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ARTICLE

Secreting Blackness in the Poetry of D.S. Marriott

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In this article, I read D.S. Marriott's readings of Frantz Fanon's statement 'I secreted a race', in an attempt to perceive the secreting blackness of Marriott's poetry. Secreting is understood in the senses of separation and secrecy, concealment and removal, particularly with regards to physiological processes involving bodily substances. Secreting blackness is understood as the historical, social, and psychological conditions of Marriott's poetry: the lived experiences of race and racism; the increase of pressure that leads to rupture; the visible and invisible effects of violence and wounding in terms of bursting, bleeding, and staining.

The article is structured around a close reading of Marriott's poem 'The "Secret" of this Form Itself', by means of which I read Marriott's critical and creative writings more generally. As suggested by the poem, with its expressions of blood, excrement, dying, and death, the secreting blackness of Marriott's poetry reveals the substance and subsistence of black life and black death.

I reference a selection of Marriott's writings, including *On Black Men* (2000), *Incognegro* (2006), *Haunted Life: Visual Culture and Black Modernity* (2007), *Hoodoo Voodoo* (2008), *The Bloods* (2011), and *In Neuter* (2013).

Keywords: D.S. Marriott; Frantz Fanon; Race; Blackness; Death; Secrets; Secrecy

Introduction

In the chapter 'The Lived Experience of the Black' in *Black Skin, White Masks* (published in English in 1967), Frantz Fanon considers relations between the black man and the white man, and, subsequently, between the black man and himself.^{1,2} Fanon begins with the white man's exclamation upon encountering a black man: 'Look, a Negro!'³ He recounts an incident in which a little white boy exclaims upon seeing a black man – presumably Fanon – on a train in Lyon.⁴ The exclamation

functions as accusation – the black man provokes fear: ‘Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened!’⁵ – and as pronouncement. The individual black man is judged according to social, cultural, and historical generalisations about blackness: ‘I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: “Sho’ good eatin’.”⁶ Feeling the pressure of these generalisations, he is unable to separate the white man’s judgements of him from his judgements of himself. No matter how the black man sees himself – how he sees his blackness, if at all – he is seen as a black man in a white world: ‘I am overdetermined from without. I am the slave not of the “idea” that others have of me but of my own appearance.’⁷ Fanon explains that blackness is observed and diagnosed according to a ‘racial epidermal schema’⁸ (specialist training is not required to make the prognosis); the black man is or he is not, according to his blackness. Therefore, in order to survive in the white world, the black man must identify and understand himself according to his body, his skin, his substance. He must understand himself to be nothing but black, or, nothing because black.

David Marriott makes frequent reference to ‘The Lived Experience of the Black’ in his critical and creative writings.⁹ He attends to Fanon’s use of figurative language, pursuing the potential significations of his words and images in relation to blackness. I am interested in the ways in which Marriott returns to Fanon in his poetry, particularly to Fanon’s statement: ‘I secreted a race.’¹⁰ The verb ‘to secrete’ suggests separation, particularly with regards to physiological processes involving the internal and external secretions of bodily substances. Secretion also suggests secrecy, the need for concealment or removal, processes and substances that should not be seen or made visible. Both senses derive from the Latin *secretionem*, a dividing, a separating, a setting apart. As I discuss, the race to which Fanon refers is signified by blackness and by black blood. Whereas blackness and black blood may suggest a separation between racial essence and racial substance, the experience of race precludes such separation. As blackness will not be concealed or removed, black blood will out. Addressing historical and contemporary realities of racism and racialized experiences of violence, trauma, alienation, and loss, Marriott emphasises

blackness and black blood in terms of that which is seen and made visible and that which is unseen and made invisible.

Blackness, blood, and black blood recur in Marriott's poetry. Indeed, his poetry is marked by its repetitions of words and images. As readers move between *Incognegro* (2006), *Hoodoo Voodoo* (2008), *The Bloods* (2011), and *In Neuter* (2013), seas, ships, storms, depths, shallows, rims of the earth, slopes, snowy drifts, white heat, dying, dead bodies, ash, desolation, black holes, and angels provide continuity without reprieve. Many of Marriott's repetitions are allusive – for example, masks, trains, and amputations recall Fanon – but Marriott is careful about what and how much is revealed and concealed; he administers details such as names, dates, places, as if to direct readers' research and reading beyond his poetry. However, the repetitions and references can also become obstructive, opaque, making it difficult for readers to get inside the poetry, to see what is happening. In the absence of admission, the abundance of philosophers and poets in Marriott's poetry can become oppressive. Readers understand the poetry to be meaningful and are overcome by meaning; a sense of meaninglessness may succeed the break.¹¹

Marriott's poetry asks readers to rethink their approaches to reading. Rather than attempting to extract meanings from the poems, readers might perceive the secretions of the poetry, the ways in which it secretes. This poetry conceals within darkness, within blackness; this poetry bursts and gushes, spills and stains. Reading Marriott's poetry as a poetry of secretion means recognising how rudimentary linguistic relationality – the system of differences that makes meaning possible – spills into, and is spilled into by, the relationality of racist domination, whereby subjects are othered, concealed, silenced, and mystified, even as they are exposed, black bodies in a white world. Upon readings and re-readings, this poetry separates, allows itself to be seen, makes itself visible. I propose that in secreting blackness, Marriott's poetry reveals its substance by means of its substances – blood, excrement, ash – that reveal experiences of subsistence – black life and black death. The repetitions and references increase and release poetic and political pressure, reproducing the causes and effects of the experience of racism as recounted by Fanon, in terms of bursting, bleeding, and staining. As Marriott's poetry secretes blackness, is stained

with black blood, readers might recognise their own relationship with blackness, their own experiences of being stained with black blood. Thus, I begin with the concept of secreting blackness in Fanon's and Marriott's critical writings, followed by close readings of Marriott's poem 'The "Secret" of this Form Itself', through which I think about blackness in Marriott's poetry more generally. I read Marriott's poetry without differentiating between collections; I believe the poetry enables readers to drift between words, images, and ideas, and is not contained by the covers of individual books. I conclude with a beginning that is neither a beginning nor an end, but an absolute tension of opening.

Secreting Blackness

On that day, completely dislocated, unable to be abroad with the other, the white man, who unmercifully imprisoned me, I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object. What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood?¹²

You come too late, much too late. There will always be a world – a white world – between you and us... The other's total inability to liquidate the past once and for all. In the face of this affective ankylosis of the white man, it is understandable that I could have made up my mind to utter my Negro cry. Little by little, putting out pseudopodia here and there, I secreted a race.¹³

Fanon attempts to articulate the experience on the train in Lyon, or, more accurately, the proliferating experiences produced by the experience on the train in Lyon. The experience of racism exceeds the experience of the event. Contrasting medical terminology and non-verbal utterance, which suggests that the black man hears himself as if hearing someone else, Fanon emphasises the struggle and painfulness of articulation: to be dislocated is to be disarticulated, to lose speech, to cry. The black man feels himself break into pieces, his bones displaced, his being put out of joint. The violence of the white man's exclamation – the impact of his speech – forces the black man out of and into his body, out of and into the world. He is fixed in place, in

his blackness, and forced out of place, out of his experience of himself – distancing occurs, dissociation, disintegration, severance.

In *Haunted Life: Visual Culture and Black Modernity* (2007), Marriott discusses this severance in terms of ‘an irreparable psychic separation of the ego’.¹⁴ The exclamation – ‘a Negro!’ – gives rise to an intrusion in the psyche, an imago, that effects a split between ‘the ego’ and ‘its others’.¹⁵ Marriott conceptualises this intrusion as a ghost, a phantasmic other:

In other words, one of the major impacts of racism is the sense of coming across an intruding double in whose ghostly, enigmatic, and hallucinatory movement the ego undergoes ‘an amputation, an excision’ [*un décollement, un arrachement*]. This disarticulation of self by its specular double takes place not only as a corrosive intrusion – Fanon’s metaphors are exact here – but, more significantly, as the crumbling away of the self’s phenomenological boundaries.¹⁶

The arising of the ghost is a movement from subject to objecthood, psychic integrity to bodily brokenness: ‘the pain or anger which intrusion provokes derives not from something missing, but rather from the addition of something undesirable and dirty that fragments the body by destroying all positive semblances of self.’¹⁷ This intrusion, or the movement of this intrusion, creates space in the psyche, putting distance between ‘self’ and ‘disarticulation of self’ (‘disarticulation’ suggests structural disassembling as well as the loss of the ability to speak, whereby articulation is putting oneself together, composing oneself, speaking oneself into being). The ghost expands to fill the space, abject in its form and its formlessness. It destroys the black man’s sense of self, destroys his ability to differentiate between himself and the ghost (the imago, ‘a Negro!’), destroys his ability to differentiate between himself and the world. He becomes that which is ‘undesirable and dirty’. As the boundaries between self and world ‘crumble away’, Fanon describes the black man bursting, bleeding, staining himself and the white world with his ‘black blood’.

‘What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood?’¹⁸ The question seems to contain its

answer. It could be nothing else; for you, it could be nothing else but to be cut off, to be severed, to be removed from existence. Whereas 'amputation' and 'excision' denote surgical procedure, and 'hemorrhage' denotes a medical condition or an injury, the accumulating violence of these words suggests torture, trauma, annihilation. As the body bleeds, uncontrollably, the question seems to multiply. How does the body come to be spattered with blood? Perhaps there is an increase of pressure, coagulation and obstruction; perhaps there is a wound. What is the source of the blood? There is an uncanny sense of distance between 'my whole body' and 'black blood', as if the blood is foreign to the body, as if the blood is spattered from elsewhere. Whose blood is it? Marriott examines the scene:

Something goes wrong – Fanon starts hemorrhaging; a little self-dramatizing maybe, but this metaphor of leakage and wounding points to a traumatizing extrusion taking place in or on the body. Instead of an intact 'corporeal schema,' what we see here is a body disembodied by image, language, thought; the word 'nègre' acting like some kind of chemical dye converting epidermal surface into imago. Here's a funny thing, though: the body is a medium for what has been transferred on to Fanon, like a genetic flaw, and simultaneously what is penetrated and replaced by the ghostly incarnation that comes upon it, and whose effect gives Fanon vertigo.¹⁹

The body is 'disembodied by image, language, thought'; the body is disembodied, is separated from itself, is freed from its form and converted into image, language, thought. This is not a lossless conversion. The body is the medium through which the conversion takes place – the surface upon which black blood is spattered – and that which is lost, losing itself to the ghost within the psyche.

Fanon switches pronouns – 'you', 'us', 'I' – extending the subjects and objects of the experience. The disintegration of the black man's selfhood is the destruction of the individual and the collective, of the black man and black men. As the black man breaks into pieces, he feels the past, present, and future of blackness break into pieces. Psychic brokenness becomes historical brokenness; the arising of the ghost

gives rise to other ghosts: 'tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: "Sho' good eatin'."'²⁰ Whereas the black man is dislocated and disarticulated, the white man is ankylotic, his joints stiffening, his bones coalescing, his selfhood consolidating. The white man will not 'liquidate the past'; to do so would threaten his sense of self and world, his solid boundaries. The black man has no such boundaries. Unable to distinguish between himself and the ghost (or ghosts), he feels himself to be the intrusion; he is a ghost, a man already dead.²¹

Marriott emphasises Fanon's representation of blackness as belatedness – 'you come too late, much too late' – which complicates the notion of dislocation. ('Belated' is a euphemism for 'dead'. Suggestively, definitions of the word 'belated' include 'detained beyond the usual time, coming or staying too late' as well as 'overtaken by lateness of the night; hence, overtaken by darkness' [*OED*].) Not only is the black man out of place, he is out of time, as Marriott explains: 'There is nothing spectacular or mystifying about this sense of belatedness; in racial dramas the pain of displacement effectively eradicates a sense of self preceding the traumas of intrusion.'²² To be too far away as well as too late suggests the unattainable conditions for self-determination, the impossible terms of arrival. Reminded of what he was, the black man is reminded of what he is not, where he will not be. In answer to the question 'what does the black man want?', Fanon states: 'The black man wants to be white.'²³ If wanting is lacking and being is being white, there is an implication that the black man is not, that he will not be.

The recognition of race is the eradication of 'a sense of self'; to be recognised according to blackness is to be wounded is to be concealed by black blood is to be replaced by blackness. As Marriott writes:

What cuts into the body rending it into a mutilated screen or mask is also what dissolves the boundaries between inside and outside, between, that is, a self possessed and a body dispossessed, desolidified by the imago. As a result, the body becomes both divided and aberrated: it has no body other than this heterogeneity that empties it of itself.²⁴

off from my own presence'²⁸ – a subject that does not belong to its place, a subject at a distance from itself, selfhood in the absence of a self. Perhaps 'sentimental foreignness' refers to the past – the desire to locate and return to another place, an imagined home – whereby 'fusion' refers to the present – psychic integrity or social assimilation, the desire to become like, to blend in, to disappear into a place. Fanon writes: 'The discovery of the existence of a Negro civilization in the fifteenth century confers no patent of humanity on me. Like it or not, the past can in no way guide me in the present moment.'²⁹ To search for the past or the present, as if these are variable outcomes that may result from the same methods, is to be ambivalent about destination, perhaps to be resigned to failure or loss.

The 'restless voices', a disembodied collective, seem to speak without signifying. These voices do not articulate, do not sound, do not reverberate. 'Reflected', they see themselves and turn away, or they are seen and turned back. The 'antiplace' is a place of non-arrival, where the voices are unable to cease, where they cease to be. In 'Moulds This Fragile Should Never Be Taken', Marriott writes:

Now she is looking in the mirror again – conflicted by a wish to disappear, and a wish to peer through the ruins of what is reflected. Disappearing in order to render herself less opaque. [...] *Not all images are true and this one is empty without substance to it*, but no less real for being cut from its ground, marked by what is absent, like a pool shelved by ice.³⁰

The antiplace is a treacherous mirror. Hearing the words '*half-caste, paleface, ored*', the woman refuses her reflection, concealing herself by means of the darkness she will not recognise. She is out of place in herself, losing herself in her surface, losing sight of her depths. Recognition of race is a trap.

This point is reinforced in the line: 'where we enjoy the status of victims'. The collective is personalised, identified, and immediately dispossessed. Victimhood is a status subject to rights and limitations – 'disease', 'compensation', 'tricks of fate' – a category of being in relation to suffering. Nevertheless, this is a status to be enjoyed. Marriott seems to ironize racist attitudes, according to which 'victims' – here, a black

collective – take advantage of their disadvantages. Perks include the condition of being uneasy, unwell, possibly contaminated; the need for reparations; the sense of being deceived by the past, deprived of self-determination, and denied the choice of destination. Irony implodes in the question mark. What is the question? Where does the question begin? The question mark is the anti-place of the answer.

when we stepped off the boat
 the tide, the long imperial gain,
 extended to all colonies,
 debased by the raw stink,
 the world retched in the advocacy, we were the script –.³¹

There are numerous boats and ships in Marriott's poetry. Several are named: Jesus of Lübeck, a sixteenth-century slave-ship, in 'The Dream, Called Lubek';³² Zong, an eighteenth-century slave-ship, the site of the murder of 132 slaves, in 'Soultracts' and 'Atlantis';³³ SS Mendi, a twentieth-century passenger ship that sank, killing 616 members of the South African Native Labour Corps, in 'The Wreck of the Mendi'.³⁴ Several are unnamed, as in the example above. Whatever the context, the ship in Marriott's poetry recalls the slave-ship. Although the black collective has 'stepped off the boat', the history of being a commodity overtakes the possibility of arriving, of belonging to a place or finding a home. Like the white world described by Fanon – 'There will always be a world – a white world – between you and us...'³⁵ – there will always be a 'long imperial gain' between 'we' and 'all colonies', between our place and us. Deferring a reading of debasement and 'raw stink', the phrase 'world retched' connotes 'wretched', thus exiled, vile, damned (this is an allusion to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth [Les damnés de la terre]*). To be the script is to be written, to experience being as being in the hands of another. Marriott reiterates Fanon's statement: 'And so it is not I who make a meaning for myself, but it is the meaning that was already there, pre-existing, waiting for me.'³⁶ The line cuts off abruptly, withholding the content of the script and the possibility of interpreting the meaning, and resumes with another question and another secret.

visible; the visibility of these substances is a sign that something is wrong. Whereas blood signifies violence and wounding, excrement signifies unsanitary conditions, destitution, disease, neglect, abuse, self-neglect, fear, death. Marriott continues, describing 'the wider culture's association of blackness with uncleanliness, a racial fantasy in which the experience of having a black body is tantamount (at the level of both unconscious and cultural fantasy) to being smeared over with shit'.⁴¹ To be dirty, soiled, stained is to be covered with brown and black marks, to be marked as black.

The experience of blackness is affected by the fear of contamination. The white man fears becoming black through contact with the black man; the black man is made to recognise the threat of his secretions. His body is spattered with black blood, smeared with excrement; the surface of his body concealed by substances from within, and, regarding excrement, from the depths. Blood and excrement are substances that should be contained by the body. Once secreted, they become contaminating substances that signify the necessity of their removal. Their externalisation dissolves boundaries between self and world, or reveals the vulnerability or absence of such boundaries. Indeed, black blood and excrement are threatening in relation to their formlessness. In the poem 'Those Who Eat Human Flesh' ('know what shame is'), Marriott writes: 'Call it love of junk food, | that absorbs death | via a simple liquidation.'⁴² Formless substances spread, contaminate, incorporate – once released, they cannot be kept separate, they cannot be kept out. The process of liquidation begins, boundaries dissolve, death follows. Therefore, to be marked with or as excrement is to be marked with death, to be marked as already dead, as Marriott makes explicit: 'the rich brown is ashen and the blood is stopped cold'.⁴³ He describes the association of blackness and excrement as a 'depressing and melancholic' fantasy. Furthermore, this association is violent. It is violent to convert the black body into excrement, to imagine the conversion of all black bodies thus. It is violent in terms of form – as with a haemorrhage, there is an increase of pressure leading to rupture – and in terms of representation. Individual experiences of blackness are collectively stained, collectively shamed. Indicating the pain of representation, Marriott describes the disarticulation that accompanies shame: 'Fanon's loss of the wherewithal to express

hurt in this situation being arguably the cruelest deprivation of all.⁴⁴ Indicating the pain of the attempt to articulate pain, he writes: 'I tried to scream but my throat just came apart and the ice just passed over me until I was coated with thick black blood, and then I really lost it, silently screaming and screaming and no one to hear or unbury me'.⁴⁵

as when wading through a warm stinking mess to meet my father,
lightscreens in the back of my cropped skull,
a whirlpool of shapeless heads screaming in the darkness
I want to let go – but cannot
there is no consolation, the opaque derision
anonymous, racially compelled.⁴⁶

The first-person singular speaker emerges from 'a warm stinking mess', some abject shallows, moving towards his father, who might portend his past or his future, a 'mourned-for origin' according to which 'everything was, and is repeated again' (the latter quotations are from the poem 'Into the Pit', which develops the study of fatherhood and self-determination).⁴⁷ The 'whirlpool of shapeless heads screaming in the darkness' recalls the 'restless voices', further emphasising the links between articulation, representation, and pain. The speaker expresses his inability to release himself from the hold of his race, from the insistence of the past. The first-person singular speaker returns throughout the poem, expressing ignorance and melancholy in relation to history: 'I didn't know [...] that the weak,|dying on an outlying island, could sing useless lieder of queens and empires'; and desire for containment and self-preservation in relation to history: 'I would love to lock the door|ease the flood|fresh on last night's storm|safe'.⁴⁸ The poem concludes:

I didn't know the depths of these unspoken things,
or why I had to wait until 1963
to sound them out in the parade of a new age
watching Adidas shop-windows and gold chains

the repeated denials
along the way drifting back to the real.⁴⁹

The date 1963 indicates several historical contexts for the poem. For example, Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his 'I have a dream' speech in Washington, D.C.; white supremacists bombed the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, murdering four black girls; the West Indian Development Council led a boycott of buses in Bristol in response to the Bristol Omnibus Company's refusal to employ black and Asian workers. Unlike the antiplace, the date provides a place of arrival, against which 'unspoken things', although unarticulated, are able to sound, to reverberate. The date provides a material structure, if not a limit, to the abject formlessness of the depths, enabling a return to the 'real'. The structure is organised according to 'repeated denials', which may refer to internalised and externally imposed denials, of being, of experience, of rights, of reality; the repression of the pain provoked by these denials, or the refusal to submit. 'Drifting' reiterates the sense of ambivalence about destination; 'the real' is that which is inevitable. The poem ends with a return to death. Thus, the "secret" of this form' is the reality of death: death as process and the outcome; death as lived experience of past, present, and future; death as place of arrival and antiplace. If death is the secret, the secret is revealed to be open, if not openly admitted (hence the ironic use of quotation marks). What is the significance of the revelation?

An Absolute Tension of Opening

Dying and deaths, dead bodies, and ghosts proliferate in Marriott's critical and creative writings. Dead bodies are mostly black, their deaths mostly resulting from blackness. For example, *On Black Men* (2000) opens with textual and photographic documentation of the lynching of black men in nineteenth-/twentieth-century America and closes with personal responses, mediated by newspapers and television programmes, to the racially motivated murder of Stephen Lawrence in London in 1993. *Haunted Life* opens with state surveillance, 'infotainment', and public responses to the murders of two Nigerian boys in London, Damilola Taylor in 2000 and 'Adam' in 2001, and closes with a survivor's account of the Rwandan genocide. In *Incognegro*,

Hoodoo Voodoo, *The Bloods*, and *In Neuter*, sometimes Marriott names the dead, sometimes he does not. Providing varying combinations of names, dates, and places, he enables readers to research historical contexts and news reports, or to recognise the absence of records and investigations. Sometimes Marriott commemorates the dead; for example, he dedicates poetry to the memory of W.S. Marriott,⁵⁰ 'the 616 members of the South African Native Labour Corps who drowned on the morning of Feb. 21st, 1917',⁵¹ Aimé Césaire,⁵² Dambudzo Marechera,⁵³ and Gillian Rose.⁵⁴ Sometimes he bears witness. The poem 'Atlantis' offers the recognition of the murders of the slaves of Zong, if not 'the infinitely small honour of the poem.'⁵⁵ Marriott stresses the significance of recognition above honour. Whether or not 'repetition brings the named ones near', whether or not 'the unsaid is not the unsayable' – there is ambiguity about the representation of personalisation, closeness, intimacy, articulation – he asserts: 'Even when all the voices are swallowed,|everything remains witnessable.'⁵⁶

Marriott resists performing grief, elegising, and excavating history for the sake of performance and elegy. For example, in poems written after the death and burial of his father, he remembers: 'I wrote his funeral program in *Word*'⁵⁷ and 'At the graveside me and my brother took|turns with the spade, shovelling earth in. [There was] no performance to release the grief|moving heaven in earth over the rim'.⁵⁸ Rather, Marriott is concerned with seeing and making visible experiences of dying and deaths that are repeatedly unseen and made invisible (repeated – mediated – images of death can render death visible and invisible in relation to the viewer; who sees the deaths of 'thousands of dead black boys'?⁵⁹ What are the means and meanings of this seeing?). It is important to distinguish between making a spectacle of death and bearing witness to death, between performing grief and demonstrating a practice of mourning. In the poem 'Through a Red Prairie', Marriott describes viewing a photograph of the dead body of Emmett Till, who was lynched in Money, Mississippi in 1955.⁶⁰ He writes:

The circle of the law is this: the echo must first be heard for there to be a limit to what is voiced, but only in silence can I hear it, and so silence it

once more as a wordless moan. What I mean is that I cannot get away from hearing the sound, the hunt for meaning, even though I refuse to scance the silent life of the image. [...] As such, the picture has to be inverted, for it is not so much a present as a bearing witness to what is manifest as the emblem of what it is the warning of. That is one must read it for what it is not.⁶¹

What is voiced precedes the echo, however, the echo must be heard to signal the arrival of voice. The limit, which may or may not be conceptualised as a place, enables the return of the voice as echo. What is voiced by the photograph may be the life of the dead black boy, or his death, or the grief of his mother, but voice cannot be separated from other sounds (the event of Emmett Till's death, 'what had passed, or what had happened').⁶² The speaker refuses to excavate the dead body by means of an examination of the photograph, even as the history of the photograph enshrouds him. The photograph of the dead boy must be inverted: the speaker does not view a dead black body, but the matter of black life; he bears witness to the already deadness of black life.

In *Haunted Life*, Marriott writes of blackness as 'a right to death that sees in death its most essential property'.⁶³ The past, present, and future of blackness is marked by death; to make visible and bear witness to this death is to make life possible. To mourn black death is to make black life possible. Mourning is not the representation of grief, or responsibility, or regret, nor is it the experience of processing or moving on from such feelings (for every movement is a movement closer to death, which intimacy can fail to recognise). Rather, mourning is related to the articulation and disarticulation of memory, recognition, and predestination.

In Marriott's poetry, the substance that signifies mourning in relation to black life and black death is ash. Ash, like blood and excrement, occurs frequently; I focus on the image of ash in the mouth. For example, in the poem 'Unconsoled', Marriott writes: '*blackness is a code, a chain, a zero, it has no volume or form, it signifies a mouth full of ashes.*'⁶⁴ Proverbially, a mouth of ash suggests disappointment and loss: the fruit that turns to cinders and smoke in the biting. To parse the image literally, ash

in the mouth denotes destruction by fire, mortal remains in utter ruin, the loss of identity even to forensic odontology. And if ash connotes mortal remains, then ash in the mouth invokes the image of cannibalism. It might also suggest some ritual practice, perhaps an act of mourning.⁶⁵

While ash in the mouth marks the presence of death in the body, or identifies the body as the place of death, it also suggests remnants of speech. It suggests language, voice, and echo. In the poem 'Falling Snow', Marriott writes of speaking as 'a form of death',⁶⁶ suggesting that to speak is not a speaking into being, but a means of perceiving death in life. Following its delivery, voice ceases to exist, unless it returns as echo. Perhaps there is a correlation between ghost, echo, and ash, as different mediums of return, eruptions from a secret realm.

In this sense, secretion may be understood as the mediating principle between instances of repetition. In *Haunted Life*, meditating upon Eurydice's non-return from death in Greek mythology, in Sartre's *Black Orpheus*, and in Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, Marriott imagines Orpheus descending into the underworld – the antiplace, perhaps – of himself. This Black Orpheus must seek, and fail to secure, the 'return' of his lover White Eurydice, whose nearness dazzles him with promises of destroying his blackness (is he a negative image of the little white boy on the train in Lyon, in intimate horror of being digested black?). It is this Black Orpheus, rather than White Eurydice – who never quite existed in the first place – who 'returns', who repeats his solitary status at the threshold of himself, repeatedly capable of recognising his grief as grief for an illusion. 'I secreted a race': to read Marriott as a poet of secretion is to recognise the racialised identity in his work that necessarily preserves aspects of restorative justice – of reparation, of the righting of wrongs, of the undoing of loss and the speaking of suppressed history – while also bursting all such binaries and limitations, enacting an abundant 'return' that is simultaneously self-creation and self-destruction.

In the poem 'The Bloods', Marriott writes: 'The charred ruins buckling in the wind – and insisting that words, like *torture* or *truth*, remain empty aside from

this insistence.⁶⁷ Contrasting with the idea that 'repetition brings the named ones near', this line suggests that repetition fills words with meaning. Fullness does not preclude nothingness, as nearness does not preclude death, but to be full with meaning does imply repetition, force, pressure, and rupture. Towards the end of 'The Lived Experience of the Black', Fanon writes, 'Je me définis comme tension absolue d'ouverture', which Markmann translates as, 'I defined myself as an absolute intensity of beginning.'⁶⁸ In *Haunted Life*, Marriott provides the following modification and explication:

[Fanon] states: 'I defined myself as an absolute tension of opening'. This tension cannot be sublated or surpassed, for its creative force is the achievement of negation, an absolute opening to the future *and* the past that is neither white nor black but beyond the Manichean.⁶⁹

To be an 'intensity of beginning' implies an ending, risking reducing Fanon's argument to a linear and dualistic understanding of life and death, to a denial of the possibilities of life in death and death in life, to a fantasy of destination and arrival. In contrast, to be a 'tension of opening' implies not closing but bursting, breaking, exploding.⁷⁰ A tension of opening contains the possibilities of life in death and death in life, revealing that these possibilities cannot be contained. Regarding a tension of opening as 'creative force', in *On Black Men*, Marriott writes of Fanon:

[It] may be that the process of writing *Black Skin, White Masks* played its own part in that putting back together, in the constructing of another self to reflect on the one that had been lost. To say this is to suggest that for Fanon – as for others – writing can be a form of reparation, of self and of world.⁷¹

If writing can be a form of reparation, this has less to do with repair or recovery of that which is broken, or with the representation of brokenness, than with creativity that is constituted by destruction and death.⁷² In 'Through a Red Prairie', Marriott writes:

'This is what words are for, after all: to stop us from crumbling inwards, to help us put up with feelings of paralysis, of perpetual dying.'⁷³ This notion may be extended to poetry: the creative force of poetry is an exploding outwards that not only recognises wounding, violence, and death, but recognises in them the possibilities for new spaces, new forms, and the revelation of secret substances.

Notes

- ¹ References to *Black Skin, White Masks* are from Charles Lam Markmann's translation. David Marriott refers to both Markmann's translation and the original text – *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1951) – occasionally providing modifications of Markmann's translation. Notably, Marriott translates the title of the chapter 'The Fact of Blackness' as 'The Lived Experience of the Black' ('*L'expérience vécue du Noir*'). Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967; repr. London: Pluto Press, 1986; repr. 2008).
- ² Adhering to the terms of Fanon's and Marriott's arguments, I focus on black and white men in this article.
- ³ *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 82.
- ⁴ As Marriott states: 'Fanon's example in *Black Skin, White Masks* recollects an actual event as it occurred – there is no doubt that the black psychiatrist traipsing round the streets of Lyon is Fanon himself.' *Haunted Life: Visual Culture and Black Modernity* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2007), p. 210.
- ⁵ *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 84.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 84–85.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 87.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 84.
- ⁹ In 'The Case of Blackness', Fred Moten proposes the word 'case' as 'a kind of broken bridge or cut suspension' between 'lived experience' and 'fact', black and blackness, thing and object, by means of a reading of Martin Heidegger's 'The Thing'. He affirms 'a transition from thing(s) (*choses*) to object (*objet*) that turns out to version a slippage or movement that could be said to animate the history of philosophy.' 'The Case of Blackness', *Criticism*, Vol. 50, No. 2 (Spring 2008), pp. 180–181. In 'Judging Fanon', Marriott responds to Moten's proposition. Emphasising Fanon's representation of the experience of blackness as that which 'is not', the unrepresentability of the experience of blackness as that which 'can never be', he critiques Moten's utilisation of ontological theory to explicate Fanon's phenomenology of blackness. Furthermore, he questions Moten's recourse to Heidegger: 'Moten does not explain why, nominally speaking, the case of blackness should take the form of a juridical dispute between Fanon and Heidegger, nor why that dispute should be settled by the latter's account of "representational thinking."' 'Judging Fanon', *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge*, Issue 29 (2016), [no page number]. Curiously, in the poem 'Lorem Ipsum' in *The Bloods*, published five years before 'Judging Fanon', Marriott writes: 'Objects are not things. [...] Only the other can save us,|even though he wears funny peasant shoes|and walks like a German. [...] Things are not objects.' *The Bloods* (Exeter: Shearsman Books, 2011), p. 11. Without presuming to insert myself between Marriott and Moten – bound by their poetry, I am suspended, inexpertly, between the history of consciousness and the history of philosophy – I follow Marriott and include this footnote as a placeholder for a possible

response to their exchange.

¹⁰ *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 92.

¹¹ In the preface to *Hoodoo Voodoo*, Romana Huk correlates reading Marriott's poetry with surrendering to poetry, with willingly submerging: 'I'm overwhelmed by the beauty that is not beauty (in the sense of the riveting image) that is this book. I'm overwhelmed (in the full etymological sense of that word, to return to this book's first watery metaphors).' *Hoodoo Voodoo* (Exeter: Shearsman Books, 2008), p. xiii.

¹² *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 85.

¹³ *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 92.

¹⁴ *Haunted Life*, p. 210.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 42–43.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

¹⁸ *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 85.

¹⁹ *Haunted Life*, p. 2–3.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 84–85.

²¹ I allude to Malcolm X's statement – 'I live like a man who's already dead' – as cited by Marriott in 'Photophonics'. *Incognegro*, (Cambridge: Salt Publishing, 2006), p. 93.

²² *Haunted Life*, p. 219.

²³ *Black Skin, White Masks*, pp. 1–3.

²⁴ *Haunted Life*, p. 3.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

²⁶ *Hoodoo Voodoo*, p. 61.

²⁷ *Incognegro*, p. 8.

²⁸ *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 85.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

³⁰ *Hoodoo Voodoo*, p. 47.

³¹ *Incognegro*, p. 8.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 20–22.

³³ *The Bloods*, pp. 107–116.

³⁴ *Hoodoo Voodoo*, pp. 98–101.

³⁵ *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 92.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

³⁷ *Incognegro*, p. 8.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 8–9.

³⁹ *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 86.

⁴⁰ *Haunted Life*, p. 212.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

⁴² *Hoodoo Voodoo*, p. 71.

⁴³ *Incognegro*, p. 13.

⁴⁴ *Haunted Life*, p. 211.

⁴⁵ *In Neuter* (Cambridge: Equipage, 2013), p. 24.

⁴⁶ *Incognegro*, p. 8.

⁴⁷ *The Bloods*, pp. 88–90.

- ⁴⁸ *Incognegro*, p. 9.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.
- ⁵⁰ *Hoodoo Voodoo*, [no page number].
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 98.
- ⁵² *The Bloods*, p. 70.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 124.
- ⁵⁴ *In Neuter*, p. 21.
- ⁵⁵ *The Bloods*, p. 115.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 116.
- ⁵⁷ *Incognegro*, p. 5.
- ⁵⁸ *Hoodoo Voodoo*, p. 68.
- ⁵⁹ *In Neuter*, p. 7.
- ⁶⁰ As Marriott indicates in the notes, this poem is in dialogue with Fred Moten's *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Radical Black Tradition*, which includes discussions of spectacle and black performance, elegy, and the sound of the photograph. *Hoodoo Voodoo*, p. 115.
- ⁶¹ *Hoodoo Voodoo*, p. 96.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 95.
- ⁶³ *Haunted Life*, p. 226.
- ⁶⁴ *Hoodoo Voodoo*, p. 18.
- ⁶⁵ Blackness as 'zero' without 'volume or form' might suggest apophantic theology, and ashes in the mouth may be read as a negation of the ritual blessing of the brow with ash, symbolising repentance and redemption, on Ash Wednesday. Huk writes: '[The figures in *Hoodoo Voodoo* depend on a form of cannibalism] to speak, perhaps, like the dead in old European epics, who required the living's blood in their mouths before uttering their stories and prophecies. Even more troublingly, there seems to be no more blood – only ash – in the mouths of the dead speakers in this book.' *Hoodoo Voodoo*, p. vii.
- In thinking about the practice of mourning in Marriott's poetry, it is important to note Gillian Rose, whom Marriott cites as an influence. *Haunted Life*, p. 273.
- Rose relates the story of Phocian's wife, who consumes the ashes of her husband, 'and thereby gives his unhappy soul a resting place, a tomb, in her own body.' *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996; repr. 2008), p. 25.
- ⁶⁶ *Incognegro*, p. 98.
- ⁶⁷ *The Bloods*, p. 102.
- ⁶⁸ *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 106.
- ⁶⁹ *Haunted Life*, p. 68.
- ⁷⁰ Marriott's use of the word 'tension' recalls Fanon's discussion of the muscular tension that precedes violence, revolution, and decolonisation: 'When the native is confronted with the colonial order of things, he finds he is in a state of permanent tension [...] That impulse to take the settler's place implies a tonicity of muscles the whole time; and in fact we know that in certain emotional conditions the presence of an obstacle accentuates the tendency towards motion.' Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by Constance Farrington (London: McGibbon & Kee, 1965; repr. London: Penguin Classics, 2001), p. 41.
- ⁷¹ *On Black Men* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000; repr. 2012), pp. 67–68.
- ⁷² To reiterate the relationship between 'a tension of opening', 'creative force', and language, it is worth mentioning Marriott's associations between tension and grammatical tense, between violence,

language, and temporality. Following a reference to Fanon's 'tension of opening', he writes: 'death as lawless violence is the predicament and possibility of who we are and might become, here, now, the tenses through which we belong irreducibly to this time.' *Haunted Life*, p. 234. Additionally, in the article 'Inventions of Existence', he discusses Fanon's ideas about creativity in terms of the future imperfect. 'Inventions of Existence: Sylvia Wynter, Frantz Fanon, Sociogeny, and "the Damned"', *CR: The New Centennial Review*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Winter 2011), p. 53.

⁷³ *Hoodoo Voodoo*, p. 95.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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