

ARTICLE

Technopsyence and Afro-Surrealism's Cripistemologies

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Abstract

This article critiques today's digital mental health research and treatment paradigms through a crip theoretical approach. I argue that, in a neoliberal risk culture and austerity logics that use big data to capacitate and debilitate, psychiatric technoscientific endeavors (what I call *technopsyence*) reproduce racial capitalism in their aim of governing mentalities. Yet mobile devices are also the means by which crip bodyminds creatively interrogate and resist racial capitalism and the psy discourses that support it. I explore a recent work of Afro-Surrealism that presents scenes of extractive racial capitalism, fantasies of digital futures, mental distress, and care, and that, I argue, opens up avenues for thinking bodyminds and the digital otherwise.

In 2010, the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) launched the Research Domain Criteria (RDoC) project. Named in allusion to the 1970s Research Diagnostic Criteria (RDC) that eventuated in the DSM-III, the RDoC means to "fix" the issue that has bedeviled psychiatry for decades: its diagnoses are shifting, subjective entities, and without a scientific nosology, psychiatric research must proceed on an unstable foundation that

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precludes firmly aligning psychiatric diagnoses with genetic and neuroscientific research. With the RDoC, psychiatry may finally be able to achieve its goal of “neuroscience-based psychiatric classification,” which would then allow the field to incorporate “data on pathophysiology in ways that eventually will help identify new targets for treatment development, detect subgroups for treatment selection, and provide a better match between research findings and clinical decision making” (Insel et al., 2010, 748). Some of that data will be gathered through mobile devices—cell phones in particular—which are being legitimated as a scientific method for gathering affective data, and the concepts of the “digital phenotype” (Jain, Powers, Hawkins, & Brownstein 2015), an impression of an individual assessed from their digital life, and “digital phenotyping” (Torous, Onnela & Keshavan, 2017), a method of drawing on people’s uses of digital devices to evaluate behavioral health, have been developed to name this data gathering with a term familiar to scientists (“phenotype”).

As technoscientific objects involved in what Ian Hacking (1986) calls “making up people,” and in what Shelley Tremain (2010), drawing on Foucault, theorizes as the governmentality of disability, these devices deserve analysis and theorization through a critical disability, race, and feminist science and technology studies lens. As media objects, they deserve analysis through a critical media studies perspective that can attend to their status as cultural practices of representation and communication—as devices that circulate affective flows when their human users transmit videos of police brutality, images of dead refugees, and audio of children forcibly separated from their parents. Psychiatric research designates such affective flows symptomatic of psychiatric diagnoses, but a critical mad studies perspective identifies them as registrations of the political and its traumatic social encounters. How might critical mad studies theorize what happens as these media are incorporated into and become foundational to the production of mental health markets—to the production of categories of “madness”? And how does this production of pathologies intersect with processes of racialization (Aho, Ben-Moshe, & Hilton, 2017) and with the global constructions, under US imperialism, of debilitated and

capacitated populations—of refugees, of people living through wars (Puar, 2017)—and of how, and whether, they will be incorporated into zones of disability inclusion?

With their unexamined assumptions about the normal/abnormal and the healthy/pathological, these technoscientific projects offer rich ground for crippling technoscience. This article takes the special issue theme—“crip technoscience”—in its doubly imperative tense, an urgently needed action: following Carrie Sandahl’s (2003) definition of “to crip” as “spin[ning] mainstream...practices to reveal able-bodied [and -minded] assumptions and exclusionary effects” (37), the action of crippling technoscience exposes the technoscientific naturalization of normalization and of curative practices, its ableism and sanism, and its epistemologies derived from a Western Enlightenment that defined “the human” through constructing certain populations as less-than-human. As such, this article pursues an excavation of “cripistemologies,” in line with work done in the so-named special issue of *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies* (Johnson & McRuer, 2014), whose contributors argued for alternate epistemologies based in crip experience (following feminist standpoint theory). The evolving field of mad studies has been cripistemological from its origins, refusing the psy disciplines’ “knowledge” about those they designate mad and instead articulating states of mental distress and trauma as experiences through which mad knowledge is established (see, e.g., LeFrançois, Menzies, & Reaume, 2013).¹

Crippling technoscience, then, exposes the normative models for mental states at the center of the technoscientific production of madness. Gesturing to Foucault’s work on the emergence of the “psy-ences” as a distinct modern discourse central to disciplinary power (e.g., Foucault, 1979), I name this technoscientific production of madness “technopsyence.” As this article undertakes a cripistemological analysis that understands technopsyentific epistemologies to reify Western constructions of human/subhuman, it is centrally interested in interrogating how that production imbricates racialization with pathologization (see, e.g., Browne, 2015; Hilton, 2017). I will argue that the mobile-device form of “making up

madness” is wedded to other biomedical racializing projects that operate within a neoliberal risk culture built on extractive racial capitalism. They are at once tools that claim to capacitate and new tools in the arsenal of extractive racial capitalism as it seeks to apportion debility and capacity. Furthermore, these emerging tools continue what Jackie Orr (2010) argues has been the post–World War II projects of the psy disciplines to govern mentalities, and they augment their global reach, using the logic of racial liberalism and white savior discourse that serves as cover for the racial capitalism they exercise. An analysis of them thus helps deepen work by Nirma Eruvelles (2011), Jasbir Puar, and David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder (2015) on the operations of debility and capacity at the national and global levels.

Yet, as cultural practices of representation and communication, those media are also used to imagine alternate visions of rationality, affect, and care. In the article’s second half I explore one such vision, a work of Afro-Surrealism broadcast on the very screen media that are this article’s concern. Afro-Surrealism, like the Black feminist speculative fiction that Sami Schalk (2018) analyzes in her work, centralizes the crip concept of bodyminds (Price, 2015). For both Margaret Price and Schalk, “bodyminds” goes beyond the typical disability studies framework of “bodies and minds” as discrete yet connected and equal processes to instead understand them as enmeshed, an understanding that enables new theoretical understandings for disability studies. In my analysis of the Afro-Surrealist work, I argue that its aesthetics, combined with its use of the means of media production used in technopsyence, challenge technopsyence’s models for trauma and bodyminds. Surrealism in general challenges the Enlightenment privileging of rationality and all that follows in its wake, including its presumptions of the value of coherence, routinized scheduling, linear progression narratives, and capitalist realism, while Afro-Surrealism additionally aligns these presumptions with the racial capitalism that fueled the Enlightenment project. Where crip theory has explored camp as an appropriate aesthetic to combat ableism and sanism, here I argue that Afro-Surrealism provides an additional crip aesthetic tactic.

Technopsyence, Risk Culture, and Debilitation

Today's psy research ecosystem consists of four major domains: state-funded technoscientific initiatives; technology corporations (Apple and Google in particular) that integrate into those state projects; consumer-facing designs, which include both the major technology corporations (Apple, Google, Facebook) as well as smaller startups; and the academic institutions that often host this research. The first group includes the RDoC as well as the Brain Research through Advancing Innovative Neurotechnologies (BRAIN) Initiative, a funding platform for neuroscientific biotechnologies development; the Precision Medicine Initiative (PMI), which aims to link the burgeoning ability of consumer devices to gather fine-grained data about people's lives to the massive genomic datasets already gathered in the Human Genome Project; and more recently, the 21st Century Cures Act.

One example of this ecosystem is the Aurora Study. Hosted at the University of North Carolina, funded through an NIMH grant and private donations, and focused on trauma victims, the study uses a Study Watch wearable made by Verily (the life sciences division of Google's larger umbrella corporation, Alphabet), which records heart rate, skin electrical conductivity, and movement, and a cell phone app, developed by Thomas Insel's Mindstrong, that uses Mindstrong's digital phenotyping methods, which assess phone use time, word choice speed, and keystroke speed (Molteni & Rogers, 2017). Alongside these, genomic analysis, fMRI imaging, self-assessment, and electronic medical record (EMR) analysis will be used to construct markers of physiological changes that can predict who is most likely to develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), post-concussion syndrome, and depression. Principal investigators note that those populations the study will be useful for are "civilian trauma survivors, service men and women, and combat veterans with these common post-traumatic conditions" (Fromer & McLean, 2017). In addition to establishing measurements by which to predict risk for those diagnoses, the study will

allow Verily and Mindstrong to validate their technologies before they are enrolled in the larger Baseline Study, Google's private/public endeavor comprising its core attempt to enter biomedical research. The NIMH announcement of the Aurora Study explains that its information gathering is oriented toward the RDoC (NIMH, 2016). In the publicly available material about the study (as of September 2018), nothing identifies who the study expects to enroll: we are told only that there are about nineteen member institutions across the United States, and trauma victims who appear at those hospitals will be asked to enroll. In other words, it is unclear how the project conceives of trauma, of the social environments in which it happens, of the populations who experience it. From its inception, then, the study appears to assume the affective happens sanitized of social context—that it can be measured via physiological markers that are conceptualized as untouched by racism, sanism, and sexism.

The RDoC and its triumphing of mobile devices as knowledge-producing situates digital phenotyping within biomedicalization (Clarke et al., 2003), the paradigm for research and treatment that arose in the early 2000s and is characterized by private/public partnerships, research conducted on patient populations, the transfer of computational methods and databases among multiple domains, and engaged patient groups advocating for their particular conditions. The domain of biomedicalization under examination here, technopsycence, has a history worth summarizing. In her work on the post–World War II psy disciplines, Jackie Orr (2010) argues that the period ushered in new forms of managing the mental health of populations, what she calls “governing mentalities.” The psy disciplines were key to state biopolitics and to biopower as postwar nation-states sought to control a potentially unruly populace. This is obvious, as Orr notes, in the NIMH's founding: in 1949, its director wrote that “the prevention of mental illness...is an attainable goal...[that] must be done as rapidly and economically as possible[, and thus] techniques for a mass approach to the problem must be developed” (p. 353, quoting Felix 1949, p. 405). Where in the mid-twentieth century NIMH instituted a biopolitics of governing mentalities, today's technopsycientific media intensify that now seventy-year-

old project not only with their increased speed and efficiency but also due to the broader social and cultural intensification of risk culture.

Risk culture and technopsyentific media: Embedded within late liberalism's political economy of risk and security (Povinelli, 2011), such technopsyentific media and their heightened regime of affective surveillance must be considered part of a risk society inscribed by systemic racism and sanism. As Lisa Nakamura (2015) puts it, surveillance today has two functions: "to regulate, define, and control populations; and to create new gendered, racialized, and abled or disabled bodies through digital means" (p. 221). The risk industries materialize these functions in their provision of what one major player in the field, LexisNexis Risk Solutions, calls "data analysis business solutions." Its website (risk.lexisnexis.com) offers information about the services it provides to payors (health insurance companies), physicians, and other health care industries; services it also offers to other industries, including the automobile industry, law enforcement, the financial services industry; and collections and recovery. The company has more than 78 billion records on US citizens, including voter registration records, law enforcement records, educational records, and information about debt and liens, and the "socioeconomic data analyzed by LexisNexis Risk Solutions uncovers a wide range of information needed to understand social determinants of health, including information on relatives and associates, assets, trends over time, education, neighborhood and household characteristics and more" (LexisNexis, 2017a). Such analysis is applied for the purpose of creating a prediction of the overall health risk of a new hire (i.e., how much medical expense an employee will cost, so that in aggregate this data allows a business to calculate possible total employee medical costs), even without a past medical history; or, at the group level, it can be utilized "to improve care management and risk stratification activities" (LexisNexis, 2017a).

Big data analytics companies like LexisNexis are central tools within neoliberalism's austerity logics and the privatization of public services. Their services allow corporations to do more with less, including, as may seem obvious, screen job applicants to see who might potentially cost a company

more in health care costs than others. Since the Affordable Care Act mandated equity in both health and mental health care coverage, corporate clients of LexisNexis Risk Solutions will want analyses of mental health risk as well. But I am less interested here in the possibilities for discrimination against individuals—which are obvious and deeply concerning—as I am about the ways that risk is defined and that redound at the population aggregate level. LexisNexis Risk Solutions uses the following data to calculate risk: bankruptcy records, property tax assessment, lien and judgment records, criminal records, purchase activity, voter registration, college attendance records, and subprime credit request offers. How the company interprets these data is evident in claims such as, for voter registration, that “individuals showing engagement in their community may be more likely to engage in their own health”; or for “derogatory records” (liens, felonies, etc.), that “liens, evictions and felonies indicate that individual health may not be a priority” (LexisNexis, 2017b). Risk is assessed, then, through data reflective of extractive and racialized capitalism.

It would be naïve to think that the digital phenotype and digital phenotyping won't be used by risk assessment industries, either through compliance required to receive benefits or as companies extract users' data without their full knowing consent. The economic logic of risk assessment industries requires companies to avail themselves of whatever datasets they can obtain to make inferences about individuals' and populations' health, which are then used to enforce neoliberal regimes of austerity: to categorize and rank people in order to decide who deserves to receive care, rehabilitative treatments, financial resources. Surveillance studies scholarship has abundantly demonstrated that the state's public-private partnerships enable it to enforce new tools of surveillance on people receiving state benefits (see, e.g., Gilliom, 2001; Monahan, 2017). For those who live under the regime of disability surveillance (most recently exemplified in the 21st Century Cures Act's mandated Electronic Visitation Verification [DREDF, 2018]; see also Hilton, 2017), digital phenotyping is a logical next step. For the risk industries currently embedded in social

services already draw on data about mental health. For example, as Virginia Eubanks (2018) explains, a software program called Vulnerability Index—Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT), in operation in Los Angeles, is used to decide who among the unhoused will qualify as most “at-risk” and therefore be granted a spot in the limited number of housing units available. Among the data the VI-SPDAT uses to calculate risk is data about mental health issues that the unhoused must supply if they hope to be granted housing. In Pittsburgh, the Allegheny Family Screening Tool (algorithmic software used to predict child abuse and neglect and thus to allot resources to various families) draws on Pittsburgh’s Department of Human Services Data Warehouse, which gathers data from offices, such as the criminal justice system and local school districts, that pathologize and criminalize mental health and substance abuse. In their work on big data in public health domains, Nadine Ehlers and Shiloh Krupar (2017) argue that the “medical hot spotting” used in Camden, New Jersey, a majority Black city, to predict so-called high users of health care is a thoroughly racialized project that ignores racial capitalism as the cause of health care indebtedness; it justifies increased biomedical surveillance of geographies already heavily surveilled and increased administration of them. Among the three groups targeted by medical hot spotting are the mentally ill; various studies of “high utilizer” data consistently show that people with multiple visits to emergency rooms have the diagnosis of depression.

Even as there are no data to support digital phenotyping, various psy domains are predicting how to incorporate it. An article in *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, for example, reports on ongoing studies and predicts the utility of digital phenotyping in substance abuse disorders (Ferreri, Bourla, Mouchabac, & Karila, 2018). As Helena Hansen and Samuel Roberts (2010) argue, substance abuse disorders today are highly racialized and pathologized, with opioid users, culturally constructed as white, designated a population worth rehabilitating. It is difficult not to foresee that certain populations with digital phenotypes designated as indicating drug use may be punished rather than rehabilitated. This seems especially probable given

that in the case of medical hot spotting, interventions occur in order to teach “high utilizers” how to self-manage their conditions—in other words, to educate them into neoliberal modes of self-governance.

Figures of risk and chatbots: In addition to digital phenotyping, technopsyence is at play in the clinical applications developed for mobile devices, mental health apps. Here I will focus on two mental health chatbots. The first, Koko, illustrates how corporations position their development in relation to hegemonic models for mental health and figurations of citizens at risk; the second, an artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot called Tess/Karim, clarifies the global biopolitical stakes of governing cybermentalities under US imperialism. Koko, designed by an MIT graduate student, initially prioritized a support group model for people experiencing distress. A member would post about their distress to the app, and other members would respond using cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) principles meant to encourage the distressed person to rethink their outlook—in the terms of CBT, to “reframe.” CBT is the therapeutic modality most prioritized in Silicon Valley: it aligns with core Silicon Valley beliefs in the individual’s power to self-govern through techniques of rational agency; its philosophy that the mind works as a tweakable feedback system is familiar to Silicon Valley workers; and, most alluringly, it seems to have the capacity “to scale”—it can be delivered to masses of people through mechanisms that increase efficiency over typical psychiatric practices. Automated systems training users to govern their distress applied to large populations: this is the dream that, as Orr demonstrates, has motivated biopower’s investment in the psy disciplines since the postwar era.

Koko’s initial form as a stand-alone, member-participatory app was a test drive to attract venture capital to back its second iteration, which has since been licensed to other platforms. When in 2016 the company received \$2.5 million in venture capital funding, users were notified that Koko could now be accessed through a web-based chatbot and through Twitter, Kik, and Facebook Messenger. When accessed via those third-party social media platforms, those companies have full access to the content of the support sessions. At the same time, we know that Facebook is working to

construct mechanisms that can scan its communications for users at risk; unclear, and hidden behind the laws of private ownership, are whether Facebook is licensing AI development from Koko and/or the role of the big data Koko is gathering in Facebook's development process.

By hosting Koko as a third-party app, Facebook is able to claim that it is disciplining its technology—that it takes seriously claims that it has detrimental effects on mental health and puts its users at risk, especially teenagers. The teenager whose mental health is at risk, whether from cyberbullying or otherwise, is one of the three figures that dominates how citizens at risk for mental illness are figured—what Julie Elman (2014) describes as the “teenager in crisis.” The other two figures are the veteran soldier—the citizen willing to sacrifice for the nation (see, e.g., MacLeish, 2013; Wool, 2015)— and the pre-citizen, a figure gestured to in the trope, repeated in psy research as well as the popular press, of “the global burden of depression.” Online reporting promoting Koko reflected this cultural investment in these two. For example, an article in *The Verge* began with a story of a teenage suicide, then noted the Veteran Administration's interest in tech-driven suicide prevention methods that crystallized when in 2017 US Pentagon officials met with executives from Google, Facebook, and Apple to discuss such methods (Popper, 2017). In light of Jennifer Terry's (2017) argument that biomedicine functions to legitimize the continuation of war, technopsychological research's orientation toward veteran mental health grants it access to the funding institutions and ideological matrix supporting war.

Tess/Karim illustrates how US technopsychence is implicated in that matrix through its application to the third figure at risk, the pre-citizen. Called Tess in the US context, funded by the Singularity University, the chatbot uses what its developers at x2AI call “an emotion algorithm”—basically an algorithm that infers the emotions being expressed in human language. First tested by health care corporations who licensed it as therapy for their own employees (nurses and other care workers), the chatbot is presumably monitored by actual psy professionals—in effect, a psy clinician “steps in” if the software identifies expressions indicative of harm to the self or other dangers. According to its founders, that allows for clinicians to monitor fifty

rather than five patients: scale is the motivating factor here, a way for corporations to hire fewer psy professionals and therefore cut costs while still ensuring their insurance plans fulfill the Affordable Care Act mandate of offering mental health care. The bot has been sold to public health officials: Monterey County, California, has partnered with x2AI for its Tess software—according to one report, in order to fill in for the low numbers of mental health professionals who are bilingual (Beltran, 2017), and to another, to serve Hispanic workers (day laborers) (Edgcomb, 2017). That this is occurring in Monterey, which is characterized by extreme wealth inequality, is no accident. Chatbot therapy is here implemented within the context of austerity, where certain populations are deemed unworthy of full services. It is telling that Monterey applied for and received a federal grant to institute a medical hot spotting program (Monterey County Health Department, 2017; Monterey County n.d.). Ehler and Krupar (2017) argue that hot spotting villainizes specific groups as a burden on the state—its primary trope of the “high utilizer of health care” is a new version of “the welfare queen”—and that these groups are racialized. In their analysis, medical hot spotting attempts to train in self-governance those designated high utilizers, making them responsabilized neoliberal subjects who can take on the burden of risk. A tool such as Tess, which de-politicizes states of mental distress, is quite clearly aligned with medical hot spotting’s aim of producing self-governing neoliberal citizens. Tess, in other words, is implemented for the state’s aims of governing the mentalities of workers (migrant day laborers) highly exploited under conditions of global capitalism.

If within the American context these technologies are envisioned as ensuring that workers will increase the speed and efficiency at which they work, they function at a global scale to legitimize imperialism, war, and the doctrine of the white techphilanthropist savior. Executives from x2AI were included in a United Nations forum on using AI for mental health at a global scale after Tess, reworked as Karim, was used to address trauma experienced by Syrian refugees (Solon, 2016), and Duke University researchers have piloted a study using Tess for perinatal depression in Kenyan women (Green, 2018a, 2018b; Green et al., 2018). In this, these

technopsychiatric media aid the broader biopolitical project by which bodyminds are brought under the governance of the Western psy disciplines; their debilitation by US imperialism is then, as Puar (2017) conceives it, converted to a capacitation as Karim interpellates them into Western subjectivities. As x2AI separates its operations into two corporate entities—it has established a for-profit arm that licenses Tess to for-profit corporations and a nonprofit that gives its humanitarian-oriented chatbots to aid agencies—tech corporations can claim the position of white savior of the mind, while they move to govern cybermentalities at the global level.

Crippling Technopsychence with Afro-Surrealism

In a context in which digital device use has become the grounds for extending psychiatric diagnoses and treatment, can we think care and the digital otherwise? What practices currently exist and are being imagined by disabled people to hack hegemonic psy practices? As this issue's editors remind us, "Disabled people use technoscience to survive and alter the very systems that produce disability or attempt to render us as broken" (Hamraie & Fritsch, 2019). In the area of mad practices, we might think here of organizations such as The Icarus Project and the Hearing Voices Network, two collectives with an online presence that foster communities of care for members who would typically be diagnosed with and (pharmaceutically) treated for bipolar and schizoaffective disorder, respectively. Or we might think of the work being done by Black Lives Matter to establish networks that can care for members in ways that ensure Black people experiencing distress are not exposed to encounters with state-sanctioned mental health authorities, which often become encounters with law enforcement.

We might also look to how the same media of mobile devices and digital technologies are being envisioned within creative projects by crip subjects. In what follows, I explore such a creative project, *Random Acts of Flyness (RAoF)* (HBO, 2018). Broadcast on the prestige US cable channel HBO, its exhibition context could be considered problematic from a crip theoretical sitpoint: after all, the economics of US cable production inhibits

participation by disabled media producers (see, e.g., Ellis & Goggin, 2015), and some of HBO's shows have come under fire as ableist. The show itself takes up an analogous problem: that the cable channel industry and prestige media productions more generally have supported toxic white masculinities and the psy models that have done little to undo them. Having noted that, I want to introduce Alison Kafer's (2013) nuanced discussion of the paradoxes inherent to crip living and technoscience. Kafer's discussion of Donna Haraway's cyborg will help to think through the cyborg figure in *RAoF* as well as to confront the media-production paradox of *RAoF*, where it is using the same means of production (screen media and digital devices) that it describes as extending racial capitalist logics.

After noting the critiques of Haraway's cyborg (1987) lodged by postcolonial, women of color, and disability studies scholars, Kafer resuscitates the figure for what she argues is a potency lodged within these critical fractures. While the cyborg may fail to universally instantiate a (crip) politics, it can when it is used for political purposes. As examples of crip cyborg politics, Kafer cites the many crip activists who use technoscience's products (wheelchairs, breathing tubes) in order to facilitate their activism against the disability industry; and she includes instances where people use the pharmaceutical products of the medical-industrial complex for blasphemous ends—not those for which they were devised, and often not those for which (at least according to insurance coding) they can be prescribed. These, she argues, can be thought a kind of crip cyborg politics, where, by turning technoscientific logics against themselves, it explodes its constraints.

Yet Kafer is also ambivalent about using the cyborg to theorize the activist and blasphemous uses she explores, for it was mental asylum administrators and vanguardists in using powerful new sedative drugs Manfred Clynes and Nathan Kline (1960) who developed the term: they imagined what it would mean should an astronaut experience mental distress in the controlled environment of outer space, and the means of control (psychopharmaceuticals) necessary to restore order. With its origins contaminated by ableism and sanism, Kafer cannot enthusiastically offer

the cyborg as a figure with which to theorize our futures. I want to place this crip ambivalence toward the cyborg next to *RAoF* because the show is similarly critical of cyborg fantasies, and, similar to Kafer's crip activists, the show's criticism is undertaken through the very technologies of exploitation—digital devices, networks, and distribution platforms—that the show critiques.

To get there, I must first describe the show's aesthetics, which, I argue, align it with camp as a potent aesthetics for crip cultural interventions. The show is intertextually rich, free associative, uses a chronologically disjointed narrative, and incorporates a pastiche of cinematic genres including animation, *cinéma vérité*, documentary realism, retro sequences filmed to look like old game shows, clips from old movies and news reports, film running in reverse, frames within frames, and so forth. In other words, the show's montage and collage-like qualities defy norms of televisual coherence and aim to provoke a Brechtian alienation effect. With segments that are wickedly humorous, I think its aesthetics complement camp, which crip theorists have identified as an aesthetic mode appropriate to crip tactics, as a form of performance that reveals "the arbitrary delineation between normal and defective" and "disarm[s] with a wicked humor" (Sandahl, 2003, 37). Like camp, Afro-Surrealism celebrates those figures deemed monstrous or otherwise marginal; like camp, Afro-Surrealism is wickedly funny, often painfully so in the ugly truths its humor reveals. Like camp, it is purposefully excessive (what one Afro-Surrealist names "rococo" [Miller 2013]), and this excess subverts norms of realism and the capitalist inevitability they have come to support (e.g., Shonkwiler & La Berge, 2014).

More salient to mad studies, in refusing "realism," Afro-Surrealism also refuses Western epistemologies' presumptions and valuing of rationality, and it thus aligns with mad studies' critiques of sanism and sanist epistemologies. In its refusal of (capitalist) realism's use of linear progression to structure narrative time, Afro-Surrealism instantiates crip notions of time (e.g., Samuels, 2017) as broken, slow, non-normative, a kind of time travel apart from the "regular" (i.e., the ordered time of Western

industrialism). In *RAoF*, crip time joins with how the show conceptualizes, visualizes, and narrativizes the connectedness of historical trauma to present trauma—in other words, how Black bodyminds in the present are imbued with the present and past of racial capitalism, a historical materialism of the bodymind. In my analysis, I will focus in on the show's encounters with what the psy disciplines might call PTSD (and indeed, the show explicitly references that diagnosis) and how these connect to its critique of televisual narratives that promote white psy models for mental health. The show's refusal of these models works in tandem with its Afro-Surrealism, its insistence on a surrealist grammar for representing, and redressing, Black bodyminds under racial capitalism and the hegemonic practices of representation and communication that it fosters.

The show begins by referencing police brutality: Terence Nance, one of the show's creators, is using his phone camera to film himself while bicycling on a quiet New York street, and is sideswiped by a police car, knocked to the ground. The officer accuses Nance of a crime, and as the scene begins to escalate toward what we assume will be an act of police violence, Nance and the camera phone he is using rise into the air, and Nance then flies over the city. Nance's camera, the means of producing the representation we are watching, literally figures as a criminal act here, representing how phone cameras, in their capacity to record and transmit moments of police brutality, endanger the juridical's production of Black people as criminals. The best response to that production (of random acts of violence) becomes, in Nance's imaginary, turning to the surreal (of random acts of "flying," with its additional meaning of being hip).

Throughout all six episodes, police brutality is intercalated with other manifestations of historical and present trauma to Black bodies. The biopolitics enacted on Black women's bodies is shown in a recurring theme of their disproportionate incidents of maternal mortality. Another recurring theme is depression and anxiety that arise from being daily subjected to scenes of violence against Black bodies. Another is the kind of dissociation women subjected to sexual violence undergo when they report to the police and are required to submit to physical examinations. These scenes of our

current moment are visually and diegetically framed by allusions to the Middle Passage, with recurring tropes of Black bodies entering bodies of water to descend toward an ocean floor. In other words, the show depicts contemporary Black life as scenes of physical and mental trauma and connects this to systemic racism and the historical plundering of Black bodies.

A rendering of that plunder germane to technopsycence is the show's wickedly ironic visions of technosolutionism to redress these historical traumas. In episode 3, Nance appears before a mostly white audience to introduce an app called Bitch Better Have My Money that connects its users with Black people so that its users can give reparations. Significantly, Nance explains that the app's algorithm "takes into account medical records, criminal records, real estate records, land rights and treaties, in order to make extremely precise determinations about how much our Black users are owed due to the contemporary injustices of redlining, hiring discrimination, and, of course, mass incarceration." Told they may have to sign over real estate, intellectual property, and bank accounts, the audience members look increasingly uncomfortable and eventually flee the theater. The show cuts to a montage that establishes a connection between the theft of Africa's natural resources by the West—coltan, specifically—and the West's theft of Africa's people to serve as labor in the cotton market. In basing this reference to the plunder of African coltan, the mineral that powers our electronic devices whose extraction today is performed by slave laborers in Congo, the show makes apparent the material conditions of global capitalism and imperialism that underlie the production of media devices. As signified in the app, media technologies in this wickedly humorous segment cannot redress the harm their production processes and the broader context of racial capitalism inflict.

This part of episode 3 resonates with two narratives from episodes 5 and 6: one, on contemporary Africa; another, on what the show's notes call "blackness in the singularity," which includes two instances of Black cyborgs. As we shall see, these two narratives are associatively linked through an interest in Black bodyminds, mental distress, and psy

discourses. The African narrative begins in a wealthy white family's home, as two white parents, a Black girl, and a white film director sit around a dinner table, while the white characters discuss being new parents of this child they've adopted from an African country. The girl, silent throughout, suddenly speaks to the director in an unidentified language. In response to the director's look of surprise, the mother explains that the child's psychiatrist calls this a symptom of PTSD from her experiences of war in Malawi. This event inspires the director to search YouTube for "African child rebel soldiers," and he finds a video in which a white American soldier grabs and carries away an African child, presumably to protect the child from the surrounding violence. The director then decides to direct a film about the soldier and child and to play the soldier.

After having completed the film, and as he dresses for an award ceremony, he is informed that the soldier he played has been found, alive, in an African prison, serving a sentence for raping African children. The director ignores the obvious conclusion, that in that YouTube video the American soldier on whom his film is based was not rescuing the child from harm but rather intended to harm him. The director is also told his child actor is refusing to wear a black tuxedo to the awards ceremony because in his culture, a black outfit attracts devils, and is insisting on wearing white. In the following scene, the director accepts his film award, with the child actor, wearing black, by his side. During his acceptance speech, insects swarm from the director's mouth and choke him. The child then speaks in an African language, and this time, in contrast to when the adopted girl spoke, the screen provides a translation: "I told you. Demons." A cut introduces Courtney Love making a joke at an awards ceremony that it's best not to go to after-parties that Harvey Weinstein attends, and the crowd roars with laughter. This begins the next segment, with Nance, in voiceover, providing an astute analysis of how toxic white masculinity undergirds Hollywood: it finances shows such as *The Sopranos* and *Breaking Bad*, and films like *Fight Club*, that figure white masculinity through Jungian archetypes of dualistic psychology, in which white men play "good guys" while beneath the surface they simmer with anger. Nance then argues that the circulation

of these televisual archetypes influenced the political, that they are implicated in the reproduction of white supremacy manifested both in the 2016 election and in US wars.

These structures are metonymized in the white director's movie: he imagines himself as the white savior of Africa, as have multiple US war-making administrations, but the white savior is actually a monster that destroy Black Africans, a fact he conveniently ignores. When the African children identify a demonic logic at work within the director and the cultural narratives in which he traffics, they are correct in their "diagnosis" of what fuels his media productions. Thus, when the adopted African child's African speech is diagnosed as a symptom of PTSD, the Western psychiatrist has medicalized a mode of speaking that is actually a form of knowledge. The children speak their *cripistemologies*—knowing derived from their experiences as the victims of imperialism—which the psy disciplines describe with diagnostic practices that drain them of political import.

This theme of the systemic plundering of Africa and its relationship to the bodyminds of Black people occurs again in the season's final episode, which centers on Black women, affective states, and questions of care. Here I invoke Price and Schalk's use of "bodyminds" as an alternative to the conventionally phrased "bodies and minds," because *RAoF* presents the Cartesian dualism under "bodies and minds" as connected to that systemic plundering, and instead visualizes Black living (and distress) as "bodyminds"—that is, as enmeshed. The episode's many vignettes thematically cohere around Black women and care. It opens to white shapes pulsing in black, suggesting luminescent fish but that reveal themselves to be teeth. Two Black women congeal out of this darkness, one holding the other; and soon around and beneath them congeal more Black bodies, suggesting their presence among a heap of writhing Black bodies. The woman sings an eerie lullaby whose lyrics concern the need to rest in order to survive the day. The following sequence depicts a young female office worker whose day is saturated with microaggressions and exposure to violence toward Black bodies (we see an alert about Tamir Rice), and the sequence ends as a voice enunciates that "you stay woke for so long, you

risk never again feeling the joy of sleep." The opening thus connects the Middle Passage to contemporary discourses about staying woke, the past serving as preview to how racial capitalism today produces bodyminds similarly informed by it.

The episode next follows the story of Nina, a cook at a cramped and loud nightclub, as she leaves work to take the subway home. Clearly exhausted, enduring microaggressions from other white riders, she is then lulled into melancholic relief by a wandering guitar player. Advertisements play over loudspeakers instructing residents of New Drexciya, "the underwater autonomous zone," that they are out of the evacuation zone for the coming hurricane (evocative of Katrina, Maria, and other climate change disasters affecting primarily people of color) and so are encouraged to upload their consciousness through a service offered by Citidrive. Walking into the ocean water while her friends beg her not to be seduced by the upload offer, the waters swirl around her to open a portal down toward the ocean floor. We watch from below as a body submerges in water, while a voiceover says, "Worry Number Two: I cannot swim," and words on the screen label this "Worry #2 of 1,000 Worries that a Black Person Should Not Have to Worry About." This cuts to a man (artist Arthur Jafa) saying, "When we came, we were not human beings, we were things," and a chorus of voices repeats the episode's chorus, "I stay woke." We return to Nina's underwater domicile, where she decides to go ahead with the upload. We watch as her physical form seemingly drops off to sleep and an indicator shows the percentage status of the upload. The system malfunctions, leaving her not fully uploaded, while the system monotonously repeats that a refund will be issued to her estate. A cut opens to happy music and the voiceover saying, "You arrive at the Singularity, and make a friend," which is instantly interrupted by another female voice saying, "We have so much more to show you, but we were lied to as well," and the visuals return, once again, to the Black man still struggling to swim under water, except that this time, a woman emerges from the water, not drowning, able to survive the water, and looking a little bit pissed off.

The connections established in this montage-heavy sequence suggest that the transhumanist fantasy of consciousness upload extracts surplus value from Black bodyminds; it is a scam like the many others perpetrated by racial capitalism. Staying woke to that scam in fact allows a Black woman to surface, to overcome the worry she shouldn't have. In another segment, the show explicitly criticizes fantasies of mind-machine melding through a discussion of the "humanoid" BINA48 (not an imagined humanoid: this is the real-world creation of the real-world Terasem Foundation, based on Octavia Butler's imagined religion of Earthseed in *Parable of the Sower*). This robot, built in the image of the Black spouse (Bina) of its white creator, expresses a future fantasy where both robot and human Bina merge; the Black woman criticizing BINA48 that notes in conversations, BINA48 repeats its white programmers' assumptions about the politically correct things for a Black woman to say.

This criticism of Silicon Valley's tech fantasies is embedded within the broader aim of this episode, to think about how Black women find care. At the episode's conclusion a Black woman speaks to the camera about what Black women are entitled to (and that we know American culture denies)—failures, fuckups, fantasies, etc., without harm coming to their bodyminds and their credit ratings. She ends by repeating, "You are entitled to rest," and breaks into laughter to state that "she's snoring!" Bringing the conclusion back to the opening scenes of an insomniac woman so woke she can't sleep, this ending offers the show as a remedy for the distress experienced by those bodyminds tuned into historical and present forms of trauma.

Significantly, the show is drawing on a mythology created by the Detroit techno group Drexciya, whose 1997 album *The Quest* was their first to construct a mythology of an underwater city inhabited by the children of pregnant enslaved women who died in the Middle Passage. Detroit techno was (and is) a musical genre that reinvigorated the Black music industries in Detroit (and Detroit itself), which had been decimated by deindustrialization and the white music industry's theft of Black creative property. In re-representing a music genre invested in repurposing Western

technology to construct new mythologies for Black life, the show builds on the Afro-futurism of a musical genre and its envisioning of the relationship between Blackness and machine. *RAoF*'s scenes of New Drexcia expose the white transhumanist fantasy of the cyborg singularity as a fantasy premised on Enlightenment assumptions that privilege mind over body, that align Black with body, and that drove the West's project of extractive racial capitalism. By referencing Detroit techno's mythic world of the underwater inhabitants of Drexcia, the show foregrounds its lineage within Black cultural forms that already have powerfully tinkered with Western technologies to imagine new worlds growing out of the decay of industrial cities and the (racialized) myth of progress on which they were based.

I read *RAoF* as performing its own tinkering with the medium of prestige television, which, as Nance articulates, finances productions about toxic white masculinities that feed their political iteration, which then makes war on Black bodies, whether in US cities or internationally. Recall that Nance critiques the prestige shows *Breaking Bad* and *The Sopranos*: these shows were invested in psy discourses about mental health (Tony Soprano's therapy sessions, with their Freudian emphasis on his mother) and addiction (*Breaking Bad*'s Jesse, who attends rehab). More generally, the set of TV shows and films Nance critique are all invested in the Jungian model of the doppelganger or alter ego, a dualism underlying the individual male protagonist that forms the crux of these shows. *RAoF* adamantly refuses a similar positioning of a protagonist whose psychological makeup and emotional state would serve as the show's fulcrum. Instead, *RAoF* insists on a collective consciousness, a model of bodyminds forging through the surreality of existences that are materially informed by their histories. Its critique of psy models for PTSD, lodged in its African-movie segment, shows that those models medicalize racial capitalism, and that media (the director's award-winning movie) are part of that process. Then, the show troubles the contemporary fantasy of digital device solutions to what are the problems of racial capitalism. Its solution, instead, lies in Black traditions of care and Black aesthetic traditions.

Ultimately, *RAoF* resists any interpretation that attempts to fit it into categorical boxes. Its anti-narrative qualities are a mechanism by which, I would argue, it instantiates a Brechtian mode of alienation—a way of “waking up” its spectators, which, as Walter Benjamin argues, “would be identical with the ‘now of recognizability,’ in which things put on their true—surrealist—face” (1999, pp. 463-464, quoted in Landsberg, 2018, p. 3). In her work on the new Afro-Surrealist cinema, Alison Landsberg identifies Afro-Surrealism’s aim, following Benjamin, of waking its audience up to a historical materialism that understands how the past informs the present. *RAoF* insists that the roots of today’s crises—hurricanes, epidemics of police brutality, epidemics of mental distress—can be recognized via an aesthetics that denaturalizes them to expose the racial capitalism that produces them. Like Kafer’s crip cyborgs who use the products of the medical industry to protest against it, Nance and the collective of artists who create *RAoF* use mobile devices to protest their racialized modes of production. They push us to recognize that technopsyence is imbricated in the logics of racial capitalism and ask us to imagine how to manifest care otherwise.

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Notes

¹ Following the Foucauldian vein of Shelley Tremain (2010) and others, I understand “madness” and its associate “mental illness” to be discursive constructions that coalesce in order that specific institutions might then manage and govern those so designated. I avoid the terminology of biomedicalized technoscience and its institutions (*madness*, *mental illness*, and *specific diagnostic categories*) because such terminology medicalizes states of being human (see, e.g., Barstow, 2013). Instead I

use *states of mind, states of being, distress*, and so forth. When I use *mental illness*, it is to specify the entity as the psy disciplines refer to it. Finally, throughout this article I will use the term *psy disciplines* to collapse a number of distinct yet related fields and industries: psychiatry, both research and clinical; psychology; and therapy of all kinds.

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