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White Skin, Dark Meat: Identity's Pressure Point

Oedipus—still, at the end of the day, our favorite bedtime story—simply by giving it a name at all has necessarily given a *bad* name to the relations between fathers and sons: which is also to say that the badness of those relations finds an alibi in Oedipus's name. Enjoying the greatest public embrace of any Freudian concept, the Oedipus complex has suffered, as objects we love not infrequently do, the violence of a normalization that refuses to grant it any complexity by stripping it of muscle and sinew and blood and reducing it to nothing but a bleached and whitewashed imitation of itself: a skeletal Oedipal myth in which, as Howard Dietz puts it succinctly in his lyric to "That's Entertainment," "a chap kills his father/ And causes a lot of bother." Like many a skeleton, this one too comes equipped with its very own closet, but where closets usually provide a dark space in which to conceal such a skeleton, here, instead, the skeleton manages to hide the dark space of the closet. For the barebones account of Oedipus that continues diffusely, throughout our culture, to stiffen more than men's spines alone, conveniently frames tensions between fathers and sons as merely the "natural" masculine practice of dicking about the dick, which, however frequent its invocation as a "bone," remains, for our patriarchal social order, nothing less than

prime beef. And so long as the bone of contention between fathers and sons is the cut of that meat, we can boast that junior has rightfully inherited his old man's healthy appetite. But the law we delight to call "Oedipal" may, at bottom, have less to do with their picking a bone who has the meat, and more to do with a sense that the meat itself is no more than a bone: a bone tossed to sons by their fathers as mere compensation, a sort of sop, for paternal imposition of the cultural law demanding the son disavow the anus as a site or seat of pleasure, assuring, thereafter, that memories of all such repudiated pleasures can only return as does the father himself: that is, as a pain in the ass.

For the anal zone, unique among areas eroticized in the various stages that chart libidinal "development," does not just pass from early preeminence to later subordination, it also undergoes a demonization within a heterosexually-inflected Symbolic that subjects the history of its libidinal cathexis to a revisionary repression. It not only loses legitimacy, that is, as a site for the production of desire, it also comes to define the space of what is viscerally *undesirable*, the space that produces our primary cultural referent for disgust. "This transformation

of affect,” Freud unambiguously declares, “constitutes the essence of what we term ‘repression’” (emphasis in original), an assertion to which he quickly adds: “we have only to recall the way in which disgust emerges in childhood after having been absent to begin with.”¹ He returns to this theme in a footnote (added to his text in 1920) that elaborates on “The Activity of the Anal Zone” in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*:

Lou-Andreas-Salomé (1916), in a paper which has given us a very much deeper understanding of the significance of anal erotism, has shown how the history of the first prohibition which a child comes across – the prohibition against getting pleasure from anal activity and its products – has a decisive effect on his whole development. This must be the first occasion on which the infant has a glimpse of an environment hostile to his instinctual impulses, on which he learns to separate his own entity from this alien one and on which he carries out the first “repression” of his possibilities for pleasure. From that time on, what is “anal” remains the symbol of everything that is to be repudiated and excluded from life. The clear-cut distinction between anal and genital processes which is later insisted upon is contradicted by the close anatomical and functional analogies and relations which hold between them. The genital apparatus remains the neighbour of the cloaca, and actually [to quote Lou Andreas-Salomé] “in the case of women is only taken from it on lease.” (S.E., 7, 187)

The straight man’s ass may seem, at first glance, to profit quite handsomely by “leasing” its one-time corridor of erotic stimulation to the female genitalia, since it does so for an exorbitant fee that includes, as downpayment, an inflexible mandate of cultural abjection. The income it tidily clears for refusing to let anal pleasure come in, is as clear as the cut of the genital difference toward which Oedipus endlessly stares. If such an exchange makes

sense in the cultural economy of masculine privilege, however, it does so because that economy succeeds in making its sense of sense appear as unimpeachably sensible—an effect in no small measure achieved through a hierarchical disposition of the senses that puts the visual securely on top (allied as it is with the hetero-genital necessity of bearing witness to “clear-cut distinction[s]”²) at the expense, for example, of olfactory sensation, which gets consigned, by and large, to the bottom.

The eye’s belated primacy, then, like the developmental “triumph” realized by the genital fixation of the libido, depends on the logic that successfully inculcates a generalized anal disgust. The eye, one might say, is always, in consequence, effectively the eye of the law, looking to establish a clear-cut distinction between subject and object, between inside and out, and bespeaking a fundamental belief in the visual determinacy of presence and absence. That determinacy is determined in the first place by the eye-opening fiat of the father’s law, which produces the “hostile” environment of which the infant first “has a glimpse” insofar as it learns that a glimpse is precisely what it must be satisfied now to have: a glimpse that will be in place of (and thus, where the psyche is concerned, in *the* place of, as well) the anal libidinal satisfaction it must, as subject of the law, renounce. Only with this first renunciation of the body’s access to sensory enjoyment does the subject, *as a subject*, acquire a body of its own – a body carved into Symbolic shape with a glance of the Oedipal cleaver as deftly as an experienced butcher peels a tender filet from the bone. From this moment on the body of the world, no less than the world of the body, will be illuminated by an ocular logic expanding the “clear-cut distinction between anal and genital” into the principle of visual perception, so that vision thereafter will always occur, at least figuratively, in black and white.

This figure, however, produces a powerful *effect of literality* by coloring the way in which racialized bodies, especially those viewed as “black,” enter the fantasmatic informing the body as such in the West. For the repression of anal pleasure within the regime of the Western symbolic gives rise to the phallus, as a sort of carrot, and to disgust, as a sort of stick, to shape the body through division into contrasting zones of front and b(l)ack, zones kept straight through a visual epistemology that translates, or more precisely, translates back, the phallic carrot – like its vegetable counterpart, the stuff of proper vision – into the stick symptomatically located, as the saying goes, up the straight man’s ass. Just as the female genitals take their privilege on lease from the anal opening stained, through prohibition, with the tincture of disgust, so the phallus in turn takes its standing from what, attributing the phrase to a patient, Freud will describe as the “‘faecal’ stick.”³ As a result, the insistent Oedipal – or, better, the insistent *Oedipalizing* – focus on castration as the law that secures the truth of a “clear-cut” genital difference reiterates and displaces the determining, because culturally performative, insistence on another distinction represented as being – which is also to say, represented *so as to be* – clear-cut: that posited between anal and genital to elaborate our governing cultural fantasy of a urethro-genital process able, through the unfailingly redemptive agency of hetero-genital desire, to wash away, as if with a stream of antiseptic astringency, the primal taint of dirt and disgust with which, and as which, the law’s prohibition first darkens our youthful doorway – or at any rate, with which it manages to darken the doorway in back.

Thus the stain of anality persists as the mark without which the genitalized body, incorporated into and by the Symbolic, could neither take shape nor come into

view since that body accedes to meaning, accedes to the genital either/or, only by way of the law as acculturating agency of disgust. That disgust pursue the Symbolic subject to seek an egosyntonic coherence by repudiating that part of its body where the stain or the “dirt” of the law’s enjoyment – its enjoyment precisely of performing disgust – leaves the structurally requisite imprint that the law calls the subject to efface.

This structure in itself does not mandate any specific social or political ideology nor determine in advance as inevitable any particular cultural formation, but it provides the material from which different societies can fashion what Winthrop Jordan, in an analysis written in 1968, described as “more inward biocultural values” that afford, in Jordan’s argument, an apparently “natural” foundation for the disgust that gives rise to the fantasy of eliminating abjected populations from the social body.⁴ Adducing the psychic economy within which such fantasies have converged on black women and men for numerous white Americans from the eighteenth century forward, Jordan proposes that

the fantasy of removing Negroes afforded them a measure of satisfaction of which they were unaware. It is possible that the idea functioned partly at a profound level as a symbolic gesture of their disgust with Negroes and the deep discomforts their importation had caused. ... [T]he simultaneous expulsion of black men and noxious slavery could scarcely help but afford a measure of cathartic relief. This is to suggest that for some men the idea of Negro removal may have functioned, in part, as an expression of certain psychic impulses associated with the bodily function to which the idea corresponded with such arresting precision.⁵

Strongly influenced by Jordan’s analysis, Joel Kovel’s study of white racism maintains that “the nuclear

experience of the aversive racist is a sense of disgust about the body of the black person based upon a very primitive fantasy: that it contains an essence--dirt--that smells and may rub off onto the body of the racist. ... Modern aversion stems from anal sadism," he insists, "while domination is phallic and oedipal in origin."⁶ In each of these accounts white racism, insofar as it appears to proceed from the racist subject's unrecognized anal fixation, testifies to and affirms the privilege of a genitalizing Oedipality; for the phobic relation to the b(l)ack that falls under the aegis of anality presupposes an investment in the either/or mandate colored by the emergence of disgust. The diagnosis of "anal sadism," then, though tainted, perhaps sadistically, by the signifier of anality, names a normative relation of "aversion" to whatever signifies as "anal" and expresses, thereby, the Symbolic's foundational law of genital difference with a clarity that risks making *too* clear the violence inherent in its paranoid vision of vision itself as always clear-cut.⁷

I intend in what follows to examine how this Oedipalizing logic entangles, for the modern West, anti-black racism and homophobia in complex relation to each other while finding in each the pressure point of a visual epistemology. By reading Hubert Cornfields's film, *Pressure Point* (1962), which collocates racism, Oedipality, and the political logic of disgust, I hope to identify the point where identity emerges both through and as the very enjoyment disgust by means of which subjects are acculturated and bound into normative social relations.

Reviewing *Pressure Point* for the *New York Times*, Howard Thompson found it easy to offer a lean account

of its plot: "The case history of a young psychopathic convict—a vicious paranoid and a professional hater of Negroes and Jews — as told to a Negro psychiatrist is the sum and substance of *Pressure Point*."⁸ Stanley Kaufmann, in the *New Republic*, fleshed out his summary with a few details, but similarly directed the reader's attention to the movie's narrative meat: "There is a framework that takes place in the present. The Negro doctor is now the gray-haired chief of a mental hospital. A staff member is upset: he is making no progress on his treatment of a Negro patient who hates him for being white. [. . .] To calm down the junior doctor, the chief tells him about the Fascist whom he treated 20 years before. This is the body of the picture."⁹ The body of the picture indeed: *Pressure Point* may find its "sum and substance" in encounters between the unnamed black psychiatrist (played by Sidney Poitier) and the unnamed white supremacist (played by Bobby Darin) whose paranoid symptoms he treats, but those encounters all pivot on the function of fantasy in our picturing of the body.

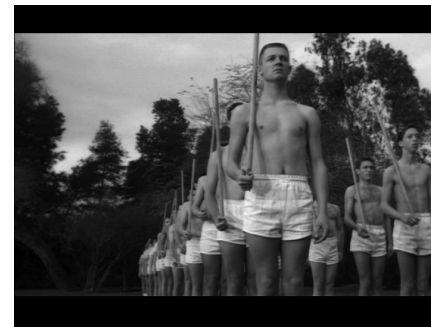
Only his terror-inducing bodily hallucinations, after all, impel the prisoner, an active participant in the German-American Bund arrested for sedition during World War II, to submit, despite his explicit contempt, to the psychoanalytic interventions of the earnest black psychiatrist. And how do cinema and psychoanalysis join forces to "arrest" those disturbances of the prisoner's visual field — disturbances that produce, in view of the film's unmistakable investment in style, the moments of its most intense and explicit cathexis of that field — except by *picturing* the hallucinated body, attempting to see its etiology, and demanding that we, with the patient, envision the image *so as to escape it*. That such an escape amounts to the displacement of one hallucination

by another—that the process of imaging the prisoner’s release from the pathogenic grip of the image must remain bound up with a residual faith, however ironic, however fraught, in the authority of the image itself—complicates the film’s account, its would-be exacting and scrupulous audit, of a racial economy indebted (up to its eyeballs, as the saying goes) to the ocular logic that Oedipus, himself become Sphinx-like after gazing for centuries through his blackened and hollow eyes, still pinpoints for us in the West.

Come closer, though, to this blackened eye, fitting emblem of Oedipal vision, that binds us to hetero-genital law by imposing a sort of blindness upon the repudiated anal desire whose site the eye’s empty cavity mimes. Here, where the blindness decreed by the father coincides with the image of the lifeless hole to which the father would make us blind, the Oedipal subject emerges in all his unsightly paranoia: cowed, that is, by the father’s bum steer into steering clear of his bum and bullied thereafter into bullying all who mistake, as he no longer can, the direction from which the law requires that a man take the bull by the horn(s). The Oedipal brute who makes mincemeat of anyone he meets who might happen to mince, the bonehead who acts like a butcher to incarnate the comparative form of butch: this is the band of boys to whose company *Pressure Point* consigns its white racist, reading the psycho-pathology of his authoritarian personality by dishing out the familial narrative that a popularized psychoanalysis serves up to account for the boys in that band. Like them, that is, the racist confronts a clinging and hysterical mother who transfers unsatisfied erotic demands from her husband to her son; like them he longs for and loathes at once his father’s sadistic masculinity.



Variety’s critic may have commented on *Pressure Point*’s hints of “abnormal human behavior – homosexuality, bestiality, sadist-masochist relationships,”¹⁰ but no more than does the film itself need we ask if the prisoner is “gay:” it suffices to label him paranoid, pathological, Fascistic, and weak; to give us telling vignettes that depict his misogyny and his failures with women; to define his political investments by showing us row after row of half-naked boys engaged in military drills; and to attribute his psychic disturbance to an Oedipal conflict left unresolved.

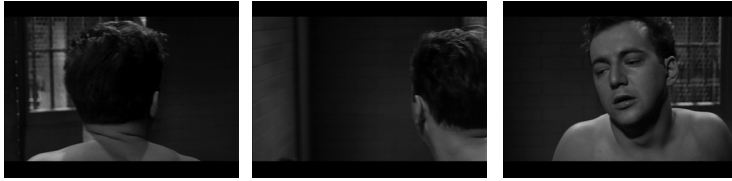


In the story on which the screenplay was based, the author, Dr. Robert Lindner, framed the issue even more bluntly: the prisoner’s “inclination... toward his own sex,” he wrote, “was merely part of the psychopathic character

structure he possessed.”¹¹ What need, therefore, to call him a fruit when it's clear from the start he's a fruitcake? If he's racist he's first of all paranoid; and if he's paranoid he's latently queer; and if he's queer it's because of his failure to negotiate the crisis of Oedipalization.

Hard as it may be to swallow now, though for many of somewhat dubious taste it continues to melt in their mouths, this chewed-over gristle is what *Pressure Point*, like much of vintage American liberalism, rapaciously devours. In its analysis the racist's racism has ultimately nothing to do with race and its explanation requires no engagement with people of color or the social contexts from which his attitudes toward them emerge. Indeed, except for the black psychiatrist, whom he counsels to “wake up” and “go back to Africa,” he has no encounters in the film with African Americans at all nor any political experiences that thematize racial relations (except where Jews are concerned). His racism need only be traced, instead, to the psychic malnutrition of his childhood to gain, in the political optic of the film, a theatrical clarification. As the psychiatrist announces in the voiceover that introduces the racist's boyhood in flashback: “He was an only child and his conception, he soon found out, was the only cause for the sudden and bitter marriage that followed it. His father was a butcher. He was quick to anger and hard to please. His vigor, it seemed, was constantly replenished by drink and by a vengeful resentment he felt toward his son.” With these words the narrative, *already* a flashback addressed to the young white doctor by the more experienced black psychiatrist, cuts to the core of the prisoner's experience through a second flashback within the first, as if this more recessed experience were at the heart not only of the racist, but also, by extension, of the black psychiatrist's counter-transferential relation to him. *Pressure Point*, true to

the doxa of what was received at the time as progressive thought, serves up as its narrative statement the rubbery tripe of a colorblind liberalism, the stuff of integrationist dreams, but the black man's meaning in the eyes of the film, as in the eyes of its white supremacist, remains nothing more than his blackness as it is reified and interpreted by whites. Neither the reality of his own psychic experience nor the substance of his dreams is permitted to season the film (which is hardly surprising since the psychiatrist in the original story was Jewish, not black).¹² The dreams or hallucinations that *Pressure Point* savors are the racist's less savory ones: visions that translate the thematics of race into issues of Oedipal development, diagnosing the one as merely a symptom of failure in the other. If this occasions the film's greatest blindness, its reading of racial hatred in terms of psychic aberration – the psychiatrist notes in somber voiceover: “although psychopaths are a small minority, it seems significant that whenever militant and organized hate exists, a psychopath is the leader” – it also provides the condition for its single most valuable insight, an insight the film can depict for the audience but one it cannot see. And how could it, since what it unwittingly shows is the blindness of vision to the structural paranoia on which visual epistemology is founded: a blindness to vision's perpetual defense against the anxiety of the unseen. If that anxiety gets expressed in the fear of whatever might take one from behind, if it centers, that is, on the threat of being seized by what vision cannot apprehend, then it associates that threat with what the scopic subject has learned to *put* behind (both temporally and spatially): the anus and the anal fixation bespeaking a superseded logic of desire that returns in the scopic economy as a blindspot resistant to the clear-cut perception of the hetero-genital either-or that defines the father's law.



Pressure Point's narrative, in its piety, appears to identify the film itself with the anti-racist politics espoused by the earnest black psychiatrist; but as a visual text whose counternarrative get articulated by the image, the film identifies rather with the white racist's paranoid visions, indulging its camera in hyperbolic flourishes that signal directorial "style" and eschew the marriage of "message" films to a starkly conventional realism. In doing so it enforces a kind of cinematic apartheid, shooting the black psychiatrist, for almost the whole of the film, with a fixed frame in medium close-up to show his stability, dignity, and control while reserving its expressively flamboyant shots, dramatic angles, and subjective movements for representations of the fantasies, dreams, and recollections of his racist patient. That patient, whose disdain for social norms reproduces the defining characteristic of the father he consciously despised, embodies, precisely by virtue of his fantasmatic relation *to* the body – by virtue, that is, of his anxious efforts to maintain its ostensible purity – the unconscious of liberalism itself: for, liberalism, as *Pressure Point* shows, is driven, no less dialectically than the racist, to preserve and defend the law of the father – even of the father it hates – insofar as it, like the black psychiatrist who materializes it's politics here, grounds its coherence, its sense of reality, in a faith in the father's goodness, a faith in the ultimate triumph of justice through *the body of the law*.

The doctor, for instance, after biting his tongue, week in and week out, at the prisoner's taunts, gives way at last to a passionate outburst when the prisoner, on the verge of parole after fooling a review board into thinking he no longer holds his self-professed fascist beliefs, rubs the doctor's face in the racism of the country the black man calls his home – the racism that led the committee to discredit the professional testimony the black doctor offered in his role as the prisoner's psychiatrist. Neither the defense of his professional integrity, however, nor the defense of the integrity of his race ignites the white-hot fervor that flares up in the doctor's speech; it is sparked, instead, by the need to assert the decency of the father, or at any rate of "the fatherland" as the prisoner himself might put it, with which, despite having just been burned, the doctor still identifies: "This is my country. This is where I have done what I've done. And if there were a million krauts like you, all sick like you are sick, all shouting 'Down! Destroy! Degrade!' and if there were twenty million more sick enough to listen to them, you are still going to lose. You're going to lose, mister. Because there is something in this country, something so big, so strong, that you don't even know." It is easy enough, and true enough, to note that the liberal production team responsible for making *Pressure Point* interpellates potential black viewers here in the name of the father's law while assuring its larger white audience of black fidelity to law as such; it is easy and true to observe that such a liberal and patriotic speech assigned to the black psychiatrist preempts any nascent black militancy in the face of institutional racism, the pervasiveness of which the film allows only the racist to pronounce. "Now you hypnotize me, huh," he tells the doctor, "well, they got you hypnotized. They've got you so mixed up you're singing

'My Country 'Tis of Thee' while they're walking all over you." By putting these words in the racist's mouth, the film preemptively impeaches as fascist any left-leaning white or black Americans predisposed to take them to heart, reassuring, in its naively liberal way, the middle-of-the-road U.S. citizen that the African American is really just an American after all. It is easy and true to point out as well that the doctor's defense of the country that continues blithely to sell him short only heightens his moral stature for the imagined audience of the film. But it is less easy, confronting the messy motives packed into the products of liberalism, to *resist* the temptation to blow the whistle, like a health inspector at a sausage factory, and pass a self-righteous judgment on liberals for marketing, though stuffed in a different skin, the odds and ends of racism.

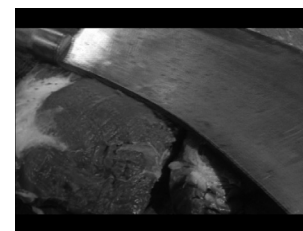
Such a judgment, however, like that whistle-blowing, would feed on the constitutive fantasy of liberalism itself: that righteousness can ultimately triumph through identification with the law (for which, in the final analysis, all health inspectors work). It would echo, therefore, the psychiatrist's faith in the presence of something vital at the very core of the nation's being, something "so big, so strong" that it gives him the ability, as he says to the prisoner, "to take it from people like you and come back and nail you to the ground." This thing that inhabits the body of the nation, resisting all efforts to identify or particularize its essence, this thing that vivifies the nation, asserting its agency, living its life, corresponds to what Slavoj Žižek has described as the "national Thing," the "*real*, non-discursive kernel of enjoyment which must be present for the Nation qua discursive entity-effect to achieve its ontological consistency."¹³ As Žižek then goes on to remark: "What is therefore at stake in ethnic

tensions is always the possession of the national Thing. We always impute to the 'other' an excessive enjoyment: he wants to steal our enjoyment (by ruining our way of life) and/or he has access to some secret, perverse enjoyment."¹⁴ *Pressure Point's* doctor adduces this "thing" to refute the racist's logic, but his very *faith* in the "national Thing" reproduces the logic of racism, which is also the logic of the Oedipal vision that offers a surplus enjoyment to those who identify with its rigid imposition of the ban on enjoyment as such.

Since Oedipus sees to it that none of us escapes subjectification through the compulsory exchange of our birthright, the pulsive enjoyment of the real, for the Symbolic's mess of pottage by which our meaning is sustained, the subject of that bad bargain is constantly looking over its shoulder to make sure that no one else arrives having cut a better deal. Enjoyment in such a system returns, as it always must, perversely, by seizing upon and putting an end to the enjoyment of the other; it turns itself inside out to find expression as disgust. The paranoid fantasy of the better deal, of the other's unbounded enjoyment, induces a visceral repugnance and a self-righteous indignation that licenses acts of brutality and other transgressions of the law so long as the enjoyment accrued thereby serves the law's repressive ends. Whatever else *Pressure Point's* doctor intends by the "thing" within the nation, it designates the very essence of the law unconstrained by law itself. Accordingly, the thing to which the doctor refers, adducing it over and against the smug contentment of the white supremacist, is, in one sense, nothing more than the white supremacist himself: the doctor rejects in the prisoner, that is, the illicit enjoyment he enshrines *at the very same time* as the national Thing. In the contest

of identitarian identifications with such a “thing,” the liberal and the fascist mirror each other in finding enjoyment in enforcing the law as disgust at enjoyment itself.

The prisoner’s racism, seen in this light, seems less the effect of an Oedipal crisis unsuccessfully resolved than the normal and predictable outcome of subjectification through Oedipal law. Small wonder that *Pressure Point*’s primal scene, the sequence that presents us with a sight for sore eyes while the film invites us to sink our teeth into the raw meat of the prisoner’s childhood, coincides with its nearest approach to the primal scene of the prisoner’s disgust, the moment at which, as a boy, he came face to face with the stain of enjoyment. Preceded by an intricate orientalist fantasy in which the prisoner indulged as a boy – a fantasy in which he’s an Eastern potentate surrounded by muscular slaves and ordering that his weak, possessive mother be crushed by an elephant’s foot – this primal scene of the boy’s disgust begins with the psychiatrist’s disembodied voice providing his professional analysis: “in reality he could not stand the sight of blood with which his fantasies were filled. It meant his father and his father’s trade.” This reference to the father ends the fantasy sequence through a violent cut to an image designed at once to conceal and evoke the murderous blow to the mother’s head. For at the very moment the elephant’s leg descends to shatter her skull, *Pressure Point* cuts to the father’s cleaver pounding a cut of meat. When the camera pulls back to reveal the father, fully at home with the knives and the blood and the offal of his shop, it catches sight of the boy as well, required to help out there after school by working behind the register.



“But,” as the psychiatrist quickly adds, “he was filled with apprehension if he had to touch, or even look at, the meat. And to watch his father prepare it was literally unbearable for him.”

Though his father’s meat repels him even before the “primal scene,” the decisive event, the trauma destined to color the rest of his life, occurs on a particularly busy day when his father, knowing full well his son’s inability to stomach his meat, sadistically orders him, nonetheless, to cut a piece of liver. Lingered for a moment in a medium close-up on the liver in its porcelain tray, the camera observes its shiny skin in relation to other objects: a marble slab rests on the counter before it and behind it looms the butcher’s scale and other tools of the trade. A reverse shot gives us the queasy boy, trying hard to swallow the revulsion already rising in his gorge while the camera prepares to gorge itself on what he sees only as gore. The sudden rapidity of a subjective zoom enacts his horrified vision, closing in tight on the liver until, divorced from any context, it engulfs the very screen, rubbing our faces in its flesh.



Dark and lined with darker veins, viscous, moist, and flecked with fat that clusters around a tear in the skin, a cavity through which we glimpse a patch of still whiter flesh within, the liver becomes the filmic Thing, the stuff of the father’s enjoyment, to which his law imposes on all a relation of disgust. Figuring what Oedipal vision at once produces and forecloses, this slimy mound of meat, this substance of life turned inside out, this liver, however lifeless, lives - unbearably, inexplicably - outside meaning, outside life.¹⁵ Oedipus may hold the whetstone to the butcher’s gleaming knife, inducing us to cross our legs in a reflex of homage to the father’s meat, but this viscous matter is what matters more to Oedipus and the father both: not the phallic flap of flesh that gets seen as the site of the Oedipal beef, but the image of an older enjoyment now made repulsive by the law. Oedipus may call it the father’s meat but another idiom would mark the father’s privilege more precisely, defining it as the father’s “shit” with which no one else better mess. Nor, as we see, are they likely to, since they see it *as* a mess - leave it to Oedipus to see to that - and turn from it in disgust.

But when, in the film, the boy turns away, fleeing the liver whose lifeless life seems liver than his own, whose gelatinous consistency can call into question the consistency of his very world, his father, claiming the shit that is his, that embodies his privilege of enjoyment, picks up the liver and pursues the boy, chasing him into the meat-locker where, surrounded by hanging sides of beef, he thrusts it at the camera, here aligned with the eyes of his son, until the heavy, oozing thing is smeared across the very lens. When the camera refocuses on the staggering boy as he falls to the floor in a faint, his face bears the stain of the bloody meat, dark mark of the father’s shit.



The liberal agenda of *Pressure Point* keeps the film, and the film's psychiatrist, from associating this moment explicitly with the racist attitudes the boy will adopt; but here, where the prisoner first suffers the symptom that attends his hallucinations, the symptom whose meaning seems latent in the name he gives it, "blacking out," the prisoner, in a sense, has himself been blacked out, has

suffered his face to be rubbed in the shit whose stain he will spend the rest of his life attempting to wash away. Call this stain the repressed enjoyment of an anal libidinal cathexis, call it the queerness come home to roost with every fledgling Oedipus, if only in the dialectical and paranoid form of enjoying its suppression in others, or call it, much more simply, with the filmic image itself, the liver: less as the thing that lives *within* us than as the thing that in itself *lives* us, the nauseating trace of a foreclosed enjoyment that can never, on the one hand, be nauseating *enough* for the law's eye not to seek it out, and never, on the other hand, foreclosed enough, to stop the law from forbidding it. What the benign integrationism of the film can't acknowledge its visual utterance shows: neither aberrant nor pathological, except to the degree that subjectification pathologizes us all, racism lives every subject produced through this primal scene of disgust, lives as the thing sublated into hetero-genital law.

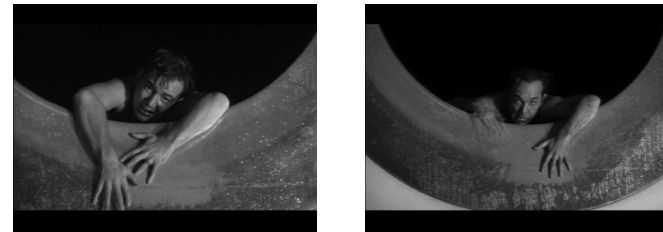
Hence the prisoner's hallucinations, which typically begin with a blackout reenacting his trauma as a boy ("Well, first I feel a little sick to my stomach, and then suddenly I feel like something's coming down on me and I can't breathe and I can't see; and then it's over"), typically overwhelm him in the course of the film while he's leaning against the sink - sweaty, on edge, and short of breath - trying to regain his composure by splashing water on his face. His gaze irresistibly drawn to the drain's black hole in the basin's pure white, an empty cavity returning his stare like a blinded Oedipal eye, he fixates upon its dark opening, fitting receptacle for the body's impurities, for the dirt it is made to take in, and all at once the camera, conveying the prisoner's subjective view, closes in for a remarkable shot: remarkable not only because the shadow of the drain all but fills the screen with its

blackness, thereby usurping the surrounding white, but also, and primarily, because the shot discovers a figure inside the drain, a man suspended from its metal rim, desperately trying to pull himself out, to emerge from the place of darkness and dirt as in theories of anal birth.



Most terrifying for the prisoner, though, in each iteration of this scene but the last one, the man in the drain is himself. No more than the “normal” subject, though, can the prisoner bear to acknowledge his own emergence from such a hole; no more than the “non-pathological” can he see that his entry into subjectivity, his inscription in the symbolic, comes only by way of renunciation of that anterior libidinal site, a renunciation so deep that like

Orpheus, or, better, like Lot in his flight from Sodom, he is forbidden to look back. Indeed, he becomes a subject only by repudiating his origin in, his relation to, and his proscribed or repressed desire for, the site of a pleasure prior to the sensory tyranny of sight. In the film’s therapeutic logic, therefore, the logic of its Oedipalizing psychoanalysis, the moment at which the racist perceives that the man in the drain, whom he washes away by turning on the tap, is no longer the intolerable image of himself, but rather the image of his father is the moment at which he begins to escape the paranoid pull of that drain, the dizzying collapse that he calls blacking out and that the film associates with the vertiginous pull of a hole made for dirt and waste.



With the pat smugness that oozes from the psychiatrist at the end of Hitchcock’s *Psycho*, the black psychiatrist explains to the racist the Oedipal guilt with regard to his father that underlies his fits: “his image and yours are interchangeable. One image was the desire to kill your father while the other was the punishment for the killing carried out in your fantasies. You were punishing yourself. In other words, you were both the killer and the victim.” Having gotten to the meat of the matter, according to the project of the film, without, for a moment, having touched on the racist’s racism at all, or even on the interconnection between the Oedipal scenario and its

political effects, the psychiatrist succeeds in dissolving the symptoms that brought the prisoner into therapy. He does so by presenting, in a clear-cut manner, the resistance to the clear-cut positionality that Oedipus effects. The either/or of “to have” or “have not” is overwritten by the identification of the figure in the drain as simultaneously victim and killer, simultaneously father and son. Or at least according to the interpretation clearly laid out by the doctor. But the film cannot visualize this simultaneity; it images the figure in the drain as *either* the father *or* the son. In doing so, it shows us, quite literally, the inescapability of the Oedipal logic that recoils in disgust from indeterminacy and the collapse of positional distinctions. Identity emerges precisely at the confluence of Oedipus, horror, disgust, and the phallic supersession of anal erotism, which suffers, thereafter, consignment to the register of the queer, that category constructed to take in whatever resists the straight, the clear, the visually self-evident relation to identity. No identity itself, the queer is the drain down in which everything that threatens identity by virtue of refusing it gets flushed. Thus the Oedipal narrative adduced by the psychiatrist reinforces the cultural work of repression, displacing into the realm of what cannot be seen the dizzying, reality-disrupting return of what the genital subject must primally repress to emerge through the law of disgust. It ignores, that is, the desire that subtends the love of the son for his father - a desire that the film only glances at, and never directly addresses, in the racist’s fantasy of *killing the mother*. With this fantasy, after all, he not only repeats the violent abuse the father displays toward his wife as well as his son, but also gains psychic access to his own enjoyment of the father’s meat - the enjoyment that leads to his “blacking out” and gets bound, by way of repression, to the disgust he then transfers onto blacks.

Given its repetition of the Oedipal structure it claims to anatomize, the psychiatrist’s analysis does not, as he tells us in voice-over, have any therapeutic effect on the racist ways of seeing that brought the prisoner before the law. Nor is there any way it could. For the film observes, despite itself, that the dissolution of the racist’s symptom, the flushing away of his anxiety-inducing and paranoid hallucination, only reenacts symptomatically the evacuation, the flushing away of the object that engenders his identity through disgust in the first place. Far from confronting the paranoid subject’s constitutive acculturation through disgust, the Oedipalization of the subject reinforces the phobic repudiations *responsible* for paranoia, disgust, and violent aversiveness. The properly Oedipalized subject into which mainstream psychoanalysis, like liberalism, works to fashion us, is nothing more than the phobic subject born through the compulsory repudiation of its earliest libidinal cathexes: through the repudiation of an enjoyment thereafter fixed through prohibition on that simultaneously repulsive and compelling dark meat within us all. The blindness of Oedipus thus turns our gaze toward the phallic flag beneath which the psychiatrist and the racist prisoner march together arm in arm, each affirming the logic of disgust, each embracing enjoyment by disavowing the enjoyment of the other, each consigned by the logic of vision to refusing the Chaucerian nether eye whose provenance vision blacks out.

To be born as a hetero-genital subject, to conform to the mandate of identity, is to enter a logic of *looking* that leaves us paranoid ever after about the dangers of *looking back*, of looking, that is, too closely at what we must claim to have put *behind*, at what manages, despite the repression intending to block it from our view, to return

as the blindspot, the point of darkness, in every visual landscape wherein we project ourselves as the disgusting subject of identity formation. Let me conclude, then, by collocating briefly what *Pressure Point* evokes as its primal scene with a passage that Homi Bhabha, among others, calls the primal scene of racialization in Franz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*. That scene, of course, centers on a white child's response to the sight of Fanon himself – a response that moves from ethnographic observation to anxiety and then to fear as the child seems to fix Fanon in the hold of a clear-cut identity by calling to its mother, "Look, a Negro." This is how critics persistently evoke the Fanonian primal scene, entering into discussion about the originary force of this violent interpellation. But it is worth recalling that Fanon presents this phrase as a *secondary* formation. The opening sentence of his chapter, "The Fact of Blackness," in which he evokes this scene reads: "'Dirty nigger!' Or simply, 'Look, a Negro.'" The relation between this injunction to look and the fearful, projective discovery, the triumphant announcement, of something dirty, the relation between scopopic discipline and the phobic experience of disgust, already allows us to see, in Fanon, the point on which pressure is exerted to make each of us, homophobically, both subject of and subject to the stain of obscene enjoyment we encounter in racism's shit – the enjoyment by which we renounce enjoyment, which we then enjoy as disgust.

Notes:

1. Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. trans. J. Strachey et al. (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953-74), 604.
2. For a fuller account of the logic of the "clear-cut distinction" see my essays "Imagining the Homosexual: Laura and the Other Face of Difference" in *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 192-241, esp. 230-239, and "Piss Elegant: Freud, Hitchcock, and the Micturating Penis" in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 1995, 2:1-2, 149-177.
3. Freud, *Complete Psychological Works*, vol. 17, 131.
4. Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 38.
5. *Ibid.*, 567.
6. Joel Kovel, *White Racism: A Psychohistory* (New York: Vintage, 1971), 80-81.
7. This is not to suggest that the "anal" itself does not consist of a two-fold movement (retention and expulsion) that provides a paradigm for the binary relation that will characterize and shape Oedipal law; to the contrary, my point is that the clear-cut distinction that the genitalizing force of oedipality would insist upon is itself not ever clearly distinguishable from the anality that it repudiates. The force of that repudiation, however, the disgust that intervenes to mark the absolutism of difference is itself the performative agent of that difference, since the expulsions characteristic of anal sadism are not themselves linked to the experience of disgust but of a "hatred" still occupying a complex and ambivalent relation to what will also be designated as love. But the prohibitory law that institutes disgust undertakes precisely to secure a distinction between the two.
8. Howard Thompson, "Pressure Point Opens," *New York Times*, October 11, 1962; 49: 3. (<http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9C04E3DC163AE23ABC4952DFB6678389679EDE>)
9. Stanley Kaufmann, "Save Us from the Serious," *New Republic*, October 20 (1962): 46.
10. "Pressure Point," *Variety*, 1962.
11. Dr. Robert Lindner, *The Fifty Minute Hour* (The Other Press: New York, 1999), 213.

12. Hence the socio-economic analysis of ethnic resentment in the film centers on the failed romantic encounter of the racist with a wealthy Jewish woman that is used to “explain” his turn to the “German American Bund.” Race is invoked in the narrative only as an adjunct to the film’s exploration of the ideological depiction of Jewish power in Nazi ideology. But in the visual representations providing the psychoanalytic “truth” of the racist’s behavior, the insistence on flesh, embodiment, meat, and the stain of a filth that engenders disgust overrides the discursive analysis of hatred with social disempowerment. Here, instead, the film offers the visual equivalent of the contemporary accounts of racism provided by Jordan and Kovel and discussed above.
13. Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 202.
14. Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, 202-203.
15. See Jacques Lacan’s analysis of Freud’s dream of Irma’s injection in *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan; Book Two: The Ego in Freud’s Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-55*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (W. W. Norton: New York, 1991), 154-5.

