

## **Mad Futures: Affect/Theory/Violence**

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Excerpt from pages 291-293:

### The Affect of Violence

In the summer of 2016 a North Miami police officer shoots a black man lying on his back with his hands raised. The man is Charles Kinsey, a behavioral therapist. So far, this would seem to be an example of the all-too-common occurrence of racialized police violence in the contemporary United States. Yet next to Kinsey sits his autistic client, Arnaldo Eliud Rios Soto, also a person of color, who is holding a toy truck. Kinsey was shot as he was bringing Rios Soto back to the group "home" from which he had escaped. When the police were first called, it was Rios Soto who was believed to be dangerous by the caller, who reported seeing him "holding something like a gun." The story becomes even more layered: conflicting reports about whom the officer had attempted to shoot drew attention from disability communities: was the officer targeting the black man lying on the ground, unarmed and with his hands raised, or the autistic man holding a toy truck next to him? Both possibilities might be connected to much longer histories of racialization, affectivity, and disablement, but their coalescence in this violent instance of racialized, able-nationalist arrangements of power speaks to the importance of thinking about the co-constitution of race and disability in the *longue durée* of racial capitalism and liberal modernity.<sup>1</sup>

Questions of intensity and excess are at the heart of the interlinked processes of racialization and disablement, often produced through the interplay of rationality and affect. Police forces were established to protect owners at a time when black people were considered unruly property, when indigenous people and other people of color, women, and people with disabilities were construed as "irrational" others against which liberal personhood was constructed. The ongoingness of racialized police violence extends this history and continues to assign to social death and literal death those deemed irrational, unruly, unstable, and unpredictable.<sup>2</sup> To draw from Alexander Weheliye's recent work on Hortense Spillers's hieroglyphics of the flesh, the "enfleshed" are the foundations on which Western Enlightenment's political, social, and scientific models [End Page 291] have been constructed, and continue to bear its burden even as their embodied and cognitive unruliness resists "the legal idiom of personhood as property."<sup>3</sup> When we revisit the affects of enfleshment and the history of racialization and disablement, we open new paths to understanding the "nastiness" of our current moment.<sup>4</sup>

In grappling with this "nastiness," one could invoke the all-too-ubiquitous statistics about the overlap of mental illness and incarceration, about the increased likelihood of police violence directed at autistic or otherwise neurodivergent people of color, but we would like to especially attend to the origins of that violence. How might we think about not only the specific acts of violence inflicted on Kinsey and Rios Soto during the police encounter that "disabled" both men (and which led Rios Soto to be re-incarcerated in a residential institution) while also attending to the state-sanctioned and other structural forms of violence that preceded and surround this event? We may never know why Rios Soto tried to escape from the group home he was living in, but it is worth wondering what parts of a residential setting make it into a "home" to begin with. Taking up the kind of critical disability and mad studies frameworks we are calling for in this forum, how might we understand the forms of incarceration and other modes of social control at play in this event as imbricated with other forms of state violence, and as linked to enduring ontological erasures—of mad or neurodivergent or disabled modes of subjectivity

—that saturate the scene of this violence?

Understanding the interrelated processes of racialization and criminal-pathologization must therefore lead to a more complex and nuanced discussion of alternatives to incarceration. Black Lives Matter has brought renewed attention to long-standing debates about alternatives to policing and incarceration. The basic questions posed in these discussions is what to do when we are harmed instead of calling the police, and what structures can be put in place to encourage greater community and personal accountability, leading to more just and inclusive social arrangements. One important example that draws attention to this is the statement issued by the Harriet Tubman Collective calling attention to the omission of people with disabilities (of color) from the Platform for Black Lives.<sup>5</sup> What does it mean to imagine liberation so broadly and radically (as the platform surely does) without incorporating the perspective or imagined reality and futures of people with disabilities, who make up, by many accounts, over half of those killed by police in the last few years?<sup>6</sup>

While it is crucial to call attention to the high numbers of disabled people, especially black disabled people and disabled people of color, implicated by [End Page 292] state violence and carceral systems, including policing, our point is also to reveal how state violence and carcerality are themselves disability and mad issues: from the disposability of mad subjects and populations and their susceptibility to premature death (Ruth Wilson Gilmore's definition of racism); to understanding the nature of systems of capture and exclusion as disabling; to discussions of alternatives to these systems.<sup>7</sup> It is about understanding the constructions of pathologization and dangerousness within racial capitalism, the entanglement of white supremacy with processes of both criminalization and disablement (constructing people as other, as deranged, crazy, illogical, unfathomable, scary, inhuman) that lead to segregation and annihilation.<sup>8</sup> Liberal reformists frequently say that people with disabilities (especially those with mental difference) or addiction issues caught up in the criminal injustice system need medical treatment rather than punitive incarceration. But what is often touted as treatment and medical care is no less coercive and normalizing than other forms of incarceration.<sup>9</sup>

*The full forum can be accessed via Project Muse and other academic databases (<https://muse.jhu.edu/issue/36559>). For those who would like a copy but cannot access these databases, contact one of the editors for PDFs.*

## Notes

We would like to acknowledge the fierce mad-identified activists, scholars, and communities who continue to imagine mad futures. We also thank the American Studies Association's Critical Disability Studies Caucus, as well as the editors and Editorial Board of *American Quarterly*, for creating generative spaces that have facilitated this project.

1. In general, the terms disabled people and disablism are preferred by those who emphasize the social model of disability and are the dominant terms used in the UK. Michael Oliver, *Understanding Disability: From Theory to Praxis* (New York: St. Martin's, 1996). Those who emphasize rights frameworks tend to use people with disabilities and ableism; this usage is more common in the United States. Dan Goodley, *Disability Studies: An Interdisciplinary Introduction* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2010); and A. J. Withers, *Disability Politics and Theory* (Black Point, Nova Scotia: Fernwood, 2012). Some scholars, however, differentiate between ableism and disablism: ableism, like normalcy, is shaped according to the imagined ideal of "the perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human"

that we are all measured against and thus refers not only to the specific forms of oppression that disabled people experience (Fiona A. Kumari Campbell, "Exploring Internalized Ableism Using Critical Race Theory," *Disability & Society* 23.2 [2008]: 44; also A. J. Withers et al., "Radical Disability Politics: A Roundtable," in *Routledge Handbook of Radical Politics*, ed. R. Kinna, and U. Gordon [New York: Routledge, forthcoming]).

2. Lisa Maria Cacho, *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected* (New York: New York University Press, 2012).

3. Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 44. [End Page 300]

4. Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 193, quoting Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (London: Zed, 1983), 442.

5. Harriet Tubman Collective, "Disability Solidarity: Completing the 'Vision for Black Lives,'" September 14, 2016, [harriettubmancollective.tumblr.com/post/150415348273/disability-solidarity-completing-the-vision-for](http://harriettubmancollective.tumblr.com/post/150415348273/disability-solidarity-completing-the-vision-for).

6. Ruderman Family Foundation, "Ruderman White Paper," March 8, 2016, [www.rudermanfoundation.org/blog/in-the-media/media-missing-the-story-half-of-all-recent-high-profile-police-related-killings-are-people-with-disabilities](http://www.rudermanfoundation.org/blog/in-the-media/media-missing-the-story-half-of-all-recent-high-profile-police-related-killings-are-people-with-disabilities).

7. Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Liat Ben-Moshe, Chris Chapman, and Allison C. Carey, eds., *Disability Incarcerated: Imprisonment and Disability in the United States and Canada* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

8. For more on the intersectional of criminalization, racialization, and pathologization go to Jin Haritaworn, "Beyond 'Hate': Queer Metonymies of Crime, Pathology, and Anti/Violence," *Jindal Global Law Review* 4 (2013): 44–78.

9. Erick Fabris, *Tranquil Prisons: Chemical Incarceration under Community Treatment Orders* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011).

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