

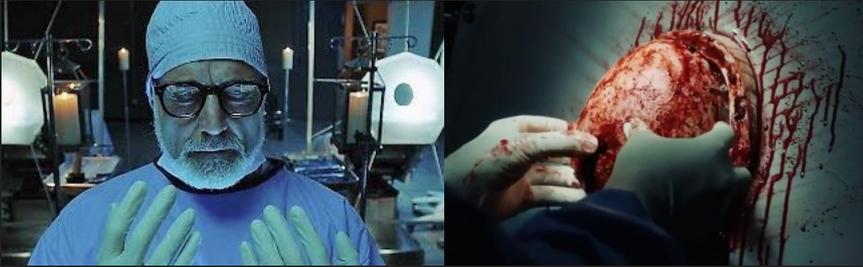
The Racist Liberal Humanist:

Black Plasticity and the Self/Other dialectic in Jordan Peele's *Get Out* (2017)

Nimra Nadeem

WRI 131: The Posthuman
Spring 2018







The problem with White Liberal Humanism

“I would have voted for Obama a third time”

- Dean Armitage

My first question (Motive: exhibit layer)

Why does white liberal humanism cause a denial/intensification of racist tendencies in Get Out?

Scholarly conversation

Common ground

- A. the film depicts blacks as ***commodified inferiors***
- B. white liberal humanism **dissimulates** the continuation of racism

Chammie Austin (2017), Brandon Harris (2017), Cara Buckley (2017), Kevin Henry (2017), Michael Jarvis (2017), Aja Romano (2017), Jason Zinoman (2017)

My second question (Motive: scholarly conv. layer)

BUT... If the black body is viewed as less human and inferior, why does the white liberal wish to embody it?



“Black is in fashion”



Eureka!

Get Out's racist violence is not encoded in treating the black as an inferior, but in treating the black as a potentiality.

Found my Method text!

"Losing Manhood:

Animality and Plasticity in the (Neo)Slave Narrative."

- Zakiyyah Iman Jackson

Qui Parle: Critical Humanities
and Social Sciences, vol. 25, no.
1-2, 2016, pp. 95-136.

Plasticity

“a fundamentally immanentist, mutable, transformable, and indeed plastic understanding of thought, matter, and being whereby the plastic is defined as that which is able to receive and give form and assumes the destruction of form in this giving and receiving” (118 Jackson)

The black mind and body are deemed plastic - “*impressionable, stretchable*” (Jackson 117) to fit the needs of the white.



So why does white liberal humanism perpetuate
this problem of black plasticity?

Transhumanism

- Purpose: Human enhancement
- In agreement with anthropocentrism
- Centered on the notion of progress
- Philosophical root: **Enlightenment**

Posthumanism

- Purpose: Deconstruction of the human
- Opposes anthropocentrism
- Opposes the notion of progress
- Philosophical root: **Postmodernism**

“Fire, it’s a reflection of our own mortality. When we breathe, when we die. Even the sun will die one day. But we are divine. We are the gods trapped in a cocoon”

- Dean Armitage



The Self Other Dialectic

Donna Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto*:

→ Dialectic of domination

→ *“The self is the One who is not dominated”*

Human  Non-human

White  Black

Transhumanist ideals + growing technological prowess

In the name of “human enhancement” and “progress”.



A future where the white can subject the plasticized black *Other* to demands more gruesome and horrific than were ever conceivable

Summary

Puzzle: White liberal
wants black body?

Black not simply
inferior, but “plastic”

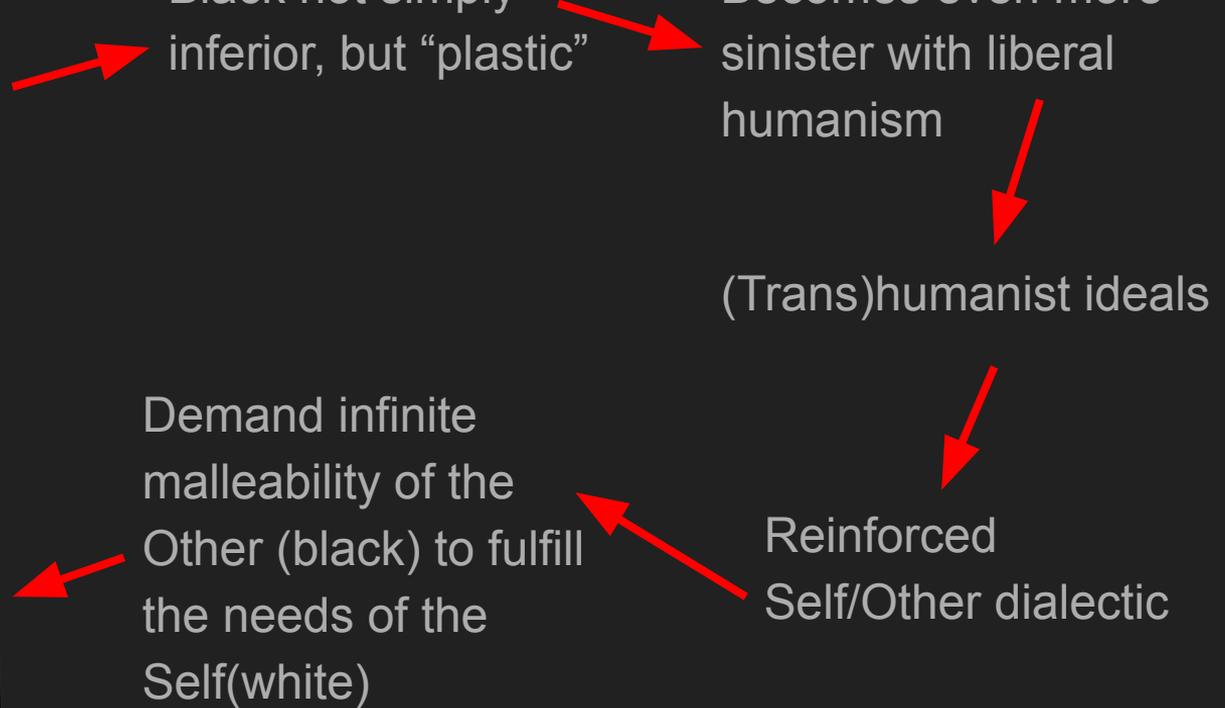
Becomes even more
sinister with liberal
humanism

(Trans)humanist ideals

Demand infinite
malleability of the
Other (black) to fulfill
the needs of the
Self(white)

Reinforced
Self/Other dialectic

**True horror of racism:
Demand and supply**



“But boy, I hate how it looks”

- Dean Armitage

