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## On the Chronopolitics of Skin-ego: Antiblackness, Desire and Identification in Bravo TV's *Shahs of Sunset*

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### Abstract

In the third season of Bravo TV's *Shahs of Sunset* (2013-14), gay Iranian-American reality television personality Reza Farahan makes a curious analogy when he caricatures flamboyantly queer guest star Sasha Salehi as black. Reza associates what he perceives as sexual depravity with racial blackness, I argue, to distance himself from Sasha *in time*. This essay thus enumerates Reza's homophobic antiblackness as a means by which he curates the imago of a right kind of modern or postmodern Iranian gay. I intervene in the epistemic break brokered by Enlightenment philosophy, which shifts human features from an anatomical to a physiognomical model of difference—a physiognomical model notably tasks the material skin with signifying the spatialization of time, for example, in racial schemas—to elaborate sociogenic psychic processes that distribute and arrange desire and identification. Like Frantz Fanon, who rubs up against white flesh so that it might rub off on him, Reza's is a sexuality of the surfaces in which he seeks white touch to negate the racial schemas that atavistically hail him. I therefore contextualize Fanonian psychoanalysis in/as critical race theory to argue that interracial meetings of bodies and secretions and intimacies level surface topographies to generate one condition of possibility for the "occult" self-invention Fanon prescribes, for black and nonblack persons of color alike.

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### On the Chronopolitics of Skin-ego

"If we want to understand the racial situation psychoanalytically, not from a universal viewpoint, but as it is experienced by individual consciousness, considerable importance must be given to sexual phenomena."

"Is there in fact any difference between one racism and another? Don't we encounter the same downfall, the same failure of man?"

"The problem considered here is one of time." — Frantz Fanon<sup>[1]</sup>

[1] In a March 2012 interview with *The Daily Beast*, gay Iranian-American reality television personality Reza Farahan names his type: "the whiter, the better."<sup>[2]</sup> Tehran born and Tehrangeles bred,<sup>[3]</sup> Reza is a successful real estate agent with a sizeable hipster mustache (one with its own Twitter account), vigilant skin care and hair removal regimens, and an expensive penchant for designer labels and gold jewelry.

He is adept at performing respectability politics for a white gaze and, in the third season, caricatures Iranian queers who don't perform respectability as black. While the first season of Bravo TV's *Shahs of Sunset* pivots on co-star GG's volatile personality, including her curious collection of guns and knives, and the second season on the emotional abuse co-star MJ withstands from her mother, the third season (2013—14) spotlights Reza's "gay rage," which the show juxtaposes to Reza's gay love: Adam Neely. This essay intervenes in what the show narrativizes, and a clinical psychologist trained in Oedipal but not Fanonian psychoanalysis misdiagnoses as "gay rage," to suggest that Reza's is the culmination and release of cathected energies triggered by racial and not sexual proscriptions. That he caricatures Sasha Salehi, a native not of Reza's Iran, which "stopped existing in 1979,"<sup>[4]</sup> but of the Islamic Republic, as black and, further, Sasha's sexualities as an affliction of the bush, is paradigmatic, I argue, of the antiblack grammar by which nonblack persons of color with *homo*-sexualities curate ethnicity-without-race to amass the passing white privilege appropriate to modern homosexual typology. Reza distances himself from Sasha *in time* by resurrecting Orientalist tropes in which an Iran untouched by the West gives birth to a pansexual people of indiscriminate libidos, polymorphous pleasures and ars erotic ineligious, like blacks, for racial modernity. His comments betray a self-loathing but not self-effacing "gay rage," I explain, because Reza's is a *hetero*-sexuality; his primal attachments are contrapuntally raced and sexed to provoke not a preference for white men but for whiter whites. They thus substantiate Fanon's suspicion, repoliticized by the interlocutions of Afropessimists, that racism, specifically antiblackness<sup>[5]</sup>—"the wholesale repudiation of the black at work in the political and libidinal economies of the present historical juncture"<sup>[6]</sup>—governs the relationship between sexuality and the unconscious, not least of all for nonblack persons of color who anxiously occupy the lacuna of a black/nonblack colorline.

How do you take your pleasure? "The whiter, the better."

[2] If, following Jared Sexton's reading, sexuality is "the site where the materiality of racialization is made most manifest," then "*racism is not an obstacle to interracial intimacy but its condition of possibility.*"<sup>[7]</sup> We might remember Fanon's confession in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952):

I want to be recognized not as *Black*, but as *White*. But—and this is the form of recognition that Hegel never described—who better than the white woman to bring this about? By loving me, she proves to me that I am worthy of a white love. I am loved like a white man. I *am* a white man. ...I espouse white culture, white beauty, white whiteness. Between these white breasts that my wandering hands fondle, white civilization and worthiness become mine.<sup>[8]</sup>

[3] In love and especially in lust, Fanon replaces his dense, "fragmented, porous, sensational, grotesque [body] with an image of the whole body, polished, perfected and sealed up in the symbolic order, for the other's gaze,"<sup>[9]</sup> hallucinating whiteness. His is a racial calculus in which tactile sensations of whiteness "[thwart] the gaze and [complicate one's] symbolic and imaginary position" to inaugurate "a different sense of the body" as *skin-ego*.<sup>[10]</sup> Fanon rubs up against white flesh so that it might rub off on him,<sup>[11]</sup> or so that the "felt sense" of his white psychic-ego might briefly align with the fact of his black body-ego,

reterritorializing (or territorializing for the first time) the flesh of his being as skin-ego.<sup>[12]</sup> His is a *sexuality of the surfaces* that locates the site of *jouissance* not in genital contact, where reproduction and fears of miscegenation lurk, but in/as the expansive surface of the body, where racial schemas and fleshy materiality live. Interracial "processes of mixing, meddling, or mingling between...the ephemeral body of white universality and the strangely dense corporeality of its dark-skinned others" engender a break, suggestive of an ontological cut, in the dialectic of being and having,<sup>[13]</sup> making it possible for Fanon to "endlessly create himself."<sup>[14]</sup> He seeks new departures with no promise or possibility of landing and refuses the reparative logic of synthesis to curate skin-ego as "occult instability."<sup>[15]</sup>

[4] At stake is Fanon's racial blackness but also and likewise his chronopolitical station in the evolutionary saga of *Homo Occidentalis*, which is why he clarifies that the problem of race is a problem for time. The white gaze inscribes and interpellates his corpus as the fleshy, material remainder of Enlightenment modernity's human-making project: grotesque and invaginated, porous and permeable, uncontained and uncontainable. He is, as Frank Wilderson writes about himself, "black, big-lipped, ugly, and menacing;" he is "gargling speech," "AIDS," "larceny," "dirt," "deceit," and "vulgarity."<sup>[16]</sup> Reza vigorously labors to keep his body taut and groomed and confined or to keep his matter in place because his, too, is not a hardened body-*cum*-container of difference inaugurated by Enlightenment humanism: an epistemic break tasked with measuring the progress of Europe's and not a universal or generic Man. Michelle Ann Stephens elaborates:

Gradually over the course of the Enlightenment, as the skin and the body both begin to harden and be seen as less and less permeable, the tying of difference to the epidermal and physiognomic also hardens the bodily surface as an impermeable container of difference. This hardening then contributes to an understanding of physiognomic difference as the marker of fundamental differences with the species.<sup>[17]</sup>

[5] Enlightenment modernity replaces anatomical human differences with physiognomic ones to henceforth classify the human body as a duality of insides and outsides in which material skin signifies the spatialization of time, for example, in racial schemas.

[6] If the "paradigmatic trope of that body left behind" by Enlightenment lore is flesh "stripped of its imaginary reflections and symbolic meanings," characterized instead by orifices and excrescences, always already black or "a threshold or meeting point of human contact,"<sup>[18]</sup> then Reza's sexual preference for whiter whites is especially relevant in the homosexual instance because "the phallus is white skin."<sup>[19]</sup> Stated another way, the phallus doubly indicts sociogeny and not ontogeny as the source of white libidinal persuasions. Lewis Gordon explains,

Consider the white man. Being pure Presence, he is equated with manliness *in toto*. The manly, or masculine, is in fact a figure of denial, a being who attempts to close all its holes and become pure, sealed flesh in search of holes. From the perspective of such a being, all holes are elsewhere; he doesn't even have an anus; when he kisses, nothing enters his mouth—he enters the Other's. In his presence, the black becomes a chasm to fill. But the black 'man' is a *hole*. ...[The penis] protrudes. It pretends not to be a hole, but instead, a filler-of-holes. ...As pure Presence, masculinity is an ideal form of whiteness

with its own gradations; the less of a hole one 'is,' the more masculine one is; the less dark, the more white. The black man would therefore have the propensity to become slimy if it were not for the fact that he embodies femininity even more than the white woman. His skin, his eyes, his nose, his ears, his mouth, his anus, his penis ooze out his femininity like blood from a splattered body. He faces the possibility of denying his feminine situation: a black man in the presence of whiteness stands as a hole to be filled; he stands to the white man in a homoerotic situation and to the white woman in a heterosexual erotic situation with a homoerotic twist; she becomes the white/male that fills his blackness/femininity.<sup>[20]</sup>

[7] Interracial meetings of invaginated flesh and phallic skin stimulate a sexuality of the surfaces in which human recognition and value, epidermalized because "we are used to thinking of the skin, the surface of the body, as the baseline for what it means to be human," are bartered.<sup>[21]</sup>

[8] In *Deleuze and Guattari: An Introduction to the Politics of Desire* (Sage Publications, 1996), Philip Goodchild elaborates the distinction between high, low and surface experiences of sexual pleasure. Deleuze and Guattari characterize a "sexuality of the depths" as lustful, carnal and fetishistic; "deep" sexualities contrast with "high" sexualities because the latter "aims to re-create the moral ideals of the Oedipal family or the subjectified couple,<sup>[22]</sup> founded on promises, principles, and mutual expectation."

<sup>[23]</sup> Notably, both are heteronormative fantasies and tautologically fail to generate *jouissance*: a *petit-mort* that shatters and radically disorganizes the self, making the parts of one's being (in the black instance, always already atomized) available to re-organization but not (in Fanon's formulation) to re-sedimentation.<sup>[24]</sup> Sexton recommends a "sexuality of the surfaces" instead that is "critical but not utopian, planned but not programmatic, indeterminate but not irresponsible, deliberate but not definitive."<sup>[25]</sup> A sexuality of surface disturbances responds to what Lauren Berlant describes as "the sociality of the world, its hiccups and inconsistencies," which "are maddening" and demand "[surface] room to move," in other words, to endlessly rearrange themselves.<sup>[26]</sup> These exchanges

[aim] at the constitution of plateaus of intensities—a continuous, self-vibrating region avoiding any orientation toward a culminating point or external end. Such a sexuality continually enfolds its intensities into every movement, word, and touch: its aim is to isolate the event of sexuality as a phantasm that subsists in every moment, "saturating every atom," without this phantasm being actualized in an exchange of bodies or promises. Indeed, every desire is initially of this nature, before being caught up in the depths of bodies or withdrawing into the ideal heights.<sup>[27]</sup> The sexuality of surfaces operates through perversion. ...One surface is always substituted for another—the search for the phantasm yields something else of a different nature as its result, but this result can be made into a new object of desire, producing new phantasms, maintaining the plateau of intensity.<sup>[28]</sup>

[9] While I do not want to obscure the contemporary afterlife of chattel slavery's "deep" libidinal transactions or the illegibility of black material "hieroglyphics," a term coined by Hortense Spillers and allegorized in writings by Saidiya Hartman and Toni Morrison,<sup>[29]</sup> I account here for a more general economy of skin and flesh—of surface topographies—to enumerate the process by which an antiblack libido governs the law of attraction for nonblack persons of color. This work elaborates what Stephens

describes as "the tension between the skin as an object of the distancing, racialized gaze" and the flesh as a haptic "site for registering relational and reversible aspects of [...] touch."<sup>[30]</sup> Irrespective of chronopolitical ideologies hailed by the Enlightenment, the skin's invagination as fleshy materiality makes it possible for bodies "[to] touch each other, [to] be touched by the other, and [to] make themselves feel touched or [to] touch themselves;"<sup>[31]</sup> which is why "skin-based or skin-linked knowledges have the capacity to bring the gaze back into relation with other psychic objects."<sup>[32]</sup> What I describe as surface exchanges thus respond to an intercorporeal drive in which "smells, sights, [and] impressions of the body's volume and size are not just scopic; they are tactile and multisensorial."<sup>[33]</sup>

[10] Stephens cites Merleau-Ponty in her study of black performance cultures to position "the touch and the gaze as interacting in a reversible, reflecting relationship to each other...a 'double and crossed situating of the visible in the tangible and of the tangible in the visible;" but she leans on Fanon, whose epidermal and historical-*racial* schemas counter Merleau-Ponty's corporeal schema, to clarify that "the intercorporeal drive seeks to touch (upon) the sensational body," or *the 'I' that feels*, "rather than the body constructed by the signifier," or *the 'I' that is*.<sup>[34]</sup> Which is to say, her study intervenes in the chronopolitical if arbitrary distinction between sensational flesh and signifying skin; she begins from a black new materialist perspective that "the outline of the skin is not felt as a smooth and straight surface" confining matter in place, because "there are no sharp borderlines between the outside world and the body."<sup>[35]</sup> I shift the ground of Stephens' intervention slightly to argue that interracial sex acts function as masochistic exchanges in which participants of color martyr the black or brown *'I' that is* to clear surface room for the sentient and white *'I' that feels*. Scholars in queer theory's anti-social school cite Lacan and Oedipal psychoanalysis to read masochism as the consequence of a death drive; Fanon, however, suggests that the ego's defeat in masochistic sex acts, which as "destabilizing episodes [...] suspend the effects of relentless negation so that we can look at them and reshape not only what concepts we can derive from them but how we, bodily, sensually, can *occupy* them," might also or alternatively satisfy a life drive.<sup>[36]</sup> Masochistic sex acts dissolve the body-ego in passing moments of *jouissance*, making room for the psychic-ego to territorialize the "dense" body's becoming-flesh. Surface sexualities are feats of alchemy insofar as they engender "changes which occur in the feeling of our skin and of the tactile surface of our body;" in these exchanges, the skin's "surface becomes smooth, clear, and distinct. The tactile and the optic outlines," otherwise discrepant, "are now identical with each other."<sup>[37]</sup>

[11] In their collaborative text, *Sex, or the Unbearable* (Duke University Press, 2013), Berlant and Lee Edelman characterize masochistic or "unbearable" sex acts as erotic meetings in which participants abdicate personal sovereignty to invoke "the psychic and social incoherences and divisions, conscious and unconscious alike, that trouble any totality or fixity of identity."<sup>[38]</sup> In the preface, which presumably the authors wrote together (although it bears the mark of Berlant's epistemological investments), they describe the project as an attempt to "account for the disturbances and anchors within relationality (to ourselves, across ourselves, to the world at large) and for the effects those disturbances and anchors have on our thinking about sociality."<sup>[39]</sup> Edelman and Berlant agree that sex constitutes a privileged site

"for experiencing [an] intensified encounter with what disorganizes accustomed ways of being,"<sup>[40]</sup> and likewise, that sex uniquely asks its participants to bear an "unbearable encounter with the unfinished business of being,"<sup>[41]</sup> but they disagree to the extent that Edelman charges Berlant with remaining "'bound to the world and thus to its conditions of possibility for undoing and rerouting."<sup>[42]</sup> Favoring instead the affective tears in social and political realities, Edelman interprets the radical undoings of sex

less as the subject's incoherence in the face of normativity than as the momentary access to a sense of its radical unrepresentability. Such negative encounters, such ruptures in the logic—which is always a *fantasy* logic—by which the subject's objects (itself included) yield a sense of the world's continuity (even if only the continuity of experiencing the world as incoherent), impose the abruptions that Lauren [Berlant] calls drama and undertakes to de-dramatize. But in my understanding of how attachment binds the subject to the world, a tear in the fabric of attachment, and so in reality's representation, cannot be separated from threat or from the dramatics of undoing. ...Managing affective intensities by recognizing their status as part of the ordinary puts the emphasis on a cognitive binding of the subject to the world of its representations—the very binding under pressure of undoing in the encounters to which I refer. Such transformative self-perception achieved amid affective discontinuity implicitly presumes a mastery of, and a capacity to include in our calculations, our unknowable primal attachments.<sup>[43]</sup>

[12] The question at the heart of Edelman's disagreement with Berlant is one I seek to address by way of Fanon: is it possible to account for "ruptures in the logic [of being]" provoked by unbearable sex acts in advance of those sex acts, as calculation and seduction or as a stratagem manufactured by the self's ego? Edelman understands the ego as that which "binds the subject to the world" as it is and not as it could be, disregarding the experiences of persons of color who identify with a white ego-ideal or who wear a "white mask" to neutralize or negate an epidermalized body-ego.<sup>[44]</sup> These people calculate and anticipate, indeed, wait for their racial schemas to be radically undone in surface masochisms.<sup>[45]</sup> Black persons *live* in the radically unrepresentable world Edelman wants unbearable sex acts to make exceptional; the black person knows instinctively, as the rule of her being and not its exception, what nonblack persons of color experience as traumatic misrecognition and whites in possession of an uncontested corporeal schema experience as voluntary if unbearable submission to "cruel optimism"<sup>[46]</sup>—that her being is always already unfinished, in want of conditions that will make ends meet. Unbearable sex acts with white/r others thus function for blacks as "an incision into a corpse;"<sup>[47]</sup> they provoke not the undoing of being but a momentary jolt or animation from the dead, its *jouissance* testifying to what Fanon describes as the "white potential in every one of us."<sup>[48]</sup> This alternate staging complicates Edelman's description of erotic submission as an encounter "with what exceeds and undoes the subject's fantasmatic sovereignty" because to suggest that the cognitive unbinding of unbearable sex acts animates nonsovereignty is to assume a priori self-mastery, even if only as fantasy and persuasion.<sup>[49]</sup> In a correction to the Hegelian dialectic, Fanon argues that the white gaze, we might add, omnipresent in and as technologies of surveillance, discipline and self-care, makes impossible even or especially a being-for-self.<sup>[50]</sup> In other words, the "unknowable primal attachments" Edelman labors to

politicize by way of Lacan and Oedipal psychoanalysis are eclipsed in Fanonian psychoanalysis by what David Marriott describes as

the ways in which the unconscious is constituted by the real and halts and interrupts it: the imagoes and stereotypes by means of which the colonial subject hates and enslaves itself as a subject, affirms its immorality or malfeasance, and fails to know itself as anything but (a masked, white) European.<sup>[51]</sup>

[13] I intervene in reality television because its new media collapses ego and image to spectacularize the primal wounds Edelman makes opaque. Its scopoc regimes capitalize on the zeitgeist of this particular moment as one in which personal or intimate events are in fact part of a staged public record of online posts and tweets, constitutive of celebrity. While certainly an implement of advanced surveillance technologies—Jasbir Puar describes reality television as "[the] constant intimate relating [of people] with omnipotent surveillance equipment"<sup>[52]</sup>—its new media compels participants to witness and cheerlead their own life stories. The editing choices made by reality television production teams further expose and humiliate actors like Reza who gamble with their real names, real emotions and real relationships on screen. These shows are morally gratuitous and ethically ugly, but that's exactly the point: they broadcast an actor's reactions to persons and things before s/he can remember to collect herself (because other people are watching) and stylize an affective response. The preferences and proclivities they exploit make irrelevant how that actor "give an account" of her person.<sup>[53]</sup> Fits and tantrums like Reza's "gay rage" are edited for dramatic effect to be profit yielding; played on repeat, in slow motion, in clips or advertisements and on reunion episodes, these scenes artifactualize the "dirty laundry" Reza otherwise goes to elaborate lengths to hide from public scrutiny and deliberate self-reflection. Consequently, his primal attachments are knowable to a discerning audience even as they remain unknowable to him.

What's Afropessimism got to do with it? A critical return to Fanon

[14] I revisit Fanon's argument that there is in fact no difference "between one racism and another" to query the suspicion that nonblack persons of color also pursue white lovers in surface exchanges that induce short-lived but sentient ontological cuts. The story line Bravo TV erects to narrativize Reza obscures this matrix of possibility; I recover it to suggest that he cultivates a gay affect inflected with modern sensibilities in an offensive move borne from the habitual trauma of white eyes. His is an effort to preempt and redirect the experience of "existing triply," or how Reza imagines himself perceived by others who invoke History to claim a priori knowledge of him evidenced by racial schemas.<sup>[54]</sup> The theory of time I inherit from Fanon elaborates how and why Iranians are racialized as non- or pre-modern in the literatures of empire, for example, ethnography and historiography. Iranians are a pansexual people ineligible for racial modernity in Orientalist lore because they live outside of white chronotopes in an untouched time of the bush, which is a quintessentially black time. Representational tropes in the Western canon objectify persons of color as "evil, sin, wretchedness, death, war, and famine," animating them on occasion as "the Wolf, the Devil, [or] the Wicked Genie," but never as human beings.<sup>[55]</sup> Black and nonblack persons of color who likewise emerge suspiciously and belatedly from bush cultures are characterized by cannibalism, savagery, barbarism and sodomy—concurrently, as sexual savagery and

bestial sodomy.<sup>[56]</sup> They don't arrive (because they can't) at disciplinary regimes that *make live*, which is another way to say that their brown and black bodies secrete and protrude hazardous contaminants into the modern world even as they slowly stand upright (some slower than others) to move from "a sexuality of the depths" associated with base carnality to "a sexuality of the heights" mired in ideology. Antiracism thus reproduces evolutionary speciesism for black and nonblack persons of color alike. The latter enjoy "ontological resistance" as patronage but not right; the nonblack person of color is contingently human: when blacks are materially or rhetorically present to bear the weight of Man's ontological anxieties.<sup>[57]</sup>

[15] While Afropessimist readings to date make a case for inanalogue experiences of racial blackness, I want to think rigorously instead or in addition about Fanon's suggestion that speciesism saturates all race discourse, or that "colonial racism is no different from other racisms."<sup>[58]</sup> His observation that blacks are "the missing link between the ape and man" uniquely qualifies Sexton's claim that all racialization "takes place *through* blackness as its matrix or schema."<sup>[59]</sup> The symbolic order that "law-likely function to *semantically-neurochemically induce* the performative enactment of our ensemble of always already role-allocated individual and collective behaviors"<sup>[60]</sup> writes the black person into being as a beast of burden, the constitutive outside to *Homo occidentalis* or as "phobic object par excellence;"<sup>[61]</sup> this is why, irrespective of where and, notably, when in the world he finds himself, "*a black man remains a black man*"<sup>[62]</sup> or a canvas for antiracism humanist proscriptions. Fanon bemoans, "I am not given a second chance. I am overdetermined from the outside. I am slave not to the 'idea' others have of me, but to my appearance."<sup>[63]</sup> His examples are as universal as they are specific:

In the United States, Blacks are segregated. In South America, they are whipped in the streets and black strikers are gunned down. In West Africa, the black man is a beast of burden. And just beside me there is this student colleague of mine from Algeria who tells me, "As long as the Arab is treated like a man, like one of us, there will be no viable answer."<sup>[64]</sup>

[16] We might update this list with the warehousing and genocide of African asylum seekers in Israel; with the constitutional discrimination against black Haitians and their mixed-race descendants in the Dominican Republic; with the black Americans cut off from access to clean water in Detroit; or with any number of occasions in which white and nonblack people of color take libidinal pleasure in the slicing and dicing of black flesh—for example, in 2012, when Sweden's Minister of Culture, Lena Adelsohn Liljeroth, cut the clitoris from a cake modeled on the body of a black woman at a World Art Day event in Stockholm.

[17] The particularities of antiracism humanism are not important, Fanon explains, because "to say [...] that northern France is more racist than the south, or that racism can be found in subalterns but in no way involves the elite, or that France is the least racist country in the world, is characteristic of people incapable of thinking properly."<sup>[65]</sup> In other words, to qualify antiracism humanism comparatively is a fool's errand, symptomatic of an inability to "think properly" about how race works as an ontological cut. The

wanton murder of Palestinians in Gaza; the warehousing and base treatment of Abu Ghraib prisoners in Iraq; the tyranny of the Guantanamo Bay torture camp; to say nothing of the violence nonblack people of color wage against their own people, would not be possible in the absence of an antiblack humanism that teaches us all to negotiate and index human life, at the micro level of instinct and gut, in reference to a constant, constitutive Other, even if only as spook: the black who is of no value or consequence to the species of Man, indeed, whose chronopolitical station absolves him of human relevance.

[18] To misunderstand the question is to rehearse what Heather Dalmage describes as "the acknowledgment of racial divisions without the acknowledgment of racial hierarchies,"<sup>[66]</sup> which is why Afropessimism

teaches us all how we might better inhabit multiplicity under general conditions at the global scale for which such inhabitation has become (and perhaps always has been or must be) a necessary virtue. And it does so less through pedagogical instruction than through an exemplary transmission: emulation of a process of learning through the posing of a question, rather than imitation of a form of being.<sup>[67]</sup>

We're here. We're queer. We're Iranian. And we're just like you.

[19] Reza's bio on Bravo TV's website likens him to a rare, gay Iranian unicorn who must "get past the baggage he carries from his upbringing," presumably as a native of Iran, to arrive at "the American White Picket Fence happy ending."<sup>[68]</sup> The network infers that Reza is natally and filially, that is, ontologically foreclosed from the space-time of the modern homosexual (complete with marriage, kids and a mortgage) or the space-time of *the now*. Its website summons Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's statement during a UN visit to the United States in 2007 that "in Iran we don't have homosexuals *like in your country*" to intuit gay sexualities as the mark of a modernity to which Iranians are not privy but which Reza might contingently access as an Iranian *American*.<sup>[69]</sup> We might pause to note that Ahmadinejad dismisses homosexual Iranian types but says nothing about queer Iranian sexualities. His comments thus invoke not homophobia but *Gharbzadeghi* or "Westoxification"—a concept made famous by Jalal Al-e Ahmad in his 1961/4 report by the same name to the Commission on the Goals of the Iranian Ministry of Education, which galvanized civil unrest in 1978/9. In Al-e Ahmad's rendering and Ahmadinejad's as well, Weststruck men, who are ideologically and commercially aligned with the West and presumably homosexual men characterized by a "fussy effeminacy," are one and the same:

The Weststruck man is prissy. He takes very good care of himself. He's always fussing with his personal wardrobe and grooming. He even plucks his hair under his eyebrows sometimes. His shoes, his clothing, his vehicle, and his house, are extremely important to him. He always looks as if he just came out of the box, or out of some European fashion house.<sup>[70]</sup>

[20] It bears noting that much of Reza's appeal to white audiences, including his appeal to Iranian viewers, is his Weststruckness. He is, or Bravo TV suggests, has a potential to be the homonormative stuff of wet American dreams.

[21] In an interview with *The Daily Beast* just two weeks after the show premiered on March 11, 2012, Reza describes receiving fan mail from other gay Iranians by the dozens: "They say *they love me, they are proud of, Thank God for me.*"<sup>[71]</sup> In another interview with the *Los Angeles Times*, suggestively titled, "'It's Not National Geographic'," Reza explains that he joined the cast

for one reason and one reason only: about a year or two ago, I just started...I don't know if it was happening more because I was living in a bubble and didn't have enough awareness, but I'm a very strong person, so it never was in my realm of possibility, but I was watching TV and reading newspapers and magazines and the Internet, and it seemed like there was one suicide a day of a young, gay teen killing themselves because they were being bullied in school. It literally broke me down and brought me to tears. I don't know if it was happening a lot before and I was just catching wind of it and I was living in my own bubble in my amazing life I was blessed to have or what, but it just seemed like it was happening way too much. And in my culture, there is such taboo around sexuality, especially. I thought if I participate and put myself out there, I'm strong enough to take whatever criticism or heat may come with it. They can call me whatever names they want, they can trash me up and down and all around. It will not impact my life one bit. But if it helps one gay teen to come out to their family or it forces one family to have a conversation, my job in life is done. What I set out to do, I did.<sup>[72]</sup>

[22] But rather than diversify what it means to be Iranian or signal to young viewers that queer sexualities do, in fact, exist in Iranian contexts (an argument premised on multiplicity), Reza's visibility functions to prescribe/proscribe how one should embody (as ego) and make knowable to the world (as image) what it means to be Iranian and gay at the same time, as the effect of seemingly contradicting sociocultural scripts. Reza's emergence as a gay TV icon effectively shifts how the signifiers "gay" and "Iranian" are read together and take root or circulate in global mediascapes receptive to the "whites of our eyes."<sup>[73]</sup> Reading "gay" and "Iranian" as compatible rather than opposed subject positions is a rhetorical move as well as a political one: it positions gay Iranians as the "us," and anti-gay, anti-American and ostensibly religiously devout Iranians as the "them" in a global imperialist project. The momentary collapse of this hard line between "us" and "them," in which the body politic sympathizes with rather than pathologizes difference, is a trap; just as soon as it expands, the boundary simultaneously contracts to reveal Western modernity's racialized limits of inclusion—what Sexton describes as an "increasing willingness to expand the boundaries of whiteness...whose only conditional limitation is the exclusion of racial blackness."<sup>[74]</sup> Coincidentally, nonblack persons of color redeem their human value in a colorblind society by virtue of "a negation of [their] own anxious ego[s]" as persons of *color*.<sup>[75]</sup> Their passing white privilege is activated by a color line that invites racially distinct persons into the folds of liberal pluralism by entrenching racial blackness as a structural antagonism.<sup>[76]</sup>

[23] While black persons of color do not move through time, nonblack persons of color can and do progressively (if contingently) move towards the sexed and gendered modernity natally foreclosed to them, but they cannot arrive at modern types. Reza seeks to prove himself as the right kind of modern or post-modern gay, I argue, so as not to be perceived by viewers as "tagging along, socially, politically, and economically, tagging along behind the West."<sup>[77]</sup> Queers of color and especially those who fail to

communicate bourgeois values are doubly marked (from without and also from within) in ways that invest the work of thinking race and the work of thinking sex with the same politics of time. When charged with "gay rage," Reza laments,

I wasn't just like a little Persian kid trying to fit in. I was a little Persian gay kid that had no roadmap for a life or a future. There were no gay Persian role models. I had no one to look up to. I had no one to talk to (41:25).<sup>[78]</sup>

[24] The intersectional nexus that Reza experiences as a chronopolitical crisis invaginates him twice, positioning him as homosexual by choice and indiscriminately pansexual by Orientalist birthright, and provokes defensive posturing in episode 5, "Fresh Off the Boat," when Reza meets Sasha, a flamboyantly gay Iranian neighbor who comfortably inhabits racial schemas.<sup>[79]</sup>

[25] Reza's on-screen identifications as a gay man constitute a strategic alignment in which he seeks to be known as something (anything) other than a person of color, but what I describe is not the unique experience of Iranian-American subjectivization. An Afropessimist study of Iran might begin with the observation that the country's name is a transliteration of the French *aryen*, identifying the state as a "land of Aryans;"<sup>[80]</sup> or with the charge that since its birth Iranian nationalism has claimed ethnicity-without-race. Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, a puppet monarch who held the title *Aryanmehr* ("Light of the Aryans") on the throne (1941—1979), launched the "White Revolution" in 1963 to "save" Iranians from racial schemas and Iran from social and political degeneracy. He imposed mandatory dress and hygiene codes, built public schools and libraries, extended healthcare to rural communities, invited unveiled women to vote in elections,<sup>[81]</sup> and privatized industry to create a resilient middle class of factory owners, to say nothing of the sweeping reforms Mohammad Reza Shah sought as part of a land redistribution program engineered to gain favor with the Iranian peasantry. His father, Reza Shah (1925—1941), was the first Pahlavi monarch to suggest white mimicry as a modernization strategy; in a geopolitical maneuver characteristic of *Gharbzadeghi*, Reza Shah sent a letter to the League of Nations in 1935 requesting the mostly European member states to formally recognize Persia as Iran. This move reclassified Persia in Western discourse (the only discourse to circulate globally as knowledge) as an Aryan/Iranian nation but did little to shift the racial alignments within Iran or among Iranians. Instead, name change institutionalized the racism already in circulation—by the 1890s, nationalists had traced the origins of the Persian people to an Aryan bloodline<sup>[82]</sup>—remaking national identifications in a modern vernacular receptive to Hitler's race war.

[26] Early ideologues of Persian nationalism like Mirza Fath 'Ali Akhundzadeh (1812—1878), a poet and polemicist who "pioneered the grafting of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment modes of thought onto Persianate cultural idioms,"<sup>[83]</sup> merged nineteenth century race science with the Indo-European classification of languages—founded by Sir William Jones in 1786, this classification locates Persian and select European languages (Greek, Latin, German and Celtic) in the same linguistic family—to identify a new ontological category specific to Iranian and Indian persons: the Indo-European. Afshin Marashi details the birth of this linguistic-ontological assemblage thus:

Iran and India were the only two extra-European cultural zones positioned at the peak of the nineteenth-century racial hierarchies, alongside the advanced European states and in contradistinction to the Semitic, Turkic, Mongol, and Aboriginal ethno-linguistic families. Nineteenth-century cultural science implied that Iran and India, unlike other groups, possessed a proto-Aryan national essence.<sup>[84]</sup>

[27] Persian nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries strategically collapsed ethnic particularities to characterize Iran as an always already white nation of Persianate people.<sup>[85]</sup> Far from the ruin one might expect in the wake of regime change in 1979, in which clergy took issue with Pahlavi-era self-representations of Iran as secular and modern, white nationalism survives today to anchor being-for-others (for example, the Iranian New Year or *Norouz* is celebrated with ritual performances of blackface minstrelsy) as well as being-for-self.<sup>[86]</sup> It instructs Iranians with social and political capital living in Iran and as émigrés in the West to identify as Persian, indeed, to anticipate and foreclose the incommensurability of identifying instead with countrymen who clamor for "Death to America" in Orientalist caricatures of Iran as a nefarious nation of ayatollahs and martyrs, sharia laws and veiled women.

Real talk.

[28] The show's producers want us to believe that Reza and Sasha meet serendipitously, facilitated only by Adam, who brings Sasha home for drinks and to meet Reza after striking up a conversation with him at the building's pool facility. Upon meeting Sasha, Reza sarcastically asks Adam, "You *just* met him and decided to bring him to our house because he's Persian?" Adam responds emphatically, "And gay," provoking Reza to retort, "If I was black and you saw a black man at the pool, would you have brought him up[stairs] just because he's black?!" (12:50, 14:20).<sup>[87]</sup> In this juxtaposition, Reza reproduces the "enormous black penis hysteria of European empire" to problematize the intimacy with which Adam receives Sasha; which is to say, he parrots white humanist ideologies in which passengers at the intersection of "gay" and "Persian" are implicated in the muck and mire of black pathology-*cum*-sexual perversity,<sup>[88]</sup> stuck in a time that inscribes sex as genital difference and genital difference as racial blackness.

[29] Reza is immediately "offended" and "disgusted," words he uses in subsequent episodes, by Sasha's affective sensibilities and political orientation, including his upbeat opinions about Iran, which oppose Reza's stoic assumption that the 1979 revolution signaled the end of a golden era, reanimating Orientalist caricatures of an Iran frozen in space and time; and is frustrated by Adam's flippant assumption that Reza and Sasha are somehow alike or share commonalities that Reza and Adam don't. "You were born in a shithole and I was born in the imperial kingdom of Iran," Reza barks. "The country that I was born in stopped existing in 1979" (14:40, 14:55).<sup>[89]</sup> Sasha's irreverence—"Okay, if I'm flamboyant, *I own it. I love it.* This is who I am" (39:45)<sup>[90]</sup>—upsets the imago of modern gay Iranian sexuality Reza labors to curate. He bemoans,

Your family is not here. No one has to deal with the consequences of you being as gay as

you are... [but] it impacts *me*. [...] You don't suffer because of it. I have to hear about it. [...] We suffer, the other people that aren't as gay as you, other Iranians (15:15, 15:30, 15:50).<sup>[91]</sup>

[30] In an interview with the show's producers edited to appear as a real-time confession, Reza further reflects, in a statement reminiscent of Fanon's claim that "the black man is nothing but biological. Black men are animals. They live naked. And God only knows what else," that "the way I was brought up, you don't swish around West Hollywood in daisy dukes and slinky tank tops. That is not the way a *dignified* Persian man acts" (15:40).<sup>[92]</sup>

[31] When Sasha fumbles in social etiquette (his foot grazes the furniture), Reza asks him to "get the fuck out" of the home he shares with Adam (16:00, 16:40).<sup>[93]</sup> They interact next at the episode's close, crossing paths again at a gay Middle Eastern nightclub when Reza's co-star Mike organizes a *Shahs of Sunset* appearance there.<sup>[94]</sup> Reza resigns to drinking (sulking) in a corner of *Club Nur* with MJ instead of socializing with the other gay Middle Eastern patrons with whom he ostensibly shares commonalities. Mike describes Reza's sour disposition thus:

I'm looking at all these Persian people, free and dancing and laughing and being themselves and not being scared to be open and gay. It's like a safe haven, man; it's a happy place with just one noticeable exception: Reza Farahan. (27:10)<sup>[95]</sup>

[32] When Reza spots Sasha in the crowd, he immediately turns to MJ, "Oh my god, *he's* here!" and then to Mike, "The queen I threw out of my house is here!" (29:10, 32:35).<sup>[96]</sup> Sasha returns Reza's nonverbal cues and extends an olive branch, approaching to greet the *Shahs* with his brother, Salman, who is also a recent Iranian émigré and (closeted) homosexual indifferent to the respectability politics Reza vigilantly defends.<sup>[97]</sup>

[33] Reza's righteous indignation—"Seeing [Sasha] brings up every negative emotion inside of me. I don't know what it is; I don't know where it comes from; [but] like, I *want to attack*" (35:30)<sup>[98]</sup>—swells when he meets an awkward Salman who is still negotiating if and when and how to identify as gay. Feeling provoked for reasons that are unclear, Reza outs Salman as a "fag," hurling the insult as loud as he can despite the looks this move attracts from the club's patrons (37:35).<sup>[99]</sup> The *Shahs* struggle to understand why their rational, well-adjusted friend cannot see himself (young, gay, Iranian) in the brothers or show these men the kindness he would have liked to receive in his early, timid interactions with other gay men.<sup>[100]</sup> Unable to calm or reason with Reza, MJ and Adam take him home; meanwhile, Mike, a recovering homophobe, stays behind to understand what might motivate his friend to participate in a hate speech that is in fact a hatred of the self, offering a humble apology to Salman on Reza's behalf. Salman poignantly reminds Mike that he left Iran precisely not to be called a fag (41:00).<sup>[101]</sup>

[34] In episode 7, Reza seeks counsel from clinical psychologist and author of *The Velvet Rage: Overcoming the Pain of Growing Up Gay in a Straight Man's World* (Da Capo Press, 2005) Dr. Alan Downs, to help him process what the show and his friends mischaracterize as a self-effacing

homophobia. When asked by Dr. Downs to describe Sasha, Reza caricatures him as someone who "wants to run naked up and down the street all day long," (27:00)<sup>[102]</sup> which offends Reza because

[Sasha] is so flamboyant, and then [*with a distressed and puzzled look on his face*] he and I end up in the same category. He makes me feel shameful that I'm gay and Persian and that he's gay and Persian. (26:45)<sup>[103]</sup>

[35] In his own words, Reza is devastated by the "category" of being Sasha's affectations corroborate. He does not have a language with which to enumerate the particular intersectional nexus he and Sasha occupy or the tools with which to locate its psychosomatic wound, but clarifies in a confessional aside that his is not reducible to "gay rage." Appealing instead to Iran's relevance for the History of Man, Reza reflects, "This isn't about gay or straight. This is about maintaining a certain level of dignity because of who we are, how we were raised, what we had, and *what we were offering to the world*" (27:05).<sup>[104]</sup> Dr. Downs responds flippantly, "Well, it makes sense that you wouldn't have him [Sasha] as a friend" (28:00),<sup>[105]</sup> asking him to meditate instead on the homophobia that is the good doctor's bread and butter. A casual exchange with co-star Asa, and not a high-profile meeting with Dr. Downs, prompts Reza to unpack the aggression with which he receives Sasha and to locate its original wound in primal experiences of racial alienation:

Everything about him [Sasha] bothers me. And as soon as I heard his voice it like triggered this old pain inside of me. I remember [that] because I looked the way I looked [and] because I was from the place I was from, I was lumped into this category; and I've lived with this pain for so long. [And] multiply that by the fact that I'm gay and all this stuff, I literally took out 39 years worth of pain on him right then and there. (38:50)<sup>[106]</sup>

[36] Sasha is the spectral reminder/remainder of "a lot of pain and a lot of dark years in [Reza's] childhood;" he is "the walking, living, breathing representation" of Reza's ghost as a queer of color *body*, doubly hailed to communicate pathological invagination (28:15).<sup>[107]</sup> That Reza endeavors to pass the buck of sexual degeneracy to blacks, the occupants of its proper Historical locus, further betrays the antiblack grammar of modern homosexual typology. Reza unravels when he begins to suspect that, despite the diligence with which he negates racial schemas to assume an ethnicity-without-race appropriate to modern homosexual typology, Adam, Mike and MJ, those people who know Reza intimately (some more intimately than others), liken him to Sasha and later, to Salman, whom Reza receives with negrophobic disgust in a bid safeguard his own ego from "the slap that will come, and that has come, from what is no longer there."<sup>[108]</sup> Black and nonblack persons of color experience different scales of racism but not unrelated racisms, I have argued, because racial schemas as "a modern skin [conditions]" epidermalize so as to pathologize nonblack persons of color in likeness to blacks.<sup>[109]</sup> Antiblack humanism thus charges Reza to wait, as Fanon does, for modernity's slap; in other words, to alternately occupy and vacate the material body, a vessel that makes sentient experiences possible but which does not house the felt sense of its person, whose "sensorium and [...] body are moving in proximity but not in sync or identity,"<sup>[110]</sup> to curate desire and identification.

[37] If the human body is epidermalized and phallicized in the same moment, during the shift from

anatomy to physiognomy characteristic of Enlightenment humanism, then the white gaze invaginates Reza's becoming-flesh twice to indict it in anachronism.<sup>[111]</sup> Stephens explains,

Our understanding of the skin as a hardened, impermeable container for difference is tied to our phallic understanding of our libidinal bodies. ...The relationality or intersectionality of racial and sexual difference is inscribed on the skin literally when the epidermalizing of racial difference is understood more broadly as a phallicizing of the body.<sup>[112]</sup>

[38] Reza translates an invaginated body-ego into the phallic signifier of modern times, that "hardened container of both racial and sexual differences, inscribed onto epidermal and genital skin," by invoking antiblack "concepts of a heterosexualist empire of Occidentalism" to bed Adam as feminine other.<sup>[113]</sup> In surface exchanges with Adam, Reza feels the taut, human skin of white universality. This particular kind of *jouissance* coheres body-ego (the 'I' that is) with psychic-ego (the 'I' that feels) as skin-ego, suggesting that the alternative world Fanon seeks finds one condition of possibility in the interracial meeting of bodies and secretions and intimacies commissioning him to serially but not exhaustively invent himself anew.

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## Notes

1. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (Grove Press, 2008) 138, 67; Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann, (Grove Press, 1967) 226.
2. Ramin Setoodeh, "'Shahs of Sunset' Star Reza Farahan on Being a Gay Iranian," *The Daily Beast*, 27 March 2012 «<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/03/26/shahs-of-sunset-star-reza-farahan-on-being-a-gay-iranian.html>», original emphasis.
3. "Tehrangeles" describes Los Angeles neighborhoods heavily populated with first and second-generation Iranian immigrants.
4. "Fresh Off the Boat," Season 3, *Shahs of Sunset*, Bravo TV, 03 December 2013, iTunes: 14:55.
5. Contrapuntality is a musical metaphor in which two modes of listening are active simultaneously. This is Edward Said's term for a "forum where every point can be counter-pointed argumentatively, not with the intention of creating a schism but with the objective of realizing shared, bi-laterally constructed totality." See R. Radhakrishnan, *A Said Dictionary* (Blackwell Publishing, 2012) 24.
6. Jared Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism* (University of Minnesota Press, 2008) 244.
7. Ibid. 239, 175, original emphasis.
8. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Philcox trans. 45.
9. Michelle Ann Stephens, *Skin Acts: Race, Psychoanalysis, and the Black Male Performer* (Duke University Press, 2014) 196.
10. Stephens inherits and develops the concept of "skin-ego" from French psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu, but cites Fanon to rework it, writing, "The bodily ego or sensational ego is tied to the skin ego, to those erogenous locations on the skin of the body around which the drives circle in search of a living being, beyond a signifying consciousness. It is this intercorporeal body, subject as it is to desire and the circuit of the drive, that sits at the intersection between the sensational body relating to the other in cultural performances and the libidinal body desiring, and being desired, and desiring to be desired, as a sexual subject-object in private relations between self and other."

See *Skin Acts* 24-25.

11. This is how Frank Wilderson describes his own relations with white lover Alice, about whom he writes, "You are health, honesty, cleanliness, piety, and plentitude. I rub against you that you might rub off on me. And then I can't stand to look at you." See *Incognegro: A Memoir of Exile and Apartheid* (South End Press, 2008) 159.
12. "Felt sense" is Gayle Salamon's term in *Assuming a Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality* (Columbia University Press, 2010).
13. Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes* 25.
14. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Philcox trans. 204.
15. Frantz Fanon, "On National Culture," *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963) 183.
16. Wilderson, *Incognegro* 158-159.
17. Stephens, *Skin Acts* 14. To be sure, the body left behind by Enlightenment modernity is a "grotesque body [...] made up of [...] 'excrescences and orifices' where what is inside can become outside: 'In the grotesque body, the boundaries between body and world and those between individual bodies are much less differentiated and more open than they are in the new body canon: the very boundary of the grotesque body reveals the intermingling with the world in that protruding body parts (the nose or stomach, for example) are understood as projecting into the world, and the inside of the body comes out and mingles with the world.'" Protruding orifices include but are not limited to the "eyes, ears, nose, mouth, breasts, navel, anus, urinary passage, and vulva." Ibid. 14-15, 15.
18. Ibid. 196, 29.
19. Lewis Gordon, *Bad Faith and Antiracist Racism* (Humanities Press International, 1995) 128, my emphasis.
20. Ibid. 127. Gordon further explains, "The black man is caught. He cannot reject his femininity without simultaneously rejecting his blackness, for his femininity stands as a consequence of his blackness and vice versa. Standing in front of a white wall, he appears as a hole, as a gaping, feminine symbol to be filled, closed up, by the being who has being." Ibid. 128.
21. Stephens, *Skin Acts* 3.
22. It bears noting that Fanon refutes the relevance of Oedipal relations in "The Black Man and Psychopathology," wherein he writes that "the Oedipus complex is far from being a black complex." See *Black Skin, White Masks*, Philcox trans. 130.
23. Philip Goodchild, *Deleuze and Guattari: An Introduction to the Politics of Desire* (Sage Publications, 1996) 80.
24. Sexton explains, "The dialogic relation between a sexuality of the heights and a sexuality of the depths turns on their agreement that *sexual drives can be socially determined*, that these tendencies can be engineered to the greatest end. ...Neither a sexuality of the depths nor a sexuality of the heights offers a liberating option. Less because sexual desire inevitably contains elements of both height and depth than because both height and depth rely upon a fantasy of the sexual relationship—a ruse that is affirmed and celebrated on the one hand (depth) and disowned and purged on the other (height), but posited nonetheless by both." See *Amalgamation Schemes* 180.
25. Ibid. 189.
26. Lauren Berlant, "She's Having An Episode: Patricia Williams and the Writing of Damaged Life,"

*Columbia Journal of Gender and the Law* 27.1 (2013): 34.

27. Freud notes in "Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex" (1905) that erogenous zones, themselves invaginated regions of the skin, "merely show the special exaggeration of a form of sensitiveness which is, to a certain degree, found over the whole surface of the skin." See Stephens, *Skin Acts* 25.
28. Goodchild, *Deleuze and Guattari* 81.
29. Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17.2 (1987): 64-81.
30. Stephens, *Skin Acts* 9-10, 10.
31. We might remember that Derridean "invagination" implicates even the modern construct of human skin in layers of flesh that have "[the] capacity to be folded in upon [themselves].' ...Invagination thus takes us not only backward in time, to a grotesque conception of the body and its organs as epidermal surfaces and orifices that fold back on each other, the residue of the medieval body—but also forward to the modern twentieth-century body of phenomenology." See *Ibid.* 16.
32. *Ibid.* 16, 19, 8.
33. *Ibid.* 22. "Intercorporeal drive" is Merleau-Ponty's term in *The Visible and the Invisible* (Northwestern University Press, 1968).
34. Stephens, *Skin Acts* 15, 19.
35. Paul Schilder, *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body* (Routledge, 1950) 85. About black matters, Zakiyyah Iman Jackson writes, "Given that appositional and homologous (even co-constitutive) challenges pertaining to animality, objecthood, and thingliness have long been established in thought examining the existential predicament of modern racial blackness, the resounding silence in the posthumanist, object-oriented, and new materialist literatures with respect to race is remarkable, persisting even despite the reach of antiblackness into the nonhuman—as blackness conditions and constitutes the very nonhuman disruption and/or displacement they invite." See "Outer Worlds: The Persistence of Race in Movement 'Beyond the Human'" in "Queer Inhumanisms," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 21.2-3 (Duke University Press, 2015): 216, original emphasis.
36. Berlant, "She's Having An Episode" 22, original emphasis.
37. Schilder, *Image and Appearance* 86.
38. Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman, *Sex, or the Unbearable* (Duke University Press, 2013) vii-viii.
39. *Ibid.* xvii.
40. Edelman, *Ibid.* 64.
41. Berlant, *Ibid.* 68.
42. Edelman, *Ibid.* 64-65.
43. Edelman, *Ibid.* 65.
44. David Marriott explains, "The I or ego is always, for [Fanon], a question of other, of others. The implication is that sociality inscribes itself in the individual, and egoic love is inhabited by the political, and that is why power is power the condition of the subject and the reason why self-love is always a question of mastery. And this certainly seems to be the implication of the stress on narcissism, on what it means to be an alienated, divided subject, a subject unable to represent itself to itself in the racist mirror of culture." See "Inventions of Existence: Sylvia Wynter, Frantz Fanon, Sociogeny, and 'the Damned,'" *The New Centennial Review* 11:3 (Michigan State University Press, 2011): 61.

45. Fanon writes, "If I were asked for a definition of myself, I would say that *I am the one who waits*." See *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (Grove Press, 1967) 120. David Marriot elaborates that waiting in the Fanonian sense is a general "sense of suspended anticipation;" it is "a moment of suspension, one that delays, perhaps permanently, the timely expression of anything that might be called one's own. It is as if the black is permanently belated." See *On Black Men* (Columbia University Press, 2000) 81-82. Kara Keeling likewise comments, "The temporal configuration Fanon describes is that of an interval before an anticipated event and after an event that has precipitated the waiting. Under such circumstances, to exist as 'one who waits,' then, is to exist in an interval." See "In the Interval: Frantz Fanon's War and the 'Problem' of Visual Representation," *Qui Parle* 13. 2 (2003): 105-106.
46. Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Duke University Press, 2011).
47. Wilderson, *Incognegro* 156.
48. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Philcox trans. 30.
49. Edelman, *Sex, or the Unbearable 2*.
50. Fanon writes, "There is at the basis of Hegelian dialectic an absolute reciprocity that must be highlighted. It is when I go beyond my immediate existential being that I apprehend the being of the other as a natural reality, and more than that. If I shut off the circuit, if I make the two-way movement unachievable, I keep the other within himself. In an extreme danger, I deprive him even of this being-for-self. The only way to break this vicious circle that refers me back to myself is to restore to the other his human reality, different from his natural reality, by way of mediation and recognition." Fanon's realization that he is recognized by nonblacks as a monster and as a beast—a Negro—incapacitates and disables him, totally and completely, making impossible even a being-for-self. He elaborates, "I arrive slowly in the world; sudden emergencies are no longer my habit. I crawl along. The white gaze, the only valid one, is already dissecting me. I am fixed. Once their microtomes are sharpened, the Whites objectively cut sections of my reality. I have been betrayed. I sense, I see in this white gaze that it's the arrival not of a new man, but of a new type of man, a new species. A Negro, in fact!" See *Black Skin, White Masks*, Philcox trans. 191-192, 95.
51. Marriott, "Inventions of Existence" 62-63.
52. Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Duke University Press, 2007) 164.
53. Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (Fordham University Press, 2005).
54. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Philcox trans. 92.
55. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Philcox trans. 167, 124-125.
56. See Joseph Allen Boone, *The Homoerotics of Orientalism* (Columbia University Press, 2014).
57. Bodies marked unambiguously as black come from a different stock; they are denied access to identification as a fluid and relative process because the black body is the timeless constant against which the human body, in likeness to whiteness, comes to know and instantiate itself as a metaphysical being. It is Fanon's claim that the wretched live in existential crisis (because they cannot transcend the indisputable fact of their wretchedness) that throws feminist theories of intersectionality and assemblage into crisis; indeed, because these critiques fail to understand the impossible task of elaborating a coherent bodily schema after it has been "attacked in several places," or after it has "collapsed, giving way to an epidermal racial schema" in which one exists not just in the third person but *triply*. Having internalized white supremacist projections of pathological blackness—"Look! A Negro!"—the black man is reduced to an artifact under the

weight of the white gaze; with no past and no future, s/he is always already untimely (that is, without time) arriving too soon to the table of human civilization and too late. See Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Philcox trans. 92.

58. Ibid. 69.
59. Ibid. 67; Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes* 264, original emphasis.
60. Sylvia Wynter, "Unparalleled catastrophe for our species? Or, to Give Humanness a Different Future: Conversations," *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, ed. Katherine McKittrick (Duke University Press, 2015) 32-33, original emphasis.
61. Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes* 244. Fanon elaborates, "The black man has a function: to represent shameful feelings, base instincts, and the dark side of the soul. In the collective unconscious of *Homo occidentalis*, the black man—or, if you prefer, the color black—symbolizes evil, sin, wretchedness, death, war, and famine." See *Black Skin, White Masks*, Philcox trans. 167.
62. Ibid. 150, original emphasis.
63. Ibid. 95.
64. Ibid. 93.
65. Ibid. 66.
66. Heather Dalmage, *The Politics of Multiracialism: Challenging Racial Thinking* (State University of New York Press, 2004) 6.
67. Jared Sexton, "The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism," *In Tensions* 5 (Fall/Winter 2011) 8-9.
68. "Reza Farahan," BravoTV.com, 12 June 2014 «<http://www.bravotv.com/people/reza-farahan/bio>».
69. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Columbia University, 24 September 2007.
70. Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadeghi*, trans. John Green and Ahmad Alizadeh (Mazda Publishers, 1982) 118-119. Originally written and presented as a report for the Commission on the Goals of the Iranian Ministry of Education on 29 November 1961 and 18 January 1962, *Gharbzadeghi* is also sometimes translated as *Weststruckness* or *Occidentosis*.
71. Setoodeh, "'Shahs of Sunset' Star Reza Farahan on Being a Gay Iranian," original emphasis.
72. "'Shahs of Sunset' star Reza Farahan: It's not National Geographic," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 April 2012 «<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/showtracker/2012/04/shahs-of-sunset-reza-farahan.html>».
73. Stuart Hall, "The Whites of Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media," *Silver Linings: Some Strategies for the Eighties*, eds. George Bridges and Rosalind Brunt (Lawrence and Wishart, 1981) 28-52.
74. Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes* 75.
75. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Philcox trans. 152.
76. See Jared Sexton, "People-of-Color-Blindness: Notes on the Afterlife of Slavery," *Social Text* 103 28:2 (2010) Duke University Press.
77. Al-e Ahmadi, *Gharbzadeghi* 64.
78. "Persian Pride," Season 3, *Shahs of Sunset*, Bravo TV, 08 December 2013, iTunes.
79. Sasha is 29 years old and by his own account has been living in the United States for five years.
80. Iran inherits its name from the first Pahlavi monarch (1925-1941), who discursively recalibrated the global hegemonies productive of an "us" and "them" to gain favor (for himself) with the West. In an article for *Frontline's* Tehran Bureau dated August 6, 2010, Reza Zia-Ebrahimi suggests that the Aryan myth, borne from Europe's racial hierarchy, legitimates this name change. He cites the writings of German-born philologist and Orientalist, Max Müller, who "claimed in 1862 that the term

- airyanem vaejah* found in the Avesta is the ancestor of 'Iran' and means the 'Aryan expanse'," to this effect. Zia-Ebrahimi goes on to chronicle how "the now ubiquitous concept of the 'Aryan race' first appeared in Iran in the 1890s. Mirza Agha Khan Kermani, one of the ideologues of a particularly bigoted version of Iranian nationalism, was the first to ever refer to it in writing. Interestingly, he spelled it *àriyàn*... a transliteration of the French *aryen*. Later, Sadegh Rezazadeh Shafagh came up with *àriyâyi*, the term now usually used in Persian." See "Iranian Identity, the 'Aryan Race,' and Jake Gyllenhaal," Tehran Bureau, *Frontline*, Public Broadcasting Service, 06 August 2010 «<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2010/08/post-2.html>».
81. We might pause, as Greg Thomas does, to connect the imperial politics of un/veiling with the libidinal economy of antiblackness. Thomas writes, "The white sexual violence writ large in Negrophobia reemerges vis-à-vis colonized women, who are shrouded in a romantic exoticism 'strongly tinged with sexuality.' ...The colonizer sees the wretched-aside veil as revealing a hypersexualized body, one not at all unlike the 'black male-penis' in intensity." See *The Sexual Demon of Colonial Power: Pan-African Embodiment and Erotic Schemes of Empire* (Indiana University Press, 2007) 90-91.
  82. Afshin Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran: Culture, Power, and the State 1870-1940* (University of Washington Press, 2008) 66.
  83. Ibid. 66.
  84. Ibid. 75.
  85. Iran is home to Arabs, Balochis, Kurds, Gilanis, Mazanderanis, Loris, Qashqais, Bakhtiari and Armenians, to name just a few of its non-Persian peoples.
  86. For example, white identifications engender an insatiable demand for racist commodities like hair-removal and skin-lightening products, and likewise inform appeals to cosmetic surgery (an aquiline nose fetish notably bankrolls Tehran's emergence as the rhinoplasty capital of the world).
  87. "Fresh Off the Boat," Season 3, *Shahs of Sunset*, Bravo TV, 03 December 2013, iTunes.
  88. Thomas, *Sexual Demon* 88-89.
  89. "Fresh Off the Boat," Season 3, *Shahs of Sunset*, Bravo TV, 03 December 2013, iTunes.
  90. Ibid.
  91. Ibid.
  92. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Philcox trans. 143; "Fresh Off the Boat," Season 3, *Shahs of Sunset*, Bravo TV, 03 December 2013, iTunes. In the following episode, the *Shahs* (minus Reza) run into Sasha at gay pride, who Asa describes thus: "Now that I see Sasha in person I definitely know what Reza meant; I mean, he wasn't wearing underwear, [he was wearing this like] jock strap" (31:30). See "Persian Pride," Season 3, *Shahs of Sunset*, Bravo TV, 08 December 2013, iTunes.
  93. "Fresh Off the Boat," Season 3, *Shahs of Sunset*, Bravo TV, 03 December 2013, iTunes.
  94. The cast is invited to participate in a float sponsored by *Club Nur* at the Los Angeles gay pride parade, which divides the *Shahs* in episode 6 when Mike, a recovering homophobe eager to participate in gay pride as absolution, disinvites Reza, who retorts, "How audacious are you to call me to uninvite me to a disgusting float that's an *embarrassment* to the gay community. I am disgusted" (3:50). See "Persian Pride," Season 3, *Shahs of Sunset*, Bravo TV, 08 December 2013, iTunes.
  95. "Fresh Off the Boat," Season 3, *Shahs of Sunset*, Bravo TV, 03 December 2013, iTunes.
  96. Ibid.

97. Sasha claims that his brother moved to the United States 2-3 months ago.
98. Ibid.
99. Ibid. Reza reflects, "I didn't think I was outing Sasha's brother. We're at a gay bar. Hello; he's standing *right there*" (37:05). Sasha righteously tells Reza to "shut the fuck up" and not to "talk to [his] brother like that," because "[if] he doesn't want to say it," in other words, to come out as gay, "[then] don't you fucking say it" (36:50).
100. Reza explains, "There's something about that off-the-boat mentality and that feeling like I owe them something because we're from the same country that doesn't sit well with me" (5:40). See "Persian Pride," Season 3, *Shahs of Sunset*, Bravo TV, 08 December 2013, iTunes.
101. "Fresh Off the Boat," Season 3, *Shahs of Sunset*, Bravo TV, 03 December 2013, iTunes.
102. "The Velvet Rage," Season 3, *Shahs of Sunset*, Bravo TV, 10 December 2013, iTunes.
103. Ibid.
104. Ibid., my emphasis.
105. Ibid.
106. "Persian Pride," Season 3, *Shahs of Sunset*, Bravo TV, 08 December 2013, iTunes.
107. "The Velvet Rage," Season 3, *Shahs of Sunset*, Bravo TV, 10 December 2013, iTunes.
108. David Marriott, "Waiting to Fall," *The New Centennial Review* 13.3 (2013): 174.
109. Stephens, *Skin Acts* 199.
110. Berlant, "She's Having an Episode" 32.
111. Sylvia Wynter, "Beyond Miranda's Meaning: Un/silencing the 'Demonic Ground' of Caliban's 'Woman,'" *Out of the Kulmba: Caribbean Women and Literature*, eds. Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido (Africa World Press, 1990) 355-371.
112. Stephens, *Skin Acts* 12. Stephens further explains, "Gradually over the course of the Enlightenment, as the skin and the body both begin to harden and be seen as less and less permeable, the tying of difference to the epidermal and physiognomic also hardens the bodily surface as an impermeable container of difference. This hardening then contributes to an understanding of physiognomic difference as the marker of fundamental differences with the species. In this world of the body as hardened container of differences, both the anatomical differences represented in the sexual organs and the physiognomic differences registered in the facial features and bodily skin color of the other become naturalized. The skin is differentiated as belonging to different genders based on the shape of the sexual organs, genital skin; the skin is differentiated as marking different races based on the body's color, epidermal skin." Ibid. 14.
113. Ibid.20; Thomas, *Sexual Demon* 31.

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