeating what you already know.

Closure is the esoteric place where the reader *makes* the narrative, characters,

plot, setting, theme, tone, and meaning—all the story elements—work and cohere. The

idea is that "just as sentences are incomplete without their predicates, narratives without

closure are like sentences which include only the subject and not the 'action' of the

sentence. Closure, in this view, completes the meaning of the story" (Douglas 159). It is

the liminal space which allows the reader to respond to the medium on the page. Yet a

reader's proficiency in comics is determined not strictly by the ability to close "gaps," it

is also hermeneutical: the narrative simultaneously is mimetic and diegesistic in that

through the pictorial and wording working together, comics show and tell but only mean through what is not shown or told. Essentially, "[r]eading comic books requires a different type of literacy because on the comic book page the drawn word and drawn picture are both images to be read as a single integrated text," which requires the reader's participation for completion (Duncan and Smith 14). Without it, what is there is simply a series of unrelated pictorial vignettes. This means the scholarship derived must be aware that graphic novels "can be a complex means of communication and are always characterized by the plurality of messages. They are heterogeneous in form, involving the co-presence and interaction of various codes" that must be placed in a specific sequence by the audience if there is to be any meaning (Hatfield 36). What must a reader know to successfully bridge the "gap" and create meaning in a graphic novel? How does a reader interact with the text? What clues does the graphic page give to the reader? And, as Hatfield asks, "to what extent does that experience resemble or diverge from the experience of reading traditional written text? How, if at all, might that experience affect the acquisition of print awareness and literacy?" (32-33).

But this is not merely a chapter which argues for the merits, the legitimization, of comics, but how said virtues determine depictions of the African American as genuine: how the African American form is an enclosure that is made from neat and efficiently packed information to display everything worth knowing in the quickest and easiest digestible way. I state this premise in the sense that there is a discrepancy between what we designate something is (In America we like to tell stories about America being the land of opportunity, a place where everyone is treated the same under the law, that

character matters) and how it behaves (The actual lived social reality). These images are narrative designations that are the means to make their depictions *the* lived social reality. In other words, I mean the discussion here to *dis*close what has already been closed. But perceptions and reality are never going to align, except through stories.

For the sake of knowledge, understanding, and meaning, the perception is that most things can be reduced to their constituent elements in order facilitate ontology. But in comics that comes at the price of believability as details highlight an absurdity: the more realistic the depictions, the less believable they are. Yet, still, because of the lack of details, there will always be something unaccounted for: hence narrative perspective allows a reader to perpetuate and maintain that the view demonstrates all there is to be seen, leading us to mistake the view for reality. It is about how the enunciation of the visual allows for the ever more precise articulation of the presentation of vaguery; in the removal of ambiguity by placing the broadest strokes, the black form states blackness through the visual presentation of the black body. By making something clear through the removal of uncertainty, through the narrowing of the possibility of meaning(s) of the presented elements for the sake of clarity, makes a finality. In other words the visuality of the black form is deliberately made in the broadest strokes in order to bridge the gutter, attempting to make the subject-matter and closure-meaning, making them equal. (i.e. Obama is not merely represented by this form, this *is* Obama).

As I deploy the term subject-matter, I do so with the understanding that the matter of dealing with the subject, that which is dependent upon conditionality, is also to deal with the force that changes the meaning of the informational material into conditional

knowledge. This act of translation means to close, fix, the black form by defining it through ever more precise and accurate bodily performance of vaguery. These precisions and accuracies are taken up as truth and ubiquitous through the narrative: they are so wide-spread and pervasive that they are ideologically foundational, like the philosophical link with the ontological[20], it is the *truth* so it is therefore fixed, perfect, absolute, and unquestioned. In that sense, blackness is defined through its performance, because it is reductive in the sense that an image that represents as black has no interiority or inner-self, the process in which closure-meaning occurs has lived sanctions and consequences on the living examples of the image. This is obsequious invisibility (double entendre in the sense that the observance and maintenance of the blackness as fix and static is invisible, yet it is also it makes the objects of the maintenance invisible) allows for a deeper examination than Barthes did in *Rhetoric of the Image* by not merely probing the connotations present in an image, but how meaning is created through a socio-functional maintenance of an ideological narrative. In other words, this is about contending with histories and narratives that we are not comfortable closing. And too acknowledge the recognizaton would mean to change the story to reflect the new information about how we live, why we live that way, and why the erasure of certain elements. Essentially, the story elements about race we choose to highlight (physicality, monstrosity, sexuality) tell on us: instead of the stories we wish to hear, this is an inquiry into that which stories hide and why these elements need to be hidden.

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[20] This will be further addressed in the next chapter.

This is a historical, methodological, and pedagogical examination of the cultural construction of social meaning(s) through a visual medium, specifically comics. It regards the visual image as the focal point in the process through which meaning is made in a cultural context, how the visual is shaped in such a way to mine a particular meaning from it, how the underpinning conceptual conventions are tied to it, and how they work through the need to visually reconcile macro ideals with micro applications of the quotidian interaction of conscious and subconscious, the designers and readers. This work, the underlying means to understand, is really about the processes of accepting how the narrative works as a metaphor, how it functions to maintain itself as the representation of blackness it is standing in for, and the use of doing so.

THE GUTTER

What makes graphic novels work is the gutter, where "human imagination takes two separate images and transforms them into a single idea" (McCloud 66). It is the physical gap between panels, the vaguely specific place of in-between where, as this will be discussed later, the narrative's motion, time, and change occur: it is the space which is purposely left vague in order to pull specificities out. As McCloud suggests, "the gutter plays host to much of the magic and mystery that are at the very heart of comics," it is the place "in which a reader has to insert [themselves] in order to transform the separate frames into a coherent narrative framework" (McCloud 66, Tensuan 950). The gutter is the determinative factor that changes a page of art into something sequential that tells a story. It is the place that allows the reader the space to discern transitions from ideas,

135

concepts, plot, setting, character, and story development, to capture the meaning out of the imaginative acts confined on the page. A gutter is the separation of the discernible and the meaningful as moments, the space which makes the narrative interactive, and allows for closure in the sense that it represent "clearly distinct moments of an ongoing event that cannot be fully seen" (Mikkonen 77). Without the gutter, comics cannot function because there is very little insertion needed by the reader in order for them to get meaning out of it.

But as this is about the discernment of race—how the gutter between the presented body of the racialized and the details needed to discern it as such—this is more about how closure deliberately does not account for *dis*closure, the ambient, as the gutter is the non-specific statement that forces the reader to fill in the presented gaps with details that align with what is presented and the reader's internal schema: in visuality the depictions of race are left vague because it is easier to accept them as a premise. What I am getting at is the notion that when given non-specificities, the reader fills in details for the sake of clarity, making assumptions that substitute their own specifics in order to totalize the plot, completing the closure so that the narrative makes sense, thereby changing the image from vague to specific. Once the closure has been completed, it has been designated so there no need for further inquiry. This process of the turning a vague outline into a detailed and well-defined image is to remove the taxomonic impediments: the removal of details in the presentation is the insertion of specific and effective communication. So when presented with an image of a racialized body, it is important to note that "[b]etween the symbol and the referent there is no relevant relation other than

136

the indirect one, which consists in its being used by someone to stand for referent"
(Richards 1275). In other words, the gutter's reductiveness in the comics' presentation of
racialized bodies fails to disclose any historically situated detail as a point of gate-
keeping, thereby negating the need for authentification by legitimate contributors[21].
Essentially the "prism of culture" allows for the constituent elements of blackness to
speak for the authenticity of the perception of the presentation as not merely the
representation, but *as* the body, blackness, and the African American experience (Taylor
ix).

The following examples were chosen to illustrate different gutters, pronounced
and unpronounced, in varying types of graphic novels, and how they are used. The panels
were chosen for their lack of dialogue in order to exacerbate the diverse gutters.

The novel *Incognegro: A Graphic Mystery* is a historical narrative, yet
simultaneously fiction. Billed as a mystery novel, it is also a trickster tale, a detective
story, a race tale, or tale of invisibility. Written by Mat Johnson for his twins as a means
to connect with **"Blackness,"** the novel is a fictitious narrative of the exploits of the
actual: Walter White, the former NAACP president that, because of his ability to pass,

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[21] This is a great time to bring up Therry Groensteen's *The System of Comics* and its absence from the
present argument: Groensteen's work is critically viable in the sense that the observations it makes are
paramount for critical inquiry of comics studies. Yet it is the project's main focus, the impetus of the need
of the work, is esentialist in the sense that, in order to function, it must establish an authority comics as
"iconic solidarity": that its whole project hinges on the premise that with an adequately precise and
workable definition of comics, the genre can properly be understood as itself and can spark actual useful
critical theory instead borrowing or forcing terms and schema from literature and/or visuality (Groensteen
12). As the work here is also about the processes in which comics come to mean—but through the lens
narrative and visuality—the problem with Groensteen's work, and why I chose to use McCloud, is that it is
prescriptive in the sense that it means to make the already working system of comics adhere to its tenants: it
takes a working system and attempts to prescribe a certain functionality while *Understanding Comics* is
creating a taxonomy from observations of the existing and working system, not to presuppose authority.
Groensteen's work of presupposition is emblematic of the very reason this current argument is under way; a
standardization of a widely held and normalized predilection.

posed as a white man to investigate and publish the names of those responsible in lynchings of the deep south in the early 20th century. But the novel's layers go deeper in that Johnson places of himself as the *Incognegro*, making him the contemporary bridge with the history, with and as Walter White, his twins, and the text itself. What this means is that, there is a whole confluence of themes and significations that both recapitulate the notion of recovery and redress of the body, the scholarly acknowledgement of it as it historicizes and embodies, and the body itself, but also, in Johnson as the author and subject, it becomes an autobiographical fiction in the sense that he is relaying his own story. What this historicizing has done is recover the little known history and explicated it to a larger audience, reconnecting himself and the reader with the subject, thereby making a material, tangible link between the contemporary instance of the novel's articulation and the historical happening within the narrative. *Incognegro* is a performance of the Black body that typifies the break with the antiquated notion of "flesh" in that it is more. In this sense, Johnson has embodied the Black body by making it a noun, a verb, and an adjective in that, since it has moved from being a "thing" for spectacle, he is no longer the objectified Black body of exploitation or titillating exhibition for the sake of voyeuristic consumption. The gutter, in the novel, is deliberately utilized as an examination of the gaps of lack of disclosure concerning elements of blackness as they relate to invisibility, yet simultaneously relate to bodily over exposure.

On page 18 of the novel, there is a multilayered gutter, within the frame and without. Zane Pinchback has taken the one last job, but in order to fully pass, he must

erase all the obvious and easily traced evidence of a black body (see Figure 3.2).

Essentially it is a scene in which blackness must be erased in order for Zane and the

audience to investigate the erasure, the invisibility of the certain elements of blackness

yet to be disclosed. This is a very powerful scene in which everything of worth, of

meaning, is accomplished with the protagonist facing away from the reader, only

reflecting the—to paraphrase Dr. John Henrik Clarke—colonization of information about

the world and its people. These elements of history, of culture, that were and are

conveniently forgotten, are not merely reflected back, but tainted with the

superimposition of the ever present but unacknowledged material weight and cost of his

existence, that he is willingly erasing himself, becoming invisible, burn it away, all the

while the audience has to contend with historical elements that it hints at by clouding his

image, but may not acknowledge. Coupled with the notion that Zane has to view the

erasure of himself, as he dons the mask of whiteness, the narrative slows in order to give

the reader the measure of the moment, to reflect upon not just what is being stated here,

but also their role in perpetuating in its continuation.

In the comic milieu, this is very slow moving narrative in that each panel is

deliberately illustrating the step of the erasure of blackness and the highlighting of

forgotten history, but it is layered as the impetus of his anachronistic existence as

reflected back at him and the audience. Here, the gutter plays the traditional role of

delineator and segmentor, but also has a role in the reflection itself. The obvious and

traditional gutter allows for the deliberate slowness of the scene; the notion that from

beginning to end, the erasure and (re)presentation of a body of verisimilitude, is

Figure 3.2. Johnson, Mat (w), Warren Pleece (i). *Incognegro: A Graphic Mystery*. New York: Vertigo, 2006.

perceptively present, and can only exist in the singular sense of what is not social or politically acknowledged. But it is through the interior gutter, the frame of the mirror itself, that allows for a much deeper and reflexive examination of the process that Zane is undergoing under the context of conditioned reactions to history. It is this gutter, this inescapable demarcation from within the narrative, a metaphor for the social system, this thing that registers the gap between a clearly defined and seen Zane and that which informs his vaguery with the precision of social specificity, holds true to the presence of the social body in which the reader and Zane must contend with the weight of "ethnic appearance" (Johnson). The gutter surrounding Zane's reflected presence allows an inquiry in the processes of bridging the constructed meaning of a particular em*bodi*ed meaning, and the moves to fulfill, to manifest, an identity from them. This process is important for the sake meaning, and the socio functionality of the body in the narrative, there must be a narrative attached to the body, as an object's description reveals the narrative's pervasive ubiquity, placing "accuracy" and "truthfulness" as the necessities of the maintenance and propagation of the prevailing unsemic determinations of the systemic view of blackness and its performance.

What is happening here is that, through a refocusing of vague specificity, the reader has to insert specific details from their personal knowledge about racial elements that are lacking, taken for granted as normal, or undisclosed. In other words, the narrative that *was* held is challenged simply because of the way comics work: an intimacy is built between the reader and the narrative.

The fourth panel depicts the mirrored Zane grimaced, with a hot comb straighten his hair, effectively erasing his Blackness, his own body, in an effort to become invisible. Notice how this invisibility is coupled visually only seeing Zane's face in reflection which places the white "mask" he is now wearing as a shadow-cloak if invisibility. It is this cloak that allows him to be visually imperceptible, giving him the ability to infiltrate "Americaness" and expose it to itself. Notice that the only time Zane's reflection is unobstructed is before and after his transformation as if the mirrored Zane can only be reflectively inscribed in relation to other American signs. What this shows is that even the process of Black body erasure mimics and echoes what is reflected: that the only way to see an identity accurately and clearly is the erasure of the Black body. The violence here is in the moment of racially marking him as a liminal African American because the page represents an ontogenical transformation away from, but also toward, mimicry as pastiche. Also, because the novel materially lacks color, it requires that the reader—even though Zane is represented and it is depicted clearly, not just that his clothing can be can seen, the material is also rendered, and even the sizzle of his hair—must render closure if there is to be any meaning. The smooth lined drawings articulate the definitional clarity which denotes the ease of identity clarification of "Americaness" through the visual rendering as a veiled cloak in itself. What is going on here is that the novel is working on many layers of fictiveness through the actual (Johnson's and Walter White's lack or loss of Blackness because of their pigmentation is not only an asset to Zane, but the reporting of the story recovers the history of Walter White and the lynchings in the hopes that Johnson's twins will have a less problematic relationship with Blackness) not to

denounce the Dubois/Locke notion of Black Art, but to work with it to make a new definition: the violence here has to do with the emotional and psychological in how Zane uses his physical invisibility to bring about equity by reporting the physical violence to erase the Black Body. In Essence, Zane voluntarily endures violence to equalize the imbalance of physical violence against the African American group. In this sense, his invisibility remakes the Black body as something more than an echo or a priori because he is the exception that breaks the rule.

THE AESTHETIC

Comics work through aesthetics in the sense that meaning occurs within the boundaries, literarily and figuratively, of the frame, giving identity to what is seen so that the reader may see. The idea is that identity means, really, the evidence present that stipulates or represents a particular state of being that identifies and functions from and about the culture. Classically, aesthetics means a "philosophical investigation into the nature of beauty and" its perception as it is the set of principles underlying and guiding the work of a particular artist or artistic movement: aesthetics is concerned with how an object adheres to the pinnacle of the knowable beauty, as it is concerned with how appearance pleases (Baldick 3). In other words, something is beautiful when it can be identified as such. What this stipulates is that under the three modalities of human expression, creating sound, body movement, or making graphic representation[22], are all

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[22] See Goggin, Joyce, and Dan Hassler-Forest, eds. *The Rise and Reason of Comics and Graphic Literature: Critical Essays on the Form*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2010. Print.

metaphoric as the means to express is about articulation through representation, something to perform the state of being for something else, which means, in the classic sense, aesthetics is about a one-to-one correlation between understanding the work, what it means, why we humans created it, and its worth, effectively translating the performance by giving it a purpose. But the work aesthetics is actually doing is to create and sanction a matrix in which the structure of one form of state of being is used to structure the expression of another. Hence written language is used as the primary tool to discuss and criticize the visual, to discuss its grammar or syntax, as if meaning could only be derived through this singular matrix. In other words, the structured rules and boundaries of what is considered the primary are made and observed when different modalities are being used (e.g. like an interpretative dance that expresses like sing or a painting that expresses like a dance) the purpose is to be gleened: aesthetics means to have a singular voice to determine by utilizing the rules of the primary in order to mean. In that sense classical aesthetics is about how well the created expression maintains the rule-governed system.

But the African American sense of aesthetics emphasizes revelation and connection to the culture: beauty is determined through its performance. In other words, how one is moved toward a functioning, a knowing, and a being, as it is the further understanding of the deepening relationship between the performance of expression, language, and art rather than how the repetitive nature of a hermeneutic circle[23] only can

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[23] As it is classically identified, hermeneutic circles deal with the problem of interpretation of an object as relating the elements of the work as it relates to the whole. The idea is that elements can be removed and dissected in order to speak about the whole with authority. In that sense, the term is being deployed here to

point toward the ontologically discursive. In other words, "[c]ultural[ly]-inspired perceptions of beauty are articulated in" and through its performance as aesthetics is functioning on certain commonalities[24] (Alkebaun 33). In that sense, aesthetics is found in the quotidian performance of those within the culture; wherever the African American culture is thriving, beauty is achieved through its act of its people. In other words, there is point and purpose, a value, to everything in the everyday. Aesthetics, in the African American sense, is not in about a symmetry in which an object's merit adheres to the already held notion of the pinnacle, the ideal, but in the sense of how the expression— through music, painting, sculpture, poetry, or dance—moves to reinforce the personal connection with the art; with what it means, in the prosaic sense, to be human through the senses.

Aesthetics, then, is a means of relation, a way we learn about ourselves through the act of phenomenal expression. It is the performance of the gutter, the "suturing operation that ultimately enables the interpretative act of [determining beauty], based on the assumption that the relationship between" the art, artist, their performances, and meaning are "not an arbitrary one" but demonstrate a value and worth through the linking with its performance (Goggin and Hassler-Forest 1). In other words, African Americans need music, dance, art, poetry, and sculpture because they reveal who we are, why we are, where we come from, and what might be possible as these identify us to us: The only way to know the point of the song is how it moves the body to interpretatively dance or

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demonstrate that once the element is removed from the whole, the object's paradigm changes and no longer can relate because its state of being differs.

[24] See Welsh-Asante, Kariamu. "The African Aesthetic: Keeper of the Traditions." *The Aesthetic Conceptualization of Nzuri.* Ed. Kariamu Welsh-Asante. Westport, CT: Praeger Press, 1994. Print.

how graphic representations can catch a moment of sound. So aesthetics is not about beauty in the sense of pleasing the senses or how well the object adheres to a predetermination, but in how those senses help a body move toward beauty. Essentially, through the form, a body moves toward personhood through compulsory *dis*closure of phenomenon that impacts in that moment, making the group better understood.

In that sense, this is a call for a new type of perspective on the gutter[25], and in keeping with the spirit of the ambient, a channel that drains, it carries away the unwanted and excessive, clearing the way for what is important. In other words, the gutter is the means through which the African American sense of aesthetics is found as it visually represents a conscious moment, and the problem with the unconscious maintenance of the prevailing narrative through saccadic masking[26]. Since this is about how perception allows for the creation of a skewing of the data, it is important to note that the relative position of observation only means as it is in relation to something else is the sense that objects and subjects only relay to one another as they are perceived to relate. In this

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[25] McCloud talks about there being 6 (moment-to-moment; action-action; subject –to-subject; scene-to-scene; aspect-to-aspect; and non-sequitor) (74).

[26] Defined as a small rapid jerky movement of the eye especially as it jumps from fixation on one point to another (as in reading). It is traditionally known as the unconscious protection the brain delivers from the blurring of images that is produced as the eye moves or shifts. It is an evolutionary development that is meant to help keep our *sight* accurate by fixing on what is easily discernible and "true." Essentially the brain has chosen to give the next stable image as the one true perspective and not the presented, current blurry one: moments of fixation followed by blindness actually constructs a clear understandings of the surroundings, which makes them notoriously inaccurate. For sake of the criticism of comics as a representation of perspective, the attempt to simplify the presentation, the *appearance*, of stability becomes what is *known* as the brain projects the stable image of Black, Blackness, danger, monstrous, abjectness, etc. The stabilized image, the one that fits nice and snuggly within the boundaries of the category, then becomes true and correct while all the extraneous information is gleaned away for that sake of the simplified homeostasis. This is how and why homogeneity is created. This process is related to Rickert's argument of why *Ambient Rhetoric* is needed. It is important to note that the comic form itself demonstrates the concept, as it is about fixing the easily identifiable and discernible followed by periods of blindness, the gutter. As this is a slower and conscious version of the paradigm, because what is seen and what we are blind to is easily identifiable on the page, it allows for closer and more focused scrutiny.

sense, the gutter can only be known or understood through the means of the frame of the

panel, the marking of the barrier, the frame that demarks the context from one to the next.

It is the merger between the content that is framed within the walls, the things a reader

can be immediately aware of and affect by, and what is outside, other rhetorical actants

that have the potential to influence. In other words, for a reader to conceive of a gutter is

know or understand being confronted with a conceptuality that is always performing a

duality: the framing of here and the portend of what is there. In other words, the gutter

reminds us not to supplant the framing as all; that knowledge, meaning, and being are not

made by the supposed finalities the barriers represent. As the gutter does not allow a

reader to completely make the narrative being spun, but does allow for linkages between

framed designations. Essentially, it is emblematic of states and limitations of knowledge

in that the paradigm itself reflects what thinking is prized, mirroring current and potential

knowledge.

In other words, this new gutter would reveal how the designation on the page, the

thing the reader is interpreting, is already identified the moment the aesthetic is attached

as what is written capitulates toward the reality in which the reader is allowed to control

all aspects of the object's state of being through its interpretation, connection, and relation

to the culture. This is the argument that Houston Baker takes up in that the act of

identifying would mean to rely on a system of simplification in which naming for the

sake of control would be its objective therefore Blackness and black are always already

easily identified by universals. Tradition aesthetics, then, means through the "[s]ocial

phenomena [that] reflect[s] the accumulated experience of a group" and determines its

world view because Black bodies equate with the labor of performance as there is no

attachment to subjectivity; we are always closely related to the bestial, but as monstrous

as we have qualities that mimic the human (Lukács 123). So for the sake of creating

meaning and beauty through the identified, the imaged body in the comic is not merely

the realized manifestation of the representative predelictive discourse, but the

supplantation of the phenomenological in a particular kairos through the revelation of

object permanence in order to demonstrate the reachable Truth touted by the rumor of

Plato's table[27]. In other words, for the sake of the black aesthetic, identity is the act of

transforming the image toward connection and relation of Blackness while leaving the

body object unchanged. This flies in the face of classic aesthetics as it validates yet

simultaneously gives credence to a different social narrative through deauthorizing of

Plato as well as proving Plato fallible because it is not about what becomes true by

gaining access to the ideal, but through a demonstration of the performance of his table.

This is the difference in perception of classical aesthetics and its performance as, to

paraphrase Heidegger, Blackness means to demonstrate its aesthetic, to identify and

compare as "it" always adheres to the pattern of things in which the characteristics of

Black performs being rather than a demand for obedience to a particular ideation.

     In comics, the traditional conceit of blackness exists within the confines of the

character's outline; that is to say, solely within the walls of a paradigm of constant and

vigilant homogenization of what it means to be identified as aesthetically Black. I say this

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[27] We see this reasoning in arguments in which African and African American essentialism take center
stage in which aesthetics, rhetoric, ontology, kairos, and meaning are all attached to a particular and easily
definable African or Africanized sensibility so African Americans can be connected to it. The problem lies
within the impetus, the assumption, that there is a connection or that arguing for it fosters it.

within the confines of what is considered acceptable of standardized consumer products, chain stores, buffets, faux coffee art-houses, planned communities, and sitcom speech patterns: that no matter the context or the environment, black, in this sense, is meant to give the sense of ubiquitous sameness, the appearance of fixity. The idea is that no matter the place or space, black *being* means, first and foremost, familiarity through its appearance, its removal of ambiguity by making something clear through the elimination of uncertainty through the narrowing of possible meanings of resented elements for the sake of clarity. This quick and easy way to identify as the conclusion, the fixed ontological closure, relies on situated knowledge in that there is an assumption about the agency and perspective that means to define blackness in and for the dominant. For instance, the problem with "Lao," "Malay," "Chinese," "Black," or Cree" is the singularity the utterance denotes about those concepts. As when a word is articulated, it not only invokes the concept, but the simple solutive material designation that allows a hearer to *know* it: How we talk about a concept, in the abstract, demonstrates and reveals the problem of making it a particular material—something easily graspable and digestible—is solved. So images are created in which the concepts become material but only through a particular view, hence the inherent problem with mistaking the form the image gives as its content. This is the dilemma with Western European aesthetics being taken up as and for the description of black and Blackness as it creates, through the very auspice, double consciousness. This move to materialize is a means to exert an authority *to* designate, *to* demonstrate a sanctioned and fixed authenticity. This authenticity means to propagate the all encompassing understanding that the context, the thing that forms the

149

structure of the system, functions through an implicit assumption that objectivity, especially when it is attached to knowledge, is somehow immune to the workings of an alternate agency, presumption, perception, perspective, and bias. But this knowledge is always situated from a particular frame or filter. Hence we can have knowledge of Syrian Civil War plight but the kairos of that particular paradigm also explains why the sympathy for them is not as weighted as the outcry and empathy for the victims of the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris. Essentially war displaced refugees from a particular region do not equate within the narrow confines of how victims of the Paris attacks are seen and identified, as those from Syria are to be feared because of an imaged proximity to whom America now considers an enemy. The kairos of comics follows the same logical train as the determinations of meaning are based upon the notion of the permanence of perspective or how fixations of a particular aesthetic importance create meaning, make what and create value. In other words, aesthetics has to do with how the materialization of perspective is the sanctioning that perpetuates and maintains that the view acts and demonstrates all there is to be seen, leading the reader to mistake the imaged view as reality.

In the classic aesthetics sense, this reality, because it is so laden with predilections, means even the unknown has the potential to have not only agency, but identity as the meaning is derived through the form's movement, hence to *per*form. But it
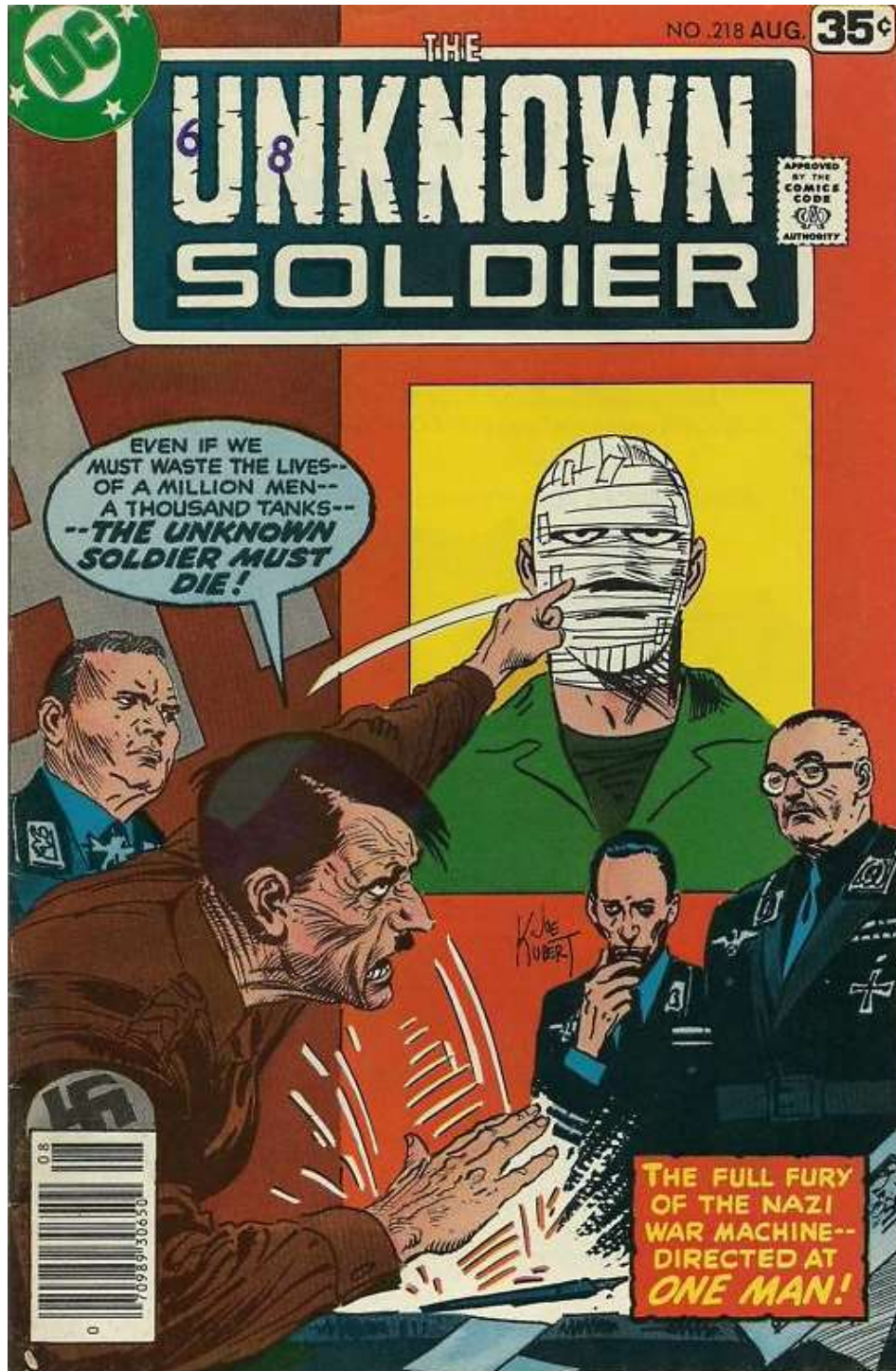
Figure 3.3. Haney, Bob (w), Dick Ayers (p). *The Unknown Soldier #218*. "The Unknown Soldier Must Die." Marvel Comics August 1978

also means that in the inherent value of a "thing" is determined by how closely it relates to its categorical imperative; how a named something specifies and gives credence to what is known about it, an epithet, hence the counter-intuitive notion of beauty through the abject, of magnificence through its absence, monstrosity, or evil. Essentially it means that virtues can be humanized and characterized without the troublesome burden of personality. In that sense, this is the personification of the archetype in which its one dimensional depiction aesthetically pleases because it embodies and no longer merely represents, but epitomizes. Created in 1966 by Robert Kanigher and Joe Kubert, *The Unknown Soldier* (see Figure 3.3) is a DC character shrouded in mystery as his bandaged face conceals not only his face, but any sense of past as he rages his one man war against evil. By removing easily identifiable markers, he transcends the individual and becomes unstoppable juggernaut, a personification of righteous war; exactly what America needs to stop the evil that are Nazis. It is through this specific removal that he is able to exemplify a precise notion of American humanity as he embodies everything the society deems heroic as, without the distractions of the face and identifying symbolizes, he exists as a singular virtue: soldier. It is interesting to note why the character always fought Nazi's in the pursuit of his ultimate target, Hitler, even when America itself was so far removed from social threat. In a time of the Civil Rights Movement, AIM, The Kennedy assassination(s), The Women Rights Movement, the Flower Child movement, and the Vietnam War why was a anonymous character that fights Nazi's so popular? What was the aesthetic, social need for narratives with the character? The answer is that during the tumultuous 60s, a time in which America's identity was in flux, society grabbed onto a

character with definite and easily discernible virtues from when the country could clearly identify itself.

Revamped by Joshua Dysart in 2008, the new *Unknown Soldier*, the formerly pacifist medical doctor Dr. Moses Lwanga, was set in Uganda amid a Kony-esque character, child soldiers, glory hounding celebrities, and abject poverty (see Figure 3.4). Although a far departure from the simplicity of the over the top action sequences of escapism the previous version contextually allows the plausibility for Superman's exploits as he battle Brainiac while destroying Metropolis, utilizes the paradigm of the genre in the sense of pastiche. This story is all to personal and real as it unflinchingly shows children being haphazardly killed by helicopter fire, nuns being raped, and the West's willful ignorance of it all. What this remodel has done is to take the pulp source material and made it "philosophically weighted" and relevant by utilizing the overwrought genre that forces the reader to contend with how the uplift of killing in the name God and country is somehow heroic or virtuous all the while chastising the West's non committal of actual change in the midst of so much unrest (White). So the point and purpose of the original, its simplicity and deliberate, neoconservative harkening toward what is easily identifiable about America, no longer fits as it is about questioning the need for such a simple social narrative, or how such a narrative addresses fixing the problems plaguing countries and cultures that the West had caused. Dysart's pastiche of the traditional narrative forces the reader to contend with the discrepancy of America's behavior and the social narrative that explains it away. It is important here to reiterate, to note, that these pastiche forms are what is making the image, the interpreted meaning

Figure 3.4. Dysart, Joshua(w), Alberto Ponticelli (a). *The Unknown Soldier*. Marvel Comics, 2009

from the visual; the figures are created in order to be seen, understood, known by applying already held notions associated with America's identity, its history, and how it chooses to speak about itself. In other words, Dysart means to not just deliberately trouble the genre and character of the Unknown Soldier by using its very means of propagation and uplift, but also to question the implicit rhetorical process in which following a logical train, pursuing the rules and procedures of the system, leads to a demonstration of the hollowness of such a narrative's faux beneficiality. Essentially, by troubling the implicit notions of the ease and simplicity of the socially identifying narrative, the work if the new Unknown Soldier, the novel and the character, means to alter the public sphere, space, through disquieting work of the reinforcement of the image of the socio-political and heteronormative narrative by utilizing the paradigm of uplift as the mechanism or trouble. But in the aesthetic sense, it does not stop there.

Part of the problem with depicting narratives that chastise the West through the lens of Africa, especially by Western authors, is how singularly troped Africa becomes because, in the end, the narrative is not about the African spilled blood but reprimanding of America as the dominant view "become justifications—for contemporary racial inequality that exculpate[s] [white people] from any responsibility for the status of people of color" (Bonilla-Silva 2). Or more specifically, the narrative is about how the dramatization of violence against Africans is used as fodder for evoking some Western emotional aesthetic; it has nothing to with those that become the consequence of the violence and everything that violence does to provoke the Western reader. Essentially,

this is an essentialism that touts that the default for all meaningful and cogent meaning

lies within the purview of dominant while all else is fair game in its use to the ends of

evoking a Western reader. But Dysart takes a different route in that the Western

essentialism is tackled head on as the only two white characters become caricatures in

that they represent particular aspects of the West's bourgeois: the alcoholic, ex-pat,

womanizing Jack Lee Howl and camera wielding, self grandizing savior of the abjected

African, in the style of the Angelina Jolie, Mrs. Margaret Wells (see Figure 3.5). Taken

from volume two of the trade paperback, the Unknown Soldier, exhibiting an agency

from sovereignty, calls out the hypocrisy that Wells represents in her attempt to take

advantage of the local "color" or help by bring attention to the plight of down trodden, as

any of these situations left the West innocent, the acts of being attentive to the problem

were altruistic, or that creating a discursive discussion would alleviate the problem. In the

panels depicted above, it is important to note that it is not singularly showing the

chastising of the work Mrs. Wells actions by criticizing who is a direct recipient is, but it

is her reaction that is to be questioned in that her own motivations reveal to whom is a

real benefit. Her ad hominem attack directly shows how she sees the victims that she is

helping; I deliberately use the word victim as her actions show that it is not people she is

helping but those beneath her. Her attack demonstrates what happens when her subject

position is challenged in that the sense of taking pictures and making a sanctioned yet

safe view of poverty, a view that does little to help or fixing the situation for those

inflicted, and her refusal to acknowledge her involvement in the perpetuation of the

Figure 3.5. Dysart, Joshua(w), Alberto Ponticelli (a). *The Unknown Soldier*. Marvel Comics, 2009

plight, effectively normalizes the abject for a particular Western reader. The aesthetic

here less about capitulating toward a notion of what is always already known to be

beautiful or beautiful through the abject, Mrs. Wells helping the downtrodden, and more

in the sense of what happens when pulling way the veil of the singular narrative reveals

how what is normatively dismissed, the subaltern speaking to challenge the perpetuation

and maintenance of the monolithic perspective, reveals, through a pastiche of Mrs. Wells'

own posture and attitude, how the Unknown Soldier is now a threat, literally and

physically, and must be restrained as his attack reflects the justified righteousness

through a lens of praxis that challenges the sanctioned homeostasis. Not solely about

toppling the prevailing structure of the monolithic narrative, this scene is about the

refocusing of the rhetorical center by allowing what would normatively be on the

periphery to expand the purview: beauty is had here because what is a more complete

narrative—a narrative in which more of the pieces are articulated than a singular

prioritized—allowing for a fuller, deeper gaze as the West's role in Africa's plight.

ARTICULATE/INARTICULATE

Built upon the foundations of the gutter and the aesthetic, immediacy is the how

comics perform direct involvement with meaning through closure, instantly connecting a

reader with giving a sense of urgency through the purpose of the implication of arriving

at a depth of intimacy of meaning, of knowledge. It is through immediacy's appearance

of intimacy that the presented bodied form in the comics signals a closeness not only with

the narrative, a signal to communicate, a sense of togetherness, of oneness, but also that

between the author and reader, by stressing the commonalities already attributed to meaning, aesthetics, and knowledge, the presented depth of intimacy is directly attributed to what is already considered important (Richmond, V.P. et al.). It is the state in which there is no intermediary, medium, or mediating agency as there is an already existent relationship between the comic narrative and the reader through a simulacra of intimacy. This appearance of intimacy presents an inherent transparency in that there is a refashioning of the beauty of aesthetics and the vague specificity of the gutter to make the interfacing form of comics disappear, which means to make it immersive for the reader as there is an inherent familiarity, a closeness, between the page and the reader. Hence the notion that the immediacy of comics is so only because it does its cultural work of filling the visual field with a single pervasive, important experience as it speaks directly with the audience: the purpose and point, socially, is to create a nearness, to remediate through a clear and authentic articulation that is already read in order to emphasize the established relationship by maintaining the system of knowledge about the depicted form through particular emphasis of meaning and beauty. In other words, a comics image can only have been read if it can come as close to a reader's fixed and known knowledges and understandings as possible of an imaged object through the deliberately slowed and singled purview of saccadic masking, which allows a person to see because it is always at the focal point, the visual center, of the presented world. The implication of immediacy in comics is not only that the successful reader will forget that they are viewing representations of buildings, people, rocks, and clouds and accept the graphic image that it offers as true and authentic visual world, but, without mediation, the experience

159

becomes immersive so a they can become the hero leaping building in a single bound, the dark avenger, or be given the ability to manipulate reality as the transparency of the form allows for a denial of mediating presence of its structure.

Antithetical to the traditional notion of transparent immediacy in which a computer is utilized to generate an object that can and will interact with actors, on screen, in order to present what is seen as not merely plausible, but unquestioned in its authenticity, comics use vaguery in that its authenticity is not in its apparent realness but in its move to mean realness (Bolter, Grusin). In other words, comics work through the movement between articulating and inarticulating the apparent intimacy between the reader and the narrative: by allowing the reader to determine the negotiation between what is immediate, what is mediated, and how it means, comics fluently express a coherent presence of clarity through the clear representation of the closure of predilection. The realness of comics comes from the allowance of an immediacy of representation through the reader's sequencing of the static images into a coherent narrative through the work of the gutter and aesthetics: the manipulation of an image's meaning by the reader means to perform the media's structure through the overcoming of its conveyance. No longer is this about the interplay of aesthetics and meaning as the comics medium is moving to satisfy the reader's desire for closure through an intimacy between what is being read, the reader, and its meaning.

Traditionally, graphic novel scholarship has not been held in high esteem because this medium does not strictly follow the traditional logic of immediate and readily available articulation of literature. Because it houses variables that literature never has to

contend with, it is traditionally dismissed for exceeding the literary category, as it relies on the reader's gaze to determine what is to be articulated. For instance, the theatrical binary expressed by Stuart Vaughn the theatre of the articulate and the theatre of the inarticulate" in that expression on stage is accomplished through explicit or implicit means (Davis 75). Eisa Davis describes the difference as articulate can be found in a Shakespeare play in which the characters will say what they think and feel, but in the inarticulate, such as a Sam Sheppard play, the play's meaning is derived from "the subtext, what is not being said or is unable to be said" (Davis 75). Essentially this eludes to the notion that a play is accomplishing its narrative by being either implicit or explicit; it cannot be both as it is a different set of criteria required to accomplish it. Even though Davis is referring to the theatrical narrative, the premise still holds for comics as what the action within and without the panels, being simultaneously graphic and literary, can be both explicit and implicit in its meaning. According to Robert C. Harvey, "this meaning can be ascertained through emphasizing one element, the graphic or the literary, over the other, or used congruently in which meaning cannot be derived without both" but must be accomplished through articulation, or emphasis, of closure (Harvey 4).

In other words, immediacy works through the power of transparency, through the comics medium need for simplification of the possible meanings, aesthetics, and knowledges by deliberately amalgamatizing the possible meanings through what is presented. In other words the elements used to construct the image, the parts that make up the image's meaning, works to achieve a particular Gestalt. The pose and the motorcycle are from a particular *Purple Rain* movie poster and album cover aesthetic, but the color

of the motorcycle, his hair and clothing, and the background are of a different time and place, but all evoke Prince. This is post hoc ergo proptor hoc utilization[28] of an image in that whatever pieces are needed to expedite immediacy to mix and blend is fair game. What this means is that for a reader to be intimate with the material, a certain amount of closure must occur the articulation of the subject in order to authenticate his story. For example, in 1991, Revolutionary Comics released their 21st issue titled *Prince* (see Figure 3.6)¸ the comic largely chronicles the musician's problems and dilemmas in creating and producing his unique musical expression while staying true to what he envisioned. This unauthorized biography written by Todd Loren and illustrated by Stuart Immonen features many of the iconic moments in the career of Prince, but do so through the auspice of amalgamation: this is not about projecting Prince or his autobiography—as he was not consulted nor did he sanction the comic—, but about propagating a regime that sanctifies his "antics," embodying, to large extent, the Prince mystique.

As counter-intuitive as it seems, the best and clearest way to depict the narrative of Prince is through the paradox of transparent ambiguity. As Prince's physicality has been a performance in breaking the stereotype of blackness as male, dangerous, sexually negative, and of challenging the structure in which blackness is known, created, and sanctioned. The idea is that, in the poststructuralist sense, Prince embodies the instability of the concept that is utilized to define blackness in society, performance, and language

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[28] I say this in regards to the presentation of a logical sequence of the comics page structure while the simultaneity of the representation of body through a conglomeration of visual lexicon of embodiment: because, in either sense, one follows the other, and because the comics medium relies upon the causal relationship, meaning occurs only when a sequence has been made. In the sequence of a comics page, each panel follows a certain pattern, forming a chain while within each panel the arrangement of the lines is the continuity of embodiment. But it is the absence represented by the gutter that allows the reader to put it all together.
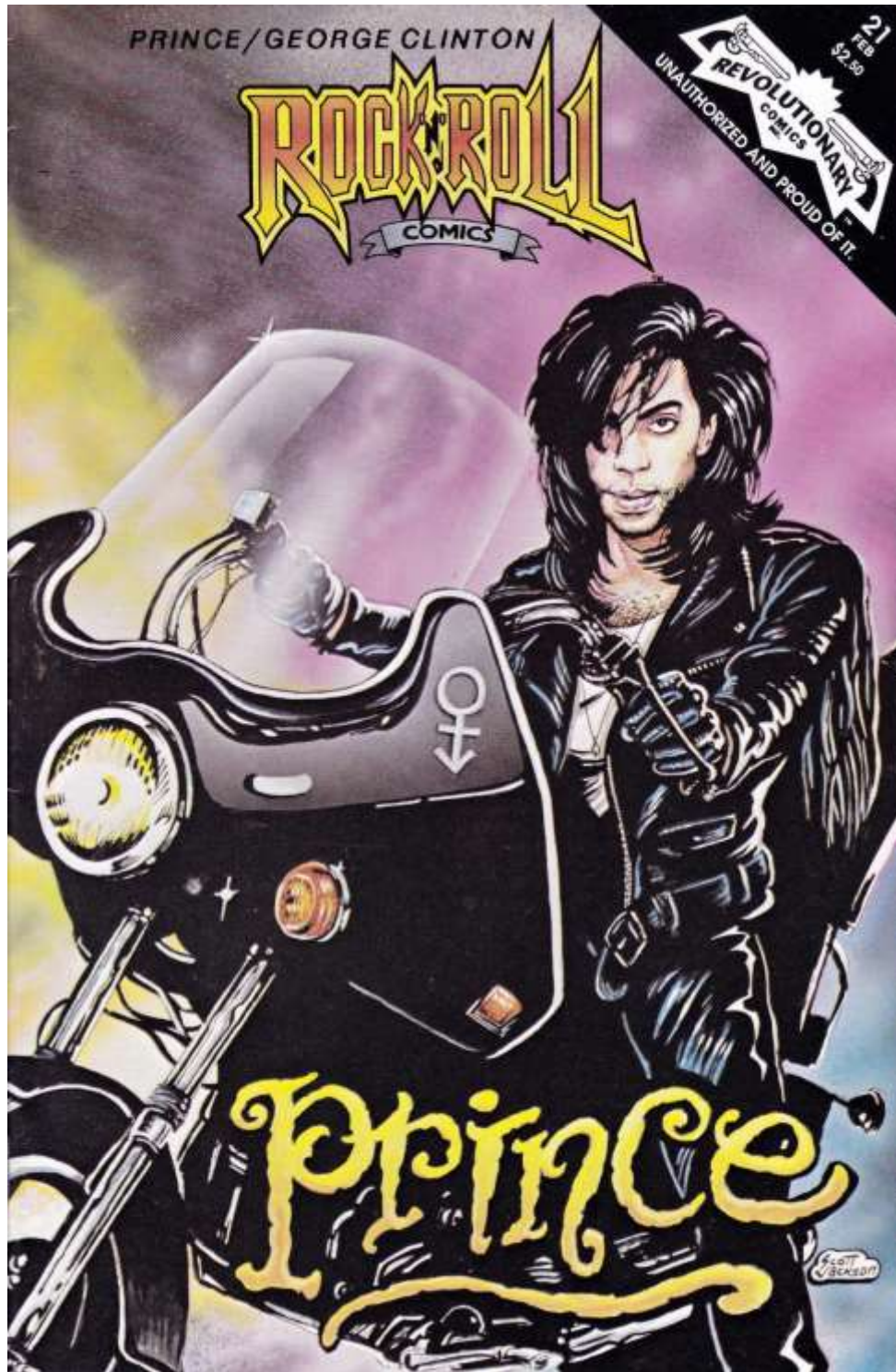
Figure 3.6. Loren, Todd (w), Stuart Immonen (i). *Rock 'N' Roll Comics #21: Prince*. Revolutionary, 1991

by challenging the paradigm of visuality through the performance of exceptionalism that embraces the taboos that blackness represents. The idea here is that Prince's articulation is accomplished through what Geneva Smitherman calls narrative sequencing, that in which the Black teller or performer of a narrative "become[s] the words they convey" (149). What this means is a re-examination of the role the sanctioned particular and singular view has played in constructing the knowable of blackness as Blackness by the clear articulation of the subtext as rebellious antics while failing to connect Price, his performance, and blackness. His refusal of adherence of the structure forces, strips naked, the authoritive through the overwhelming simplicity of compositional ambiguity which illustrates the failure of reason's relation to subject and object in the teleological trajectory of guiding the view to correctly interpret the representation. Hence, Prince's physicality in the comic exhibits a very public phenomenological return to his black body in the sense of the "near-incommensurability between first-person experience and historic-racial schema that disenables equilibrium" that allows a questioning of the ubiquity of whiteness as the natural viewpoint (Alcoff 20).

In this instance, the articulate nature of the graphic lends to inarticulate subtext that gives the reader a way to decipher meaning in the panel and move the narrative along because the visuality articulates through narrative sequencing in order to create immediacy so the reader will know meaning by seeing Prince and as the already sanctioned and authorized version. What this means is that the work's value is determined outside of the subject of Prince, beyond the scope of the cultural center of

Figure 3.7. Loren, Todd (w), Stuart Immonen (i). *Rock 'N' Roll Comics #21: Prince*.
Revolutionary, 1991

African American blurring the lines, literally and figuratively (see Figure 3.7), of potential and possibilities of the person Prince and sanctioning his out of category behavior and dress through a particular framing. Even though he is beyond the categorical, this depiction of Prince embodies a Pass, authorizing his body as a guise of a man free to self-determinate, writing this body creates a certain literacy for and about a reader to see. What this means is that the comic's aim is to make Prince, usually a visual non-sequitor, into something immediately digestible and categorized by illustrating elements of him as natural properties, creating an aesthetic that utilizes a gutter that bridges blackness, Prince's, and meaning with the already held episteme, creating a one-to-one correlation between the word and the thing. As Prince is the aberration made structurally bound, the embodiment of the image re-categorizes Prince sovereign violation as excessive, effacing black as not determined by Prince's own relation to black, but the labor needed in order to maintain it as such.

Essentially, the depiction of Prince in a comic is move to fix problems of his body's presentation as ambiguous through the reestablishment of power, status, and authority through an imaginary to fix his disorientation by framing his space how presence through how he is to be properly perceived. The idea is that "state-ideological functions [of an image] can never be conceived apart from citizen-[object] whose activities and consciousness they call into being, which themselves certainly have not yet been unmoored from the imperatives of modern state nationalism," simultaneously applauding Prince as an artist yet making his aberrant blackness adhere to a particular framing (Harper 476).

SIMULTANEOUS UNITY

In graphic novels, often one multi-paneled page is one scene of the overall story in which each panel is a section, a vignette, that relays a specific part. Meaning then comes when the specific parts are relayed as a whole, united narrative. This page unity, or layout, is a double entendre in that "page" simultaneously means the leaf of paper on which the graphic novel is rendered, yet it also works as an announcement to let the reader know that each panel will comment, augment, reflect back on the panel singly and the page in entirety. Essentially, page unity refers to how the entire page of panels coheres cohesively to render closure: each panel is a declarative piece relating to and about each other while simultaneously being a part of the larger, broader narrative. This requires readers aware of the architecture of the page: readers conscious of clues that are given by the author in such a way that allow them to reach closure not explicitly through the gutter and panel to panel movement, but as a page or scene as a whole. Once again, it requires a level of audience participation and literacy, a reader that recognizes that the determination of the scene's narrative arc can only be accomplished through careful authorial construction and closure from the gutter, the aesthetic, and page unity. Essentially, each panel is a snippet of the overall scene in which its resolution is determined by page unity closure: it can and only will be completed by audience participation. Meaning is rendered by comics strength, the idea that a readers "sense of an ending [closure] does not derive explicitly from the text itself," that the reader must

interact with it (Douglas 184). So in comics, page unity requires the audience not only to keenly make coherence out of the separate panels in understanding the presented scene, but also to understand that there is a broader sense of closure occurring.

As far as perception is concerned, this visual page unity can also be used to emphasize certain subtextual and contextual aspects of the narrative to augment its meaning: certain aspects of the narrative can be shown that have previous or future implications upon the story arc. The comics' use of page unity is an instance in which the reader's participation provides a richer, if not accurately requisite, experience: it essentially seeds the foreshadowing that delineates in which direction the narrative is moving. Like the gutter, meaning is created through the page that allows the reader to resolve tension, move the narrative, and decipher the subtext. Like articulate/inarticulate, it requires an active audience participation for its determination. The kind of page unity depends on whether it is articulate or inarticulate: plot resolution and tension release would fall under articulate, as subtextual and metaphoric would fall under inarticulate.

But it is also important to note that the ability to perceive the unity of the page, especially when considering depictions of race and gender, is multi-layered. Because of what is rendered on the page is the articulation of an abstraction, the iteration of social meanings regarding the state of being for a particular gender and/or race, unity is also about the adherence of what is on the page *as* metaphor made manifest. It is metonymy of the already read trope in the sense of what social and political usage the depicted commodity produces through its surface, powers the body politic, but "not simply in Foucault's sense that discourse involves power relations, but also in the sense that

subjects are required to contain, internalize, and mediate on those meanings" (Armstrong 2). This allows the unity of the page and the body to be "totality and singularity, visibility and invisibility, event and trajectory, ungendering and re(en)gendering" in the sense that harmony is derived through the epiphenomenal stance of not relaying on meaning from the depicted as actants, but meaning that is attained through the emphasis of the depicted metaphor's materiality (Moten 155). So to discuss page unity is to engender a discussion in of depicted bodies, "grounding the production of the object in the mechanism and habits" of embodiment of machination of essentialism (Armstrong 8). Essentialism is an important aspect here in the sense that in order for it be essential, what is being predictably performed is an act of repression through the circumventing of new knowledge through the exposure, which the key to image quality.

Yet again, unity is shown in tradition lexical novels that make use of graphics. In the effort to demonstrate what the state of being of is by showing its reciprocal, illustrating the social default. From page 28 of Paul Beatty's *White Boy Shuffle* (see Figure 3.8) accomplishes something that lexical text could not on its own. In this section of the novel, the protagonist, Gunnar Kaufman, acts out an understanding of the sticky institution of race in that he is already figured out how to manipulate white people because of his body's presentation in the all-white multicultural school on Santa Monica CA. But more importantly, the education Gunnar receives is not just about using his appearance as a means to take advantage of the naivety of the white students, or what the different between what the playground and classroom teaches about race, but in the sense of the authority to designate a default "human" state of being through a shirt of his third

always asked, "Who's going to be there?" The conversation would go:

"Shaun, Lance, Gunnar . . ."

"Gunnar? Who's that?"

"You know, the funny, cool black guy."

Some kids had reps for shredding on skateboards or eating ear wax. My forte was the ability to hold a straight face and pull off the nervy prank. I learned early that white kids will believe anything anybody a shade darker than chocolate milk says. So I'd tell the gullible Paddys that I was part Gypsy and had the innate ability to tell fortunes. Waving my left index finger like a pendulum over their sticky palms, I'd forecast long lifetimes of health and prosperity. "You'll have a big house in the hills. Over here on the love line is your tennis court. Right here by the life line is your heliport. Now where do you want your pool?" The unsuspecting dupe would point to a spot usually midway between the mystic cross and the creative line, and I'd spit a wad of saliva somewhere near the designated area. "There's your pool."

I was the only cool black guy at Mestizo Mulatto Mongrel Elementary, Santa Monica's all-white multicultural school. My early education consisted of two types of multiculturalism: classroom multiculturalism, which reduced race, sexual orientation, and gender to inconsequence, and schoolyard multiculturalism, where the kids who knew the most Polack, queer, and farmer's daughter jokes ruled. The classroom cross-cultural teachings couldn't compete with the playground blacktop lessons, which were cruel but at least humorous. Like most aspects of regimented pop-quiz pedagogy, the classroom multiculturalism was contradictory, though its intentions were good.

My third-grade teacher, Ms. Cegeny, liked to wear a shirt that read:

Whenever she wore it she seemed to pay special attention to me, Salvador Aguacaliente (the silent Latin kid who got to go home early on Cinco de Mayo), and Sheila Watanabe (the loudest Pledge of

Paul Beatty

Figure 3.8. Beatty, Paul. *The White Boy Shuffle*. New York: Picador, 1996.

grade teacher. The subtexted depiction of the shirt worn by the teacher indicates exactly

the problem of choosing to not identify race and its social impact in that by striking a line

through the other colors, the only default, typified by the word human, is white is

accomplished through an absence of what is important. The enthymeme here relies on the

default of equating whiteness with human is nothing new but when that notion is coupled

with the two-pronged multicultural education received and the special attention certain

children received from the teacher, it becomes highly problematic in that being

indoctrinated, inculturated, to not merely believe, but to *know* all roads of thought,

meaning, states of being, and knowledge end at the juncture of human. Essentially, the

shirt takes the time to point, and declare—even in a multicultural political stance—, that

"'Eracism—The sun doesn't care what color you are'" but in doing so emphasizes the

categorical gap between the difference colors, negating them in favor of the preferred

(Beatty 29). Like the gutter in which it is defined by where is it not, the shirt reasserts the

dominant's "insistent recognition of the differential movement of consciousness

demanded by meta-ideologizing as praxis" through the utilization of a particular

pedagogy meant to truncate the rhetorical process by making the reader complicit in the

construction of its meaning (Sandoval 111). What this means is that Gunnar's education,

through the shirt and the school's stance on multiculturalism, is the move to make him

human through the essentializing of the permanence of what is contingent in him that is

already human, by demonstrating what is not. In essence, the shirt is a figure of speech

which bases its conclusion on the truth of its contrary. Which to say that the shirt

romanticizes the racial problem by the evasion of the very thing it is attempting to negate.

CONCLUSION

The "competency or knowledge in a specified area" is the literal definition of literacy (*Concise OED* 831). Yet it falls short of what is required for a successful partnership between reader and author in comics to render meaning through the marriage of the print and wording on the page and the reader's interpretation as "the anticipation of retrospection [is] our chief tool in making sense of the narrative" (Brooks 23). Being literate means having "our own sense of an ending" by making "considerable imaginative investments in coherent patterns" (Kermode 17). Essentially, a readers' competency is derived from their subconscious understanding of the formation of the rules concerning knowledge in a specified system[29]. In comics, that concerns "gap" bridging, simultaneous awareness of the explicit and implicit, and page layout as it augments the possible interpretations of the narratives meaning. The "gap" bridging aspect stems from how well readers are able to apply that subconscious information in that specified system to create meaning. Essentially, the page is rendered in such a way that requires readers competent in print awareness and literate enough to bridge those "gaps." The narrative in comics "causes us [to] continually to modify our responses to the text based on our predictions," it is the space in which the readers "can even decide when their readings of the narrative are complete" (Douglas 159-160). Comics, essentially, needs competent, literate readers to narrate the narrative; readers able to use different reading strategies in order to create a space for agency, a place, from which the text composition "forces the reader to both

[29] See *Concise OED*.

172

participate in the construction of meaning and to be conscious of that process" (Williams 8). This is where Iser's implied reader becomes an integral part of the text, not passive and subjective to its meaning as a the denotative *is* the connotative. In this sense, sense is then determined through the image as syllepsis.

With the aid of current comics scholars, Hillary Chute, Charles Hatfield, Teresa Tensuan and Rocco Versaci, etc., an agency has now been created from which comics identity springs a more theoretical scholarship. What this scholarship entails is more of Derrida's notion of strategic closure, the liminal space where the audience interacts with the narrative, where the critical and analytical eye of discernment focuses on aspects and concepts of the medium rather than strictly on its taxonomic, formalistic elements, in order to conceptualize fictive traces to breed a critique of comics, and thus a new criticism. Since comics require readers able to make coherence out of conflicting fictive traces—readers who understand and acknowledge that the role of the signifier and signified only exists in a network in relation to other things—the ultimate goal is to simplify the interplay of meanings within a given text, readers that "either confirm or invalidate the predictions [they] have made about resolutions to conflicts and probable outcomes as [they] read stories" (Douglas 161). In essence, the Formalist strategy of comics study also enables a more theoretical approach. One that will show how comics "treat[…] [the narrative] in a more condensed and concise manner [as] clusters of historical details and reflections that do not easily fit into a larger whole" (Rafael 4). One that will show how the closure of presence and conceptual order begins with its functional elements, but is ultimately rendered complete through the connection the text

173

makes with the reader and the reader makes with the text. One that is competent. One

which involves a critical approach, not as a market value mode, but as an academic

application that would spawn healthy conversation about the text and its meaning rather

than its legitimacy as a medium.

But it is important to note that in the academic sense the move to understand how

comics work does not negated the social and political implications the renderings do to

maintain and uphold particular systems, continuing to bank upon already held notions of

race get taken up again and again not merely signing blackness but *as* blackness. This is

the implication, the inherent subtext, of etymology in seeing as factual and truthful.

For instance, in the very same vein of the *Captain Marvel* comic example at the

beginning of this chapter, its sentiment, the idea, still perpetuates in the sense that what is

visually depicted means only through the already establish essentialism. The depicted

picture is from the last page from Mark Waid's *Strange Fruit*, released July 8, 2015 (see

Figure 3.9). Set in 1927 Mississippi, is a narrative contemporary with Mat Johnson's

Incognergo, tackling the same subjects of bigotry, race relations, and identity, yet this

fantastic story departs from the Walter White inspired story in the sense that the impetus

reveals the underlying problems of reinvoking racial paradigms through sloppy story-

telling that means to criticize race but through a rewriting of a highly charge history. For

instance, in the image above, Sonny, featured in the background, literally runs into the

Stars and Bars clad Mandingo while attempting to escape The Klan. The problem with

this depiction is that is not only relies on the reductive properties of the comic genre, but

the overly simplification in which the non speaking, no communicative, physical

Figure 3.9. Waid, Mark (w), J.G. Jones (a). *Strange Fruit #1*. Boom Comics 2015.

specimen clad in the highly contentious flag of the rebel South is not taken into account as these visual elements have a different meaning for the African American community. This problem is that as this is supposed to be an African American story about said culture, but only establishes the racial paradigms it moves to discuss and remove.

I bring this up to highlight the very notion that explicitly how the black body is being utilized for a specific end (Gunnar's teacher wearing a particular shirt, the clear and articulate depiction of the deliberate Prince, and Billy Batson's authenticity by performing black) is still being reiterated here. In fact, Mark Waid's response to the criticism is eerily echoing of Eisner's. In an interview with CBR-TV as Comic-Con International in San Diego, Waid stated that

> We're in a social media era where there are so many people who didn't have a voice for a long, long time, and suddenly they have a voice. And they're eager to use it, and that is awesome... What I say about this is not what's important. What's important is what other people who don't have the privilege that I have want to say. That's what's important, and I have to listen. And I would be lying to you if I said it's easy, but I'm willing to try.

Notice the subtle ways in which it is not about taking responsibility for the narrative's intention or its failures, but in how his attempt at listening is difficult. What the statement has done is absolve him of any cultural insensitivity or notions that any wrongdoing were meant, but that the appropriation of black bodies, for the sake of a proper story, can be utilized, for different means and ways, for the white gaze.

Conclusion

Second Sight: Embodied Objects or How a New Plastic Creates a Real Aesthetic

The legacy of Blackness in comics illustrates a sociological selepsis. It is that which is utilized as the formation of it as a paradigm as a context, illuminating elements that are of sociological, political, and historical significance. This formation, this setting, which dresses the image as if it is to be fully understood—as it speaks to the immediate and established preceding which means to clarify—, gives shape to how and what informs the reader outside of the text, as it is already conversant with the cultural, historical, or political as "minds are embodied and that the body itself is no longer best conceived as bound by the epidermis, we might simply say that the notion of the body is itself newly plastic," of the quality of being easily shaped and formed into a thing desirable, as the normal functioning of the world could hardly be imagined without it (Rickert 42). What this means then is that through the context of accepted visuality, Blackness is plastic in that it is durable, impenetrable, lightweight, and versatile: it is about affecting and being affected by the last remaining division of discourse—interpretation—, the result of which is the arrangement that inhabits space by place and placement. Further, that to inhabit a place in a particular determined and sanctioned way means to create an aesthetic of conscious consumption, to throw away the very thing that inspired the meaning in favor of the preferred and simplified. In this way the preferred

animus of the system itself is plasmaticness[30], the omnipotent and universal freedom of an animator to subject the subject to any form, therefore it allows a creator to completely control construct and reconstruct the world according to one's will, fantasy, and whim while the object remains a floating signifier, a touchstone of zeitgeist.

By establishing a relationship with the reader, context creates an ease of communication in the sense that the ambient weaves and impacts meaning while poisoning the environment. In this sense, the form of Blackness in comics creates a link between the reader, the text, experience, and previous knowledge, to make an understanding of what is depicted, thereby giving it weight and credence to create a supply chain of Blackness, even though ambient, impacts the environment by making it toxic because it is plastic. In other words, Blackness establishes context through the soma, creating an aesthetic, a meaning, by surrounding the unfamiliar, helping the reader to connect to an identification. In this way traditionally visual creators succeed in making an ideation on the page, a concrete form used to impart what W.E.B. DuBois termed the veil, that liminal space which "yields no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world" as what is depicted does not merely reveal attitudes—public consciousness—but it is a pronouncement of vested interests in maintaining particularities of Blackness embodied on the page (9). Whether characterized as Rachel, Zane Pinchback, Brotherman, Brother Tate, the Black Panther,

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[30] In a series of essays written in the 1940s, and later combined for a book *Eisenstein on Disney*, Sergei Eisenstein described the power of cartoons as in the inherent and transparent contradiction of presentation and meaning in animation: "The rejection of the constraint of form, fixed once and for all, freedom from ossification, and ability to take on any form dynamically. An ability which I would call 'plasmaticity,' for here a being, represented in a drawing, a being of a given form, a being that has achieved a particular appearance behaves itself like a primordial protoplasm, not yet having a stable form, but capable of taking on any and all forms of animal life on the ladder of evolution."

or even Prince, the aesthetics of the soma are truly a longing to speak some value of Blackness as fixed into existence.

For the form of the black body in comics, it means to call into question the practices of the traditional that make these uses default, normal, and universal as somaesthetics is a means through which the body becomes the medium that an aesthetic is made and maintained. A branch of philosophy, coined by Richard Shusterman, that touts somatic awareness that displaces the mind/body hierarchy in which an attentive individual accounts for the body's effects and how it is affected within the world to attain a better quality of life, somaesthetics is a combination of the body's experiential with the mind's analytical creating meaning. Built on the phenomenological work of C.S. Pierce, somaesthetics works through perception and perspective in that once one is involved and conscious of the process of the body's depicted machinations, the awareness changes the very nature of the site on which subjectivity and objectivity are enacted by placing bodily experience at the center, deauthorizing understanding of what is already known as normalcy. An amelioration in which the act of being bodily aware creates an agency for the possibility of more, somaesthetics is the transactional nature of the somatic experience; it flies in the face of the fixed, traditional, and unquestionable because it is based on the ubiquitous homeostasis of the body working with the ethereal and theoretical of the mind. Somaesthetics, then, is about harmony, not hierarchy.

In its attempt to connect the dichotomous binary between mind and body, it is important to articulate that it is "a discipline that bridges narrative conceptions of subjectivity and embodiment [by highlighting] *attention* [of the] *narrative's role in*

179

sustaining and maneuvering normalization," for the sake of active "'consciousness-raising'" (Jolles 309, my italics). Here the idea is that the body, instead of being acted upon by internalized outside forces (victim, agent, passive or active, free or unfree) is instead the *site*, the landscape, on which subjectivity and objectivity are enacted. Tropological somaesthetics, then, is "aimed at creating disruptive effects in discourse that allow embodied subjects to confront normalization" (Jolles 309). What this means is that the in acknowledging and accounting for the soma in the creation of aesthetics, specifically regarding the trope of the black body, brings to the forefront, the focus, the set of principles underlying and guiding the work. In this sense, Black bodies comics are somaesthetics realized. What I mean here is that since somaesthetics is

the amelioration of the mind and body working together to create something to be read with value, the Black form becomes a tool through which an examination of the *uses* of the image as onomatopoeic: the critical line of inquiry in which the image of Blackness is largely imitative of the "natural" and obviously suggestive means for rhetorical, dramatic, and poetic effect for meaning. That is exactly how comics utilize the image of Blackness in that the lexical and graphic are working together through Cultivation theory, the relation between what is seen and the viewer's perception and its meaning. The idea here is that this is a form content analogy in the sense that the depicted image signs its own uncanny valley—in this sense the uncanny valley, not merely the traditional definition in which a synthetic depiction of human or humanness generates an unsettling quality between of the missing "something," but more in the sense of the participation the viewer

to render the image of Blackness as meaningful ultimately signs the lack of what is already determined normal, correct, and human.

Comics are a narrative realization of somaesthetics in that they can be utilized to examine "the conflation of blackness with ill-informed representations of [the] traditional…define[ing] black people as 'unseeable', not just inscrutable, particularly in superhero comic books, which could be understood as material vehicles for oral culture in the United States," as the body then is seen as a referent of the community, the means of production of what is always already known to be blackness, through a singular representation (Scott 300). What this means is that the purchase of blackness is used in this way in order to show and explicate the naturalness and normalcy of white sovereignty, but it must be continually remade while also in contradiction; doing the same things it always did, filling the space . This toxic, constant remaking is at best ad baculum in that the act of highlighting its convenience so pervasive that any further, deeper inquiry is unlikely as the image names as it identifies and articulates everything that we need to know about it.

The further implications are these: a better understanding of somaesthetics is through W.E.B. DuBois' "second sight" in that the image of the African American is dialectic in that "there is a power in looking" but only so far as to mean to represent the gaps in what Michael Taussig touts as the perception that catches on the debris of history: that second sight reveals that African Americans must be, in order to survive, and need to have the ability to understand the performance of the body white America knows (hooks 115). Somaesthetics, then, allows for a sanctioned look at the performance of second

sight: that which moves Blackness into how it is to be properly valued, as what gives it the breath of life is not merely the over-simplified yet incomplete physicality of bodily freedom—the power of brains being trained to move hands toward an idealized freedom—, but in the pursuit of acceptance or the purveyance of the traditional through which the image of the soma really reveals the scars, the sweat, the trauma, the need to work through and arrive at the ideal, concluding the already and cementing potential. In other words, the real Black figure is very different then the imaginative, which begs the question of how do we understand ourselves as real when the sanctioned narratives deny anything but the accepted, plastic, image? It is this snag that juxtaposes the official, the authoritative view, for the image of the African American, the conglomeration of Black, is a collage of things unsaid but already known. More specifically, in the auspices of the notion Mitchell's showing to see, the relationship between subject and object reverses, revealing what was seen, the sight of Black as social fact, as social truth, as the *want* of the seer. In other words, this second sight allows for an examination of the performant *need* of the looker, how the rhetorical landscape helps create the avenue through which the arrival at the image's determination is determined through the relationship with interpretation, lineage, the gutter, visuality, ontology, somatic epistemology, and the gaze. But the recourse of Blackness is in that second sight allows a challenge of the paradigm of visuality in the sense that visual sociality must be contended in that it always colors and connotes what is being looked at, how it is seen, how it capitulates to what we already know, and what knowledge is taken from it.

This is about the ways which allow for an examination of how systems of colonialism and supremacy—normalcy in visuality—are palimpsestuous, that racially dominate Black folks through the conflation and connection of the "truth" between domination and representation. How the disparity there, especially when we Black folks are using that looking to construct some semblance of identity, "rips and tears [us] at the seams of our efforts to construct self and identity," recycling the toxic and making something new and healthier (hooks 4). The challenge then is "to speak that which is not yet spoken" for the sake of creating and being mindful of our image and acknowledging the plastic history (hooks 4).

In the sense of construction, how the framework of walls, roof, and space are all contingent and built upon a particular foundational understanding, an examination of second sight is about how the entirety of the structure Blackness relies on elements of itself to structure visibility. In this sense the form of Blackness is but a mold from which an image is created, but no more salient than that material that is poured to keep a substance in place until it hardens into its permanent, "fixed" shape. This form grants the constructor the ability to create and fill according to what is needed in upholding and maintaining its adherence to aesthetics. From driveways, walls, highways, walkways, sidewalks, and ornamentations such as gargoyles and lawn-jockeys, the concrete, the content, that fills the form frames the shape and structure of an object, giving it context to sign and persuades in particular ways. But upon closer inspection, the form also shapes the content into a body: that its physicality, specifically arranged to sign a "thing" in the real world, rhetorically creates the aesthetic and meaning through a fulfilled ideology that

embodies. In this sense, the body's context is rendered through a view of the content that has been captured by the embodied form: what the body signs and represents has been confined by the formal system that creates knowledge. What I am getting at is how the performance of what fills this mold makes a real world impact through its potential adherence to an ideology that it signs. In other words, a trope is not merely a figurative of language such as metaphor, simile, synecdoche, or irony, but the *performance* of the content that is caught in the grip of a conceptual apparatus of social embodiment that is inadequate. This is a trepein, a present and active infinitive trope that means to turn, to direct, to alter. In the ontological sense, it is the representation that no longer has to persuade or attribute the object it is representing as it signs and signifies as a basic truth. What this means is that not only does it reveal real world affects as it impacts the conceptuality surrounding the object, it also reveals the need for a real world conceptual performance that drives the *how* and *why* of the mold. For Black content, the act of filling the form reveals the processes that uphold or reveal the work of the misconception of the trope of the Black body as African American, as knowable: the representation of blackness, the mechanism that persuades, that describes, *is* an action that is *in* action, and yet it is metonymy in that it is never whole but always represents the whole. Historically, the black form has been used by social discourse for specific political aims as it emerged as an abolitionist tool. These iterations addressed emerging anxieties about race, sex, class, and gender in order to question society's motivations for the enslavement of the African. As Josiah Wedgwood's Anti-slavery medallion, with its inscription "Am I not a man and a brother?," uses the black form for just that, it is interesting to note how its

rhetoric was received by the populace a fashion statement[31], that this penitent, chained, abjection, in making his plea for the inclusion of personhood, became emptied and filled with stuff of entertainment for the hegemony (see Figure 4.1). In essence, the true turn of the trope was that it only succeeded in the persuading of itself as a trope; the image of the supplicant signs the dominant's understanding of the plight, not to signify the actual, but to spur possible actants to free, not to inspire the abject. Flash forward and the similar image of the Charles Barkley 2002 *Sports Illustrated* cover mimics but with difference in that now there is no question of sovereignty as he looks down and the chains have broken as if it now could say "I am a man and a brother!" (see Figure 4.2). But the trope of the black body is so insidious, so pervasive that it immediately invokes of an image of the past. So we are forced to ask what is being rearticulated, what is the rhetoricity that means to undo if it reinvokes and refashions the Wedgwood? Does it attempt to reauthenticate what was done during enslavement in order to break or reimagine it? What are the power dynamics in such an image that invokes the physicality of Barkley, but not *Mr.* Barkley? Is the presented flesh something discoursed as the only thing that exceeds the bounds of whiteness' purview in order to push through its persuasion? How is this image filled with meaning to do its work? What I am getting at is the link between

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[31] See Thomas Clarkson's *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the Slave-Trade, by the British Parliament* in which he illuminates the medallions, that "some [people] had them inlaid in gold on the lid of their snuff-boxes. Of the ladies, several wore them in bracelets, and others had them fitted up in an ornamental manner as pins for their hair. At length the taste for wearing them became general, and thus fashion…was seen for once in the honourable office of promoting the cause of justice and, humanity and freedom." The design was also printed on plates, enamel boxes, tea caddies, and tokens. In a sense not only did the medallions become a status symbol, but also articulated the accumulation of property in an exercise of conspicuous consumption.

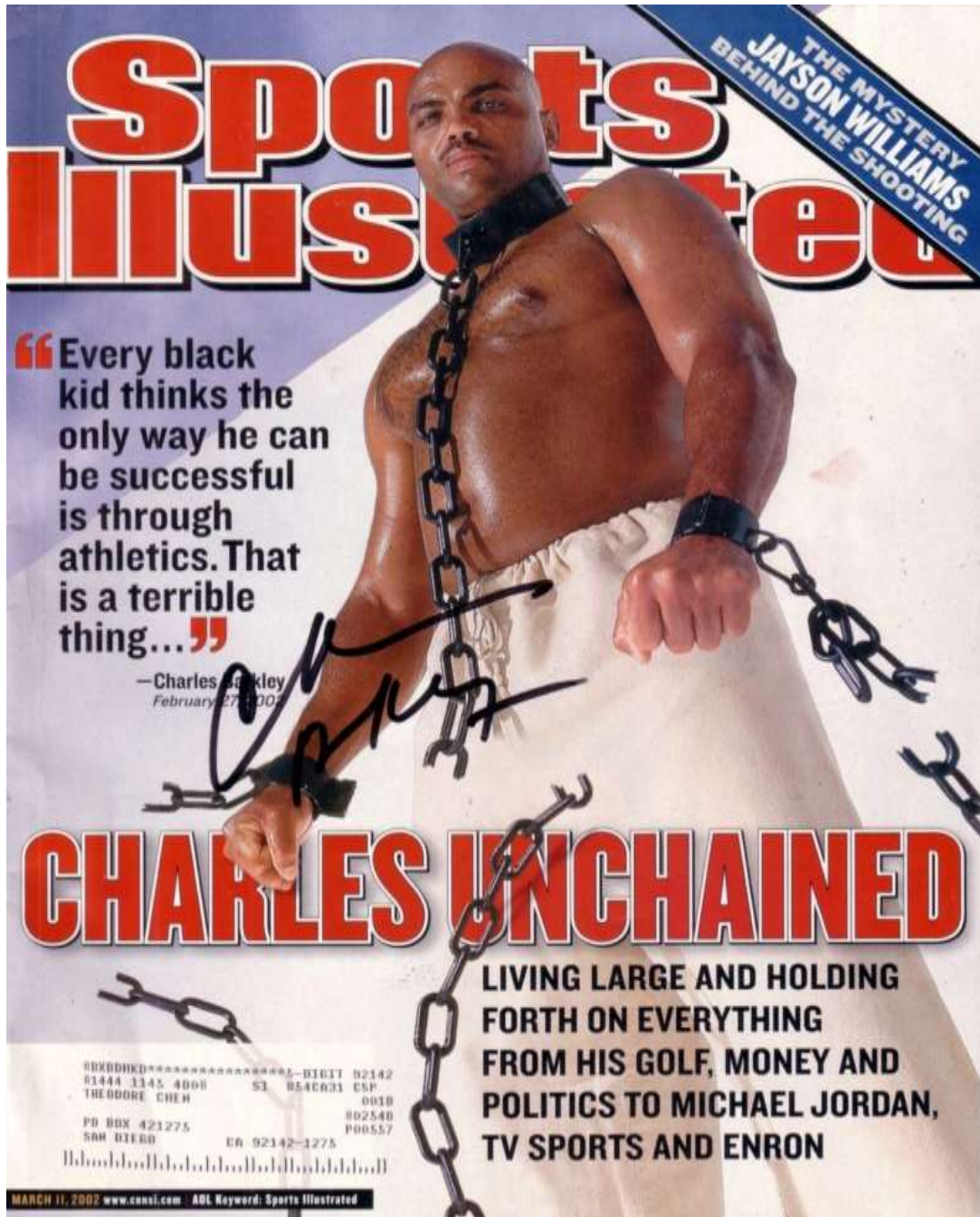Figure 4.1. Josiah Wedgewood's Anti-Slavery Medallion, 1787.

Figure 4.2. *Sports Illustrated*. March 22, 2002.

the trope's development of the black image and how the frame conceptualizes it as a ubiquity that it is invisible. In musical terms, it is analogous to how the John Coltrane song "Alabama" loses all connotation, meaning, and presence if the listener is unaware of the context, the space, which the song communicates through. That without contextual knowledge, it is simply a slow sad tune. However, it is important that the song highlights the plight of "four little girls" caught in a church bombing in the 16th St. Baptist Church on September 15, 1963, as it is indictment of a system or a celebration of the black struggle for freedom, independence, and sovereignty. But not hearing that Trane, taking "the rhythmic patterns of" King's eulogy of four little girls and speaking them through his horn, is telling the lives of them, of Emmett Till, the braggadocio of Robert Chambliss, fire hoses, the pain and anguish of Mary Turner, raisons in the sun, George Wallace, conks, separate but equal, being bright, Bull Connor, and the multitude of faceless and nameless whipped, beaten, burned, mutilated, and lynched folks (Kahn 79). This context is paramount as it was the only means of publically addressing these problems of being black, not simply what was *done* to them, but "speaking" their names gives their lives other purposes. This context creates what Sun Ra termed "being" in that space is the place; that the stories Trane makes through his speaking horn are not meant to be made whole from his "talk," but in listening to what he has to say, hearing the reverb of these people's stories reflected back at him, at me, and in that space, they become mine, they are timeless. As Fred Moten has said, "I am preparing myself to play *with* [Trane]. What is heard there? What history is heard there?" and how is it reflected in me, through me? (43). In other words, if you do not know how this story makes me,

188

makes you, how it connects us both to something human, something larger, then you are not listening to the breaks, the noises, and the contexts in which the embodied body of silence speaks for what cannot be said.

This project has been an attempt to show the articulation of the ongoing dialectic of the body as material and concept in order to understand what Hortense Spillers calls "symbolic integrity" in that the emergence from the form reveals its apprehension as "a resource for metaphor" (66). This is not to make a distinction between body and flesh, but to understand the assemblage of elements that construct and determine meaning of plastic from depictions of the body as a social context through its construction. The construction of meaning from the black body as the ontogeny of verisimilitude in that at its origins, at the auspice, the creation of the black body in art is a Western (e.g. the acceptance of the naming of Kemet as Egypt as not just factual but truthful) definitional practice, a discourse that attempts to create a material something out of the ideal that surrounds it. Not to be confused with ontology, ontogeny—originally used as a biological term in which one studies the development of an organism from fertilized egg to maturity to determine its next evolutionary step—is from the Greek meaning "to be" and is the historical and structural change in unity an organism exhibits between behavior and the environment. In other words, ontogeny is concerned with cataloging environmental factors, the innate factors that influence an organism's evolutionary path and how it appears to be real by bearing the truth. In the social sense, this is an act of physiognomy. The ontogenical scope of Blackness means to create an image that is of aesthetic convenience, the preference of which is to adhere to the viewers expectations;

that the object's meaning has little to do with fidelity to reality, but to create an authenticity that adheres to expectations. This authenticity has little to do with facts or truth, but more in the sense of what it accomplishes for the looker, iterating a truncated sense of humanity and personhood for the sake of social education. This means that the image of Blackness, so well defended by the dominant, is because of the looker's sense of connection and the intimacy it creates because "it offers [to] meet [with] our human vulnerabilities" (Turkle 1). It is about the uses of the image as an aesthetic convenience. Aesthetic convenience is about illustrating the taboo and the threat, what the looker is secretly fascinated with. Further, having this power over preference means the human gets to project meaning onto the object. In that sense, the ontogenical nature of the form of Blackness is seductive simply because it is an object laced with taboo and threat, what the looker is secretly fascinated with, "captive[ating] and liberat[ing] subject-positions" (Spiller 67). These principles, these descriptors of social context, place the image so that it continually pushes and pulls the reader in order to not only create closure, but also illustrate how the visuality is the causality of the image, its use of visual shorthand characterizes the trope as universal. It is this shorthand that is utilized to not only achieve meaning, but also to perpetuate itself and the ideology from which it springs. What this means is that the definitions and episteme are generated from the tropes persuadability, its suggestion, to define and reaffirm. The instantiality—meaning that while suggesting movement (social, political, or cultural), and if meaning is to occur, and although fixed in the midst of movement, action—requires that the reader's gaze must linger in order to create an aesthetic from the form. What I mean by the word "suggestion" is multivalent

in that it is simultaneously an implication, an inquiry, a plan, a hint, a submission, a

proposition that offers an *idea* or gestures toward meaning because the reader draws from

it in order to create the aesthetic, but it also about how that *implication* indicates and

equates a certain fact as visuality. What this means is that the particular way the drawing

embodies blackness "suggests" and "represents"—that is, to speak for and about—the

African American experience. The significance is in how the embodiment of the drawing

suggests materiality of space, subject, and experience through the static gestural

articulation of a representative trope. That the performance of the drawing *suggests* and

adheres to a system of visual discourse that is dependent upon codes and is itself a

performative act in which the weight of the body's gestural suggestion is what moves the

from the static.

Further, what this means is that this plastic is the impetus of the means to utilize

the suggestion as a synecdoche but only succeeds in creating an antinomy. From their

creation from something naturally occurring to their rendering as synthetic, these

constructions are traditionally deployed to make a common object or idea appear deeper

in meaning. The image of Blackness in comics is the opposite in the sense that taking all

of the salient and ambient and reducing it to something easily digestible, in order to make

it simpler, flatting its meaning. This means that the use of synecdoche creates a conflict

between opposing ideals of the rendering: plastic as real, the abstraction is whole, surface

is meaningful, meaning is auto didactic, and the image is always and finite, signifying

itself, etc. What this proposes is that Blackness in comics is a priori because it utilizes a

posteriori. Antinomy, most famously used by Immanuel Kant to show the inadequacy of

pure reason in the field of metaphysics, here means that the somaesthetics of the Black

form in comics is the employment of contradiction in that the image itself has been

constructed as a means to grasp the unconditioned, the uncategorized, to create what he

termed the creation of the socially necessary being.

My project has been concerned with images that depict the black form and how

they are filled through a rhetoricality that uses the created shape in particularly political

ways to produce a real world performance called Blackness. Relaying on ambience, on

the surface the idea is that the process of filling creates a flesh that upholds the current

system through renditions of blackness as phantasmic, in which the only reading

available is from the surface, in order to build a singular discoursed ideology as real, this

has truly been about the systems in which society functions and uses identifying through

fear as a means to understand. But to anthropomorphize it as a body through its depicted

lack of essentials, things that are sovereign in personhood, and thereby an interiority is

made in order to demonstrate what exceeds the normative discourse. A broader look

reveals that these images are the representational break or divide of the approximation of

a non-referential body: that each instance of the filled form's iteration shows how its

rhetorical use has codified and magnified a reliance on the trope of the black body to sign

blackness as a danger or the destination while negating the environment, the form, for the

sake of upholding or negating ideology. Whether the rhetorical aim is to contain through

the frame of the form or to replace the intentionality with another, my project has asked

what is socially gained through a particular rhetorical instance? When a determination

seeks a connection to something human, while its opposition seeks it to uphold ideology,

how does the discourse of race move forward when it perpetually repeats? And can

looking through the broader ambient lens help the conversation? I ask these questions,

not seeking in an answer, but in the hopes that the implication of the asking would

broaden the landscape, potentially leading to a discourse that does address power

dynamics such as ideology or identity, but in how the performing body/flesh best serves

the community that lives in and with the consequences in order to get to that Duboisian

veil, and reach formlessness. It is in this way, I think, we may get to the deeper business

of the recognizing the trope's entanglement with the attempt to separate it from the

ideology through abstraction and the materiality that signifies but cannot sign the lived

reality that it means to represent in order to create an intimacy.

Looking at the how the image is the pivot point that rests between the trope of the

African American and blackness at first seems to be a slanted dualistic inside/outside

approach in that there is no subtle or nuanced sliding that renders blackness: it either is or

it ain't. But an approach from the ambient, in which visualization occurs through the

politics of social need, has allowed for an access in which the mechanisms that create the

duality are not merely the machinations of the system, but allow for a view of the

rhetoricity of the system through these as points of entry. This notion of looking at

rhetoric as environmental[32] means that there is much a broader look into the ecology—

the thought process, the terrain, the perspective, the viewer, the author, the intention, the

reception, the historical context, the politics, race, sex, gender, age, and modernity—as

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[32] Rickert speaks of rhetoric as gestalt: as a way of, not simply persuasion in the traditional sense of mining for something, but as disclosure in which meaning and being are derived from the ambient space. In other words, rhetorical work is accomplished through perspectival affect. That meaning and being are derived from taking into account the spatial environment.

all are merely elements that make up Rhetoric, not simply what we happen to be looking

at that moment[33]. It is the perceptive orientation in which "persuadability does not

appear as *simple* immanence, as something that emerges from our given social

interactions, of individuals and aggregates" but more in the sense of rhetoric being

immersive which moves meaning and understanding from the subject position of how it

relates to something outside of itself to one that looks at what and how that subject

position does and relates to the other elements present within the given space (Rickert

161). For African American literature, and more pertinently this project, and because we

are discussing a literature that uses the moan, the wail, and the voice to characterize—

elements of the African American narrative that identify, mark, it as such—, to flavor, it

is important to know "that rhetoricity is the always ongoing disclosure of the world

shifting our manner of being in that world so as to call for some response or action"

(Rickert *xii*). It is this call and response that accounts for ambient rhetoric in that the

means to perceive, to understand, through sound, through what the ear captures, it is not

necessarily about what captures attention, but more in the sense of what is caught by the

ear and helps move the plot. Further, since the paradigm has shifted to accommodate the

workings of the trope of black body, the broader context has been one-sided because the

noises of whiteness, particularly those that benefit from the trope of blackness, have

largely drowned out any other voices. In this sense, the acknowledgment of the sound in

African American literature, through ambience as rhetoric, acknowledges how negative

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[33] *The Electric Word* by Richard Lanham argues that in the contemporary electronic age of email,
television, online bill paying, and shopping from home, rhetoric has changed to emphasize not merely
persuasion but one is attentive to, focused on, in that particular moment: that what is in focus is what is
persuasive.

space helps color the particulars of the narrative. By looking through an ambient

perspective, the mechanism that equates blackness with the African American experience

is, really, to look at the seams of the dress, the pins that hold the costume together, and

invisible tape that holds the wig in place for the sake of seeing the stagedness perform

outside of its sanctioned work space that creates what we already know to be blackness.

Somaesthetics, then, is a rhetorical strategy that is essential in that it becomes

another layer of social and teleological enforcement as if the reason images of Black

bodies are perpetuated is that the act of doing so justifies the meaning by creating an ism

that reinforces and justifies the system. Ism then means to practice an ideology in which

the image is ality. This suffix, meaning the condition or quality of, not only reflects is the

ism, but perpetuates the connection the gaze of the object and the subject, rendering what

is from the condition of the experience. This doubling is effectively moving the adjective

nature of the image into abstracted noun, denoting its state and/or condition, as it

performs in that "[a]esthetic objects are objects *in* a particular situation of perception or

objects *for* such a situation; they are occasions or opportunities to perceive sensuously in

a particular way" (Seel 21). The goal of these images is not strictly to neglect personhood

or cultural representation, but more about conflating that understanding is synonymous

to knowing in that "knowing an object by seeing it," an instance of what Matthew

McGrath terms visual object knowledge (Shieber 741). In this sense, the Black image in

comics continues to be composed of and for our cultural selves. That to understand it,

"we need to analyze the situation of aesthetic perception., it is characterized by a close

relation between what it does and what it refers to" is essential for understanding its

sociological need (Seel 21). Further, and this is my hope, "[t]hat to which aesthetic perception refers acquires its particular contours through the manner in which this mode of perception relates to it" would mean an honest look at how culture and society formulaically form the proper, second sight (Seel 21). Somaesthetics then is a means, a way, of utilizing the same tools and methods that uphold the system but to decontextualize it, deconstructing it, as to not merely understand it or connect with it, but more in the sense of insight and empathy, not in the service of the system but the people that are normally subject to the fixed, logical, and orderliness as people, cultures, and societies are much too dynamic and varied to be quantified and distilled into arbitrary and categorical imperatives. Although something small, these representations could begin to dismantle, as Toni Morrison states, "the nature of Othering's comfort, its allure, its power" in that the reason for the Other is to "define the estranged self" (14). But also not to highlight expectionalness in that it breaks with the nominally excepted in the zeitgeist (e.g. the acceptance and purveyance of the pejorative "negro" that immediately recalls marginalization, subjugation, and abjectification or the current nominclature to "African American" to collectively address and discuss a particular cultural group when the former more accurately encompasses the sociological experience), but in its universal mundanity in that the dismantling is of the monolith of the ism that challenges the *seeing* into discomfort. In this sense, the contribution to society, that which one must do to contribute to the achievement of the American dream, has little do with success as much as it does with cognitive dissonance of the power structure and those that wield it. Arriving at meaning in this new sense means to challenge the acceptance and purveyance of the

compartmentalization these comic images allow an honest examination of the equilibrium

that breeds the comfort to get at the deeper business of why the Black image is essential

to the hegemony's sense of humanity.

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