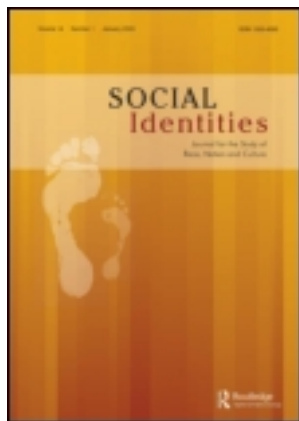


This article was downloaded by: [The UC Irvine Libraries]

On: 02 August 2013, At: 14:44

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/csidi20>

The Avant-Garde of White Supremacy

Steve Martinot^a & Jared Sexton^b

^a San Francisco State University, Berkeley

^b University of California, Berkeley

Published online: 25 Aug 2010.

To cite this article: Steve Martinot & Jared Sexton (2003) The Avant-Garde of White Supremacy, *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture*, 9:2, 169-181, DOI:

[10.1080/1350463032000101542](https://doi.org/10.1080/1350463032000101542)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1350463032000101542>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

The Avant-Garde of White Supremacy

STEVE MARTINOT and JARED SEXTON

San Francisco State University and University of California, Berkeley

If punishment could be provoked merely by the arbitrary actions of those who violate the law, then the law would be in their control: they would be able to touch it and make it appear at will; they would be masters of its shadow and light. That is why transgression endeavors to overstep prohibition in an attempt to attract the law to itself — all it ends up doing is reinforcing the law in its weakness. The law is the shadow toward which every gesture necessarily advances; it is itself the shadow of the advancing gesture.

Michel Foucault (1989)

The Problem of White Supremacy (Exotic Theorisation)

In 1998, *Critical Resistance: Beyond the Prison Industrial Complex*, a national conference and strategy-session, reposed the question of the relations between white supremacy and state violence. Fascism was the concept often used to link these two terms and the prison industrial complex was considered to be its quintessential practice. The political-intellectual discourse generated at and around *Critical Resistance* shattered the narrow definitions of racism that characterise many conventional (even leftist) accounts and produced instead a space for rethinking radical alternatives.

This sort of shift in the political landscape has been imperative for a long time now. The police murder of Amadou Diallo comes to mind as an event requiring such re-conceptualisation. The Diallo killing was really plural since it involved other police murders as imminent in the same event. Diallo's killing was plural beyond his own many deaths in those few seconds, a killing that took place in the eyes of his friends and family from as far away as Guinea. In the immediate wake of his killers' acquittals, the New York Police Department murdered Malcolm Ferguson, a community organiser who had been active in attempting to get justice for Diallo. (The police harassed Ferguson during that time and arrested his brother on trumped up charges). Two weeks after Ferguson's murder, the police killed Patrick Dorismund because he refused to buy drugs from an undercover cop, because he fought back when the cop attacked. The police then harassed and attacked Dorismund's funeral procession in Brooklyn a week later, hospitalising several in attendance. (The police took the vendetta all the way to the grave.) Tyisha Miller was murdered in her car in Riverside, California by four cops who knocked on the window of her car and found that she simply didn't respond. Angela Davis tells the

story of 'Tanya Haggerty in Chicago, whose cell phone was the potential weapon that allowed police to justify her killing', just as Daillo's wallet was the 'gun' at which four cops fired in unison. To the police, a wallet in the hand of black man is a gun whereas that same wallet in the hand of a white man is just a wallet. A cell phone in the hands of a black woman is a gun; that same phone in a white woman's hand is a cell phone.

There were local movements in each of these cities to protest acts of police murder and in each case the respective city governments were solicited to take appropriate action. Under conventional definitions of the government, we seem to be restricted to calling upon it for protection from its own agents. But what are we doing when we demonstrate against police brutality, and find ourselves tacitly calling upon the government to help us do so? These notions of the state as the arbiter of justice and the police as the unaccountable arbiters of lethal violence are two sides of the same coin. Narrow understandings of mere racism are proving themselves impoverished because they cannot see this fundamental relationship. What is needed is the development of a radical critique of the structure of the coin.

There are two possibilities: first, police violence is a deviation from the rules governing police procedures in general. Second, these various forms of violence (e.g., racial profiling, street murders, terrorism) are the rule itself as standard operating procedure. For instance, when the protest movements made public statements they expressed an understanding of police violence as the rule of the day and not as a shocking exception. However, when it came time to formulate practical proposals to change the fundamental nature of policing, all they could come up with concretely were more oversight committees, litigation, and civilian review boards ('with teeth'), none of which lived up to the collective intuition about what the police were actually doing. The protest movements' readings of these events didn't seem able to bridge the gap to the programmatic. The language in which we articulate our analyses doesn't seem to allow for alternatives in practice. Even those who take seriously the second possibility (violence as a rule) find that the language of alternatives and the terms of relevance are constantly dragged into the political discourse they seek to oppose, namely, that the system works and is capable of reform.

After the exposure of the Los Angeles Police Department's videotaped beating of Rodney King, after the rebellions of 1992, police violence only became more rampant and more brazen across the country. After the 'Justice for Diallo' movement in NYC, the police murders multiplied, and police arrogance increased. It was as if the anti-racist campaigns (or uprisings) against police violence were co-opted by the police to augment their violence, rather than effectively closing it down as they had explicitly intended. In the wake of countless exposés, the prison industrial complex has only expanded; the reportage on the racist operations of capital punishment and the legal system more generally have become absorbed in the acceleration of execution rates. Why do things get worse after each hard fought revelation? Where do we locate the genius of the system? Something is left out of the account; it runs through our fingers, escaping our grasp.

If the spectacle of police violence does, in fact, operate according to a rule of its own (as the anti-violence movements argue), what does this suggest about the social institutions that generate it and which it represents despite persistent official disavowals? First, the relationship between police violence and the social institution of policing is structural, rather than incidental or contingent (i.e., an unfortunate but minor part of the job). Second, the cultural content of the actual policing that we face is *to be a law unto itself*, not the socially responsible institution it claims to be in its disavowals. Third, a question: is this paradigm of policing a methodology for a form of social organisation? If so, of what are the police the avant-garde?

They prowl, categorising and profiling, often turning those profiles into murderous violence without (serious) fear of being called to account, all the while claiming impunity. What jars the imagination is not the fact of impunity itself, but the realisation that they are simply people working a job, a job they secured by making an application at the personnel office. In events such as the shooting of Amadou Diallo, the true excessiveness is not in the massiveness of the shooting, but in the fact that these cops were there on the street looking for this event in the first place, as a matter of routine business. This spectacular evil is encased in a more inarticulable evil of banality, namely, that the state assigns certain individuals to (well-paying) jobs as hunters of human beings, a furtive protocol for which this shooting is simply the effect.

But they do more than prowl. They make problematic the whole notion of social responsibility such that we no longer know if the police are responsible to the judiciary and local administration or if the city is actually responsible to them, duty bound by impunity itself. To the extent to which the police are a law unto themselves, the latter would have to be the case. This unaccountable vector of inverted social responsibility would resonate in the operating procedures in upper levels of civil administration as well. That is, civil governmental structures would act in accordance with the paradigm of policing — wanton violence legitimised by strict conformity to procedural regulations.

For instance, consider the recent case of a 12-year-old African-American boy sentenced to prison for life without parole for having killed a 6-year-old African-American girl while acting out the moves he had seen in professional wrestling matches on TV. In demanding this sentence, the prosecutor argued that the boy was a permanent menace to society and had killed the girl out of extreme malice and consciousness of what he was doing. A 12-year-old child, yet Lionel Tate was given life without parole. In the name of social sanctity, the judicial system successfully terrorised yet another human being, his friends, and relatives by carrying its proceduralism to the limit. The corporate media did the rest; several 'commentators' ridiculed Tate's claim to have imitated wrestling moves, rewriting his statement as a disreputable excuse: 'pro wrestling made me do it' (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 25 March 2001). Thus, they transformed his naïve awareness of bodies into intentional weaponry and cunning. One could surmise, with greater justification than surmising the malice of the child, that the prosecutor made a significant career step by getting this high-profile conviction. Beyond the promotion he would secure for a job

well done, beyond the mechanical performance of official outrage and the cynicism exhibited in playing the role, what animus drove the prosecutor to demand such a sentence?

In the face of the prosecution's sanctimonious excess, those who bear witness to Tate's suffering have only inarticulate outrage to offer as consolation. With recourse only to the usual rhetorical expletives about racism, the procedural ritualism of this white supremacist operation has confronted them with the absence of a real means of discerning the judiciary's dissimulated machinations. The prosecutor was the banal functionary of a civil structure, a paradigmatic exercise of wanton violence that parades as moral rectitude but whose source is the paradigm of policing. All attempts to explain the malicious standard operating procedure of US white supremacy find themselves hamstrung by conceptual inadequacy; it remains describable, but not comprehensible. The story can be told, as the 41 bullets fired to slaughter Diallo can be counted, but the ethical meaning remains beyond the discursive resources of civil society, outside the framework for thinkable thought.

It is, of course, possible to speak out against such white supremacist violence as immoral, as illegal, even unconstitutional. But the impossibility of thinking through to the ethical dimension has a hidden structural effect. For those who are not racially profiled or tortured when arrested, who are not tried and sentenced with the presumption of guilt, who are not shot reaching for their identification, all of this is imminently ignorable. Between the inability to see and the refusal to acknowledge, a mode of social organisation is being cultivated for which the paradigm of policing is the cutting edge. We shall have to look beyond racialised police violence to see its logic.

The impunity of racist police violence is the first implication of its ignorability to white civil society. The ignorability of police impunity is what renders it inarticulable outside of that hegemonic formation. If ethics is possible for white civil society within its social discourses, it is rendered irrelevant to the systematic violence deployed against the outside precisely because it is ignorable. Indeed, that ignorability becomes the condition of possibility for the ethical coherence of the inside. The dichotomy between a white ethical dimension and its irrelevance to the violence of police profiling is the very structure of racialisation today. It is a twin structure, a regime of violence that operates in two registers, terror and the seduction into the fraudulent ethics of social order; a double economy of terror, structured by a ritual of incessant performance. And into the gap between them, common sense, which cannot account for the double register or twin structure of this ritual, disappears into incomprehensibility. The language of common sense, through which we bespeak our social world in the most common way, leaves us speechless before the enormity of the usual, of the business of civil procedures.

The Problem with the Problem (Spectacle & Banality)

The dichotomy between white ethics and its irrelevance to the violence of police profiling is not dialectical; the two are incommensurable. Whenever one attempts to speak about the paradigm of policing, one is forced back into a

discussion of particular events — high-profile police homicides and their related courtroom battles, for instance. The spectacular event camouflages the operation of police law as contempt, as terror, its occupation of neighbourhoods; the secret of police law is the fact that there is no recourse to the disruption of people's lives by these activities. In fact, to focus on the spectacular event of police violence is to deploy (and thereby reaffirm) the logic of police profiling itself. Yet we can't avoid this logic once we submit to the demand to provide examples or images of the paradigm. As a result, the attempt to articulate the paradigm of policing renders itself non-paradigmatic, reaffirms the logic of police profiling, and thereby reduces itself to the fraudulent ethics by which white civil society rationalises its existence.

Examples cannot represent the spectrum of contemporary white supremacy from the subtle (e.g., the inability to get a taxi) to the extreme (e.g. the *de facto* martial law occupation of many black and brown neighbourhoods), all of which has become structural and everyday. As in the case of spectacular police violence, producing examples of more subtle (if obvious) forms of 'institutional racism' (e.g., continuing discriminatory trends in housing, education, employment, etc.) has the same effect of reducing the paradigm to the non-paradigmatic. The logic of this journalistic approach generates nonchalance in contemporary race talk such that sensational reportage about the supposedly hidden residues of a persistent racism disables analysis. Both the spectacular and the subtle, against which people can unite in their desire for justice, remain the masks behind which the daily operations of white supremacist terror proceed.

Most theories of white supremacy seek to plumb the depths of its excessiveness, beyond the ordinary; they miss the fact that racism is a mundane affair. The fundamental excess of the paradigm of policing which infuses this culture is wholly banal. Those theories overlook that fact in favour of extant extravagance, spectacle, or the 'deep psychology' of rogue elements and become complicit in perpetuating white supremacy. The reality is an invidious ethos of excess that, instead, constitutes the surface of everything in this society. For some time now, the intellectual quest for racism's supposedly hidden meaning has afforded a refuge from confrontations with this banality, even its possible acknowledgement. The most egregious aspect of this banality is our tacit acquiescence to the rules of race and power, to the legitimacy white supremacy says it has, regardless of their total violation of reason and comprehensibility. Our 'tacit acquiescence' is the real silent source of white supremacist tenacity and power. As William C. Harris, II wrote in the aftermath of Tyisha Miller's murder by the police:

It is heartbreaking to be an American citizen and have to say this, but I do have to say this. We have almost, and I stress almost, become accustomed to police shooting innocent, unarmed, young, black males. That in itself is bad enough, and one was at one time inclined to think it couldn't get any worse, but it gets worse ... Now we have police killing our young black females. It can't get any worse than that. (*Neighbourhood Voice*, 1999)

Harris is right; yet he also sells himself out because he acquiesces in the process of decrying acquiescence. He does not draw the line between respect for persons and impunity. He continues:

Even if she grabbed a gun, was it necessary to shoot at her twenty-seven times? I know it's less than 41, but *that's still too many times to shoot at a sleeping female — black, brown, yellow or white* (emphasis added).

Why isn't one bullet too many times to shoot anybody? It is the job of the spectacular (and sensational reports about the subtle) to draw attention away from the banality of police murder as standard operating procedure.

Spectacle is a form of camouflage. It does not conceal anything; it simply renders it unrecognisable. One looks at it and does not see it. It appears in disguise. Harris, for example, looks at acquiescence and cannot see it. Camouflage is a relationship between the one dissimulating their appearance and the one who is fooled, who looks and cannot see. Like racialisation as a system of meanings assigned to the body, police spectacle is itself the form of appearance of this banality. Their endless assault reflects the idea that race is a social envelope, a system of social categorisation dropped over the heads of people like clothes. Police impunity serves to distinguish between the racial uniform itself and the elsewhere that mandates it. They constitute the distinction between those whose human being is put permanently in question and those for whom it goes without saying. Police spectacle is not the effect of the racial uniform; rather, it is the police uniform that is producing re-racialisation.

Nothing better exemplifies this distinction than the structure of derogatory language. Derogatory terms do not merely signify; they assault. Their intention is to harm. Thus they are not solely discursive signs or linguistic statements but also modes of aggression. They express a structure of power and domination, a hierarchy that contextualises them and gives them their force. As gestures of assault they reflect their user's status as a member of the dominant group. The derogatory term does more than speak; it silences. That ability to silence derives from the fact that, in turning its hegemonic position to account, it turns the racialised other into a language for whiteness itself. Those racially subjected have no viable means of defending themselves. This, in effect, renders the derogation unanswerable in its own terms. The derogatory term obtrudes with a small daily violence whose form is gratuitous, without motivation in the situation in which it is used, and whose content is to render that situation dominated by white supremacy. If it sits at the heart of the language of racism it is because it is banal and everyday even while symbolising racism's utmost violence, the verbal form of its genocidal trajectory. Those who use derogatory terms repeatedly are putting themselves in a continual state of aggression; turning their objective complicity with a structured relation of white supremacist dominance into an active investment or affirmation. Such modes of assault demonstrate a specific obsession with those denigrated that characterises the socius of white supremacy, its demands for allegiance, its conditions of membership, its residence in viciousness.

Because it is gratuitous and unanswerable, the derogatory term grants itself

impunity, reiterates the excess at the core of each racist event without calling its ethics into question. The prevalence of derogatory terms in US conversation goes unnoticed, seen simply on the margin of common sense, as opposed to an index of white supremacy. It is a small matter, when set against such things as, for instance, the legal codes of Jim Crow or the government's assassination of Fred Hampton. Yet derogation comes in many different forms — as stories, aphorisms, discourses, legal statutes, political practices. The repetition of derogation becomes the performance of white supremacist identity, over and over again. The derogatory term occupies the very centre of the structure of white supremacy.

The gratuitousness of its repetition bestows upon white supremacy an inherent discontinuity. It stops and starts self-referentially, at whim. To theorise some political, economic, or psychological necessity for its repetition, its unending return to violence, its need to kill is to lose a grasp on that gratuitousness by thinking its performance is representable. And therein it hides. If the hegemony of white supremacy is already (and only) excessive, its acts of repetition are its access to unrepresentability; they dissolve its excessiveness into invisibility as simply daily occurrence. We can, for example, name the fact of Albert Woodfox's nearly 30-year solitary confinement in Angola Prison, but it exceeds the capacity of representation. (The ideological and cultural structure that conceives of and enables doing that to a person in the first place is inarticulable.) The inner dynamic of our attempts to understand its supposedly underlying meaning or purpose masks its ethic of impunity from us. White supremacy is nothing more than what we perceive of it; there is nothing beyond it to give it legitimacy, nothing beneath it nor outside it to give it justification. The structure of its banality is the surface on which it operates. Whatever mythic content it pretends to claim is *a priori* empty. Its secret is that it has no depth. There is no dark corner that, once brought to the light of reason, will unravel its system. In each instance of repetition, 'what is repeated is the emptiness of repetition', an articulation that 'does not speak and yet has always been said' (Foucault, 1989, p. 54). In other words, its truth lies in the rituals that sustain its circuitous, contentless logic; it is, in fact, nothing but its very practices.

In the prosecutor's insistence on life imprisonment without parole for a 14-year-old, nothing is accomplished by such indulgence. It is only excess itself that is served. That its emptiness of meaning is itself its meaning blares out from the prosecutor's rhetorical reversal in suggesting a possible commutation of the sentence. What was at stake, more than justice or humanity or the enforcement of law, was the power to impose a living death (or not). It is that which must be defended by being endlessly reconstructed, and reconstructed by being endlessly defended. The significance of the case is silently shifted from Tate's transgression (in imitation of imitation sports violence) to the political structure's impunity. In this sense, Tate becomes the fictional channel by which impunity is made real. Ultimately, that is what happened to Tyisha Miller as well. She became a similar fictional channel, a medium for the realisation of police impunity.

Indeed, the state has even invented a structural grammar to organise these

transformations. Take the legal concept of 'vicarious liability'. A man drives away from a traffic stop and a cop fires into the car to stop it (already an arrogation of impunity). He kills the passenger in the car. The driver is charged with murder instead of the cop; not only does impunity mean the cop cannot do wrong, but the driver is actually made responsible for bullets that had his name on them. The police become a machine for killing and incarcerating while the personhood of those they stop or notice or profile is conscripted into the role of perpetrator, the finger on the trigger of that machine. Vicarious liability is the inversion of responsibility by the police. When the police break up a peaceful demonstration, those who have been beaten bloody with their nightsticks are arrested and charged with assaulting an officer. In its stridency, the impunity machine claims that those people killed by the cops were only committing suicide. The existence of a victim of police abuse is transformed into the cause for the abuse, a victim of self-abuse through the machinery of the police ... There is no way to say that this makes sense.

What keeps getting repeated here? It is not just the repetition of derogation or acts of police impunity. While the police wreak havoc on the lives of those they assault, exercising a license implicit in and extending racial profiling, they engage in a vital cultural labour. On the one hand, racial profiling enables those unprofiled (the average white man and white women who are linked to one) to ignore the experience of social dislocation that profiling produces. They may recognise the fact of profiling itself, but they are free from the feeling of dread. Indeed, profiling creates insouciance in an atmosphere of organised violence. Official discourse seeks to accustom us to thinking about state violence as a warranted part of the social order. For them the security of belonging accompanies the re-racialisation of whiteness as the intensification of anti-blackness. The police elaborate the grounds for the extension of a renewed and reconfigured white supremacist political economic order. On the other hand, there is terror and the police are its vanguard. The law, clothed in the ethic of impunity, is simply contingent on the repetition of its violence. One cannot master it, regardless of the intimacy or longevity of one's experience with it. One can only sense its frightening closeness as a probability, as serial states of brutality or derogation. The dread and suffering of those in the way of these repeated spasms of violence are always here and always on the horizon. In the face of racial profiling by the police, however prepared those profiled may be for that aggression, it always appears unexpectedly.

This confluence of repetition and transformation, participation and subjection gets conjugated inversely so that the target becomes the aggressor and the uniformed aggressors become a priesthood, engineering a political culture whose construction is the practice of whiteness. What are wholly and essentially immanent are the structures of racist reason that produce practices without motive. 'Police procedures' become pure form because they are at once both self-defined and subordinated to the implicit prerogatives of this political culture. They empty the law of any content that could be called justice, substituting murderousness and impunity. The 'social procedures' that burgeon in the wake of this engineering also become pure form, emptying social exchange as the condition of white social cohesion. It flattens all ideals of

political life to a Manichean structure that it depicts as whiteness versus evil. It is a double economy. On the one hand, there is an economy of clearly identifiable injustices, spectacular flash points of terror, expressing the excesses of the state-sanctioned system of racial categorisation. On the other, there is the structure of inarticulability itself and its imposed unintelligibility, an economy of the loss of meaning, a hyper-economy. It is this hyper-economy that appears in its excess as banal; a hyper-injustice that is reduced and dissolved in the quotidian as an aura, while it is refracted in the images of the spectacular economy itself. Between the spectacular as the rule and the banal as excess, in each of the moments of its reconstruction, the law of white supremacist attack signifies that there is no law. This hyper-economy, with its hyper-injustice, is the problem we confront. The intractability of racism lies in its hidden and unspeakable terror, an implicate ethic of impunity. A repetition of violence as standard operating (police) procedure, an insidious common sense, renders any real notion of justice or democracy on the map of white supremacy wholly alien and inarticulable.

Mapping the Surface (Repetition)

There are oppositional political movements of course; some are progressive, fewer are radical. But each encounters a certain internal limitation. For instance, there are movements seeking to make the police more accountable to legal and communal standards of conduct; but their role then becomes one of making the state work better and more efficiently. They work, perhaps unwittingly, at reconstructing and not dismantling the white state. What they fail to understand or accept is that the police are already accountable, but to something out of reach of the principles of justice or democracy. There is a (largely symbolic) multiracial or mixed race movement that understands itself to be the very transcendence of race but, in mixing and matching races supposed to really exist, it subsumes the products of racism in ways that recall many dimensions of white supremacist thinking. The ethic of retribution that legitimates the expanding prison-industrial complex in the US and beyond is one of these products. Even political opposition to that ethic outside the prison wall falls prey to a certain acceptance of criminal law; in other words, it assumes that the prison is essential to social order. This acceptance is unacceptable from the point of view of the violence and violation engendered by the prison regime. Political (or politicised) prisoners demand an epistemology of a different order, one that challenges the internal limits of opposition in a radical way — the dream of prison abolition.

How can one critically discuss policing and imprisonment without interrogating the very notions of freedom, citizenship, and democracy? How is one to think seriously about (the ends of) race without rethinking gender, sexuality, and the body? How can any economic questions be raised in this country — where movements for reparations and against sweatshops and prisons are becoming paramount on the left — without confronting the spectre of slavery? How can we think political economy without also disturbing even radical

critique and its historicist narratives of development, progress, and the primacy of production?

Leftist approaches that come as close to radical critique as any already fall short. The liberal ethos looks at racism as ignorance, something characteristic of the individual that can be solved at a social level through education and democratic procedure. For Marxist thought, racism is a divide-and-conquer strategy for class rule and super-exploitation. However, the idea that it is a strategy assumes that it can be counter-strategised at some kind of local or individual level rather than existing as something fundamental to class relations themselves. For anti-colonialist thinking, racism is a social ideology that can be refuted, a structure of privilege to be given up, again at the local or individual level. Where liberalism subordinates the issue of racism to the presumed potentialities of individual development, Marxism subordinates the issue of race to class relations of struggle, and anti-colonial radicalism pretends its mere existence as a 'movement' is the first step toward eradicating racism. But liberalism's social democracy pretends that state oligarchy is really interested in justice. And the more radical critiques subsume the issue of racism in promises of future transformations of the power relations to which de-racialisation is deferred.

This stumbling back and forth between the individual and the social is even reflected in the social scientific literature on race and racism. Most theorising proceeds by either psychologising intricate political and historical processes, or by socialising questions of subjectivity and agency. The psychologising approach primarily attributes the project of white supremacy to the lurid preoccupations of (white) individual or collective psychic or biological pathologies. The socialising approach reduces white supremacy to 'mere' racism, a subsidiary strategy for the maintenance of social, political, and economic power by the (white) ruling class. Whereas the former locates the genesis of racism in (projected) fear and anxiety, insecurity or (repressed) desire, the latter claims that the specific pronouncements and practices of white supremacy are ideological subterfuge, rationalisations for or tactics of the political economy. For the first, remedies can always be found *within* liberal capitalism: from psychological counseling, moral and scientific education, legal prohibition, or even gene therapy to the self-righteous championing of human rights in nations as far away as possible. For the second, it is assumed that if racism can be made not useful to the relations of production or the security of territorial boundaries, it will fade from the social landscape like the proverbial withering away of the state. In either case, what needs to be wrenched from the grasp of white supremacy is left entirely out of the account in the name of the epiphenomenal or the overdetermining.

In both arenas a hidden depth, a secret drive, an unfathomed animus is postulated and a procedure derived that will plumb that depth, excavate the problem, dredge out the muck that causes these aberrant behaviours that we call racism. And in both approaches an issue is skirted. It is as if there were something at the center of white supremacy that is too adamant, off of which the utmost of western analytic thought slides helplessly toward the simplistic, the personal or the institutional. The supposed secrets of white

supremacy get sleuthed in its spectacular displays, in pathology and instrumentality, or pawned off on the figure of the 'rogue cop'. Each approach to race subordinates it to something that is not race, as if to continue the noble epistemological endeavour of getting to know it better. But what each ends up talking about is that other thing. In the face of this, the left's anti-racism becomes its passion. But its passion gives it away. It signifies the passive acceptance of the idea that race, considered to be either a real property of a person or an imaginary projection, is not essential to the social structure, a system of social meanings and categorisations. It is the same passive apparatus of whiteness that in its mainstream guise actively forgets that it owes its existence to the killing and terrorising of those it racialises for that purpose, expelling them from the human fold in the same gesture of forgetting. It is the passivity of bad faith that tacitly accepts as 'what goes without saying' the postulates of white supremacy. And it must do so passionately since 'what goes without saying' is empty and can be held as a 'truth' only through an obsessiveness. The truth is that the truth is on the surface, flat and repetitive, just as the law is made by the uniform.

Like going to the state to protect us from the police, these critiques approach a variety of white ideologies and disciplines as a means of gaining insight into white supremacy. It is a project dedicated to only looking so far at race, racism, or white supremacy so as to avoid the risk of seeing oneself there, implicated as either perpetrator or victim. In effect, all of these theories remain disguised for the role of race and racism as social categorisation. Once one recognises that the power relations that categorise as such are genocidal, as Joy James has demonstrated, then the very discriminatory hierarchy that structures them must already subsume as strategies for itself the class struggles, privileges, educational facilities and juridical operations to which the left goes. The task of the critique of white supremacy is to avoid these general theoretical pitfalls and to produce new analyses, modes of apprehension, and levels of abstraction.

Conclusion

The foundations of US white supremacy are far from stable. Owing to the instability of white supremacy, the social structures of whiteness must ever be re-secured in an obsessive fashion. The process of re-inventing whiteness and white supremacy has always involved the state, and the state has always involved the utmost paranoia. Vast political cataclysms such as the civil rights movements that sought to shatter this invention have confronted the state as harbingers of sanity. Yet the state's absorption and co-optation of that opposition for the reconstruction of the white social order has been reoccurring before our very eyes. White supremacy is not reconstructed simply for its own sake, but for the sake of the social paranoia, the ethic of impunity, and the violent spectacles of racialisation that it calls the 'maintenance of order', all of which constitute its essential dimensions. The cold, gray institutions of this society — courts, schools, prisons, police, army, law, religion, the two-party

system — become the arenas of this brutality, its excess and spectacle, which they then normalise throughout the social field.

It is not simply by understanding the forms of state violence that the structures of hyper-injustice and their excess of hegemony will be addressed. If they foster policing as their paradigm — including imprisonment, police occupations, commodified governmental operations, a renewed Jim Crow, and a re-criminalisation of race as their version of social order — then to merely catalogue these institutional forms marks the moment at which understanding stops. To pretend to understand at that point would be to affirm what denies understanding. Instead, we have to understand the state and its order as a mode of anti-production that seeks precisely to cancel understanding through its own common sense. For common sense, the opposite of injustice is justice; however, the opposite of hyper-injustice is not justice. The existence of hyper-injustice implies that neither a consciousness of injustice nor the possibility of justice any longer applies. Justice as such is incommensurable with and wholly exterior to the relation between ordinary social existence and the ethic of impunity including the modes of gratuitous violence that it fosters.

The pervasiveness of state-sanctioned terror, police brutality, mass incarceration, and the endless ambushes of white populism is where we must begin our theorising. Though state practices create and reproduce the subjects, discourses, and places that are inseparable from them, we can no longer presuppose the subjects and subject positions nor the ideologies and empiricisms of political and class forces. Rather, the analysis of a contingent yet comprehensive state terror becomes primary. This is not to debate the traditional concerns of radical leftist politics that presuppose (and close off) the question of structure, its tenacity, its systematic and inexplicable gratuitousness. The problem here is how to dwell on the structures of pervasiveness, terror, and gratuitousness themselves rather than simply the state as an apparatus. It is to ask how the state exists as a formation or confluence of processes with de-centred agency, how the subjects of state authority — its agents, citizens, and captives — are produced in the crucible of its ritualistic violence.

What is at stake is how to mark the outlines of white supremacist excess within its banality, to map out the dimensions of its landscape as pervasive and ordinary. The following essays are offered as only preliminary articulations in this lethal milieu. In order to engage this problematic, we construct a collective enunciation, a theoretical assemblage of diverse investigations. The four arenas addressed here — the militarisation of police, the proliferating prison-industrial complex, New World slavery, and the history of anti-miscegenation — do not subsume the situation in which we find ourselves. This project strives toward neither completeness, nor a definitive articulation. What unites these essays is an attention to the shadows and living legacies of racial despotism, the direct relations of force that are often occluded in analyses of hegemony and its quotidian institutions. We seek to displace without dispensing with the institutional rationalisations of US white supremacy in order to see its own vigorous reconstitution. This will ultimately mean addressing every social motif (a task we only begin here) as entailing a paradoxical or even incompre-

hensible scandal, something beyond the rules of society yet pawned off on us as proper and legitimate.

Steve Martinot may be contacted at San Francisco State University, or via e-mail: marto@ocf.berkeley.edu, and Jared Sexton at University of California, Berkeley, e-mail: jcsexton@uclink.berkeley.edu.

References

- Foucault, M. and M. Blanchot (1989) *Foucault/Blanchot*, translated by J. Mehlman, New York: Zone Books.
- Neighborhood Voice* (1999) 5 (6, June), http://www.wpmco.com/covrstry_tyisha_miller.htm.

