

Mythicized Bodies & Myth as Body

Interrogating Anti-Black Racism through Critical Design

Myth is a tool of preserving power and, by extension, enabling or hindering social change. This is especially true with respect to anti-Black racism in the U.S., where racialized fictions shape everything from encounters with police to the amount of pain medicine delivered by a doctor. Acknowledging these expressions of racism requires a fissure in a believer's faith in myth; a questioning of interpersonal or systemic racism's underpinnings and a willingness to receive a different reality. I offer two projects that unsettle mythologies enabling anti-Black racism in different ways: *Mapping Myths* disputes legitimizing myths—many tied to fictitious corporeal qualities—employed to justify police killings of Black people in the U.S. *The Social Body* questions the qualitative foundations of mythologies that govern social change itself. *Mapping Myths* draws parallels between the fabricated scaffolding of constellations and the fictions undergirding racialized police brutality. Modeled after a planisphere, each star on this map represents a death and each constellation represents a mythical justification for use of lethal force. *The Social Body*, by contrast, features a collection of media centered on a set of speculative medical instruments that question: What tools might a “caregiver” employ to treat a systemic “malady” ailing the “social body?” By reimagining the intangible, larger-than-life body politic as a human body—a living, dying, restorable, permeable form—its ailments, and the tools required to treat them, this project interrogates myths about the mutability of social systems steeped in racism. Together, both projects visually and materially disrupt oppressive, racialized mythologies.

Keywords

Myth; Barthes; Foucault; racism; police brutality; biopolitics; critical design

Introduction

Black people are more likely than *any* group of non-Black people—and three times more likely than white people—to be killed by police in the United States. In these instances, Black victims are less likely to be armed and less likely to be threatening people when killed (2017 Police Violence Report). Racialized police brutality—especially incidents that end in murder—is just one example of how anti-Black racism manifests, but it is significant because of the fact that officers simultaneously represent the State apparatus *and* members of the social body at large. It appears, on one level, to demonstrate an excessive use of top-down force, when in reality the power exercised in these scenarios is derived from a stealthier, bottom-up force shaped by mythologies and a white normativity that abandons Black survival in the interest of white life and society at large. The point here is not to suggest that police murder of Black citizens is worth interrogating solely because of its disproportionate prevalence; rather, that the *nature* of incidents in which police kill civilians, especially Black civilians, represents a failure of the social contract that liberal democratic societies are presumed to uphold (Bhandaru 2009, 225).

The two projects explored in this essay employ critical design approaches to interrogate racialized police brutality. They offer material explorations of this problem grounded in theoretical paradigms in order to expose new ways of seeing and understanding both the incidence of police brutality and the ways in which we interpret its propensity to change. Dunne and Raby, who coined the term “critical design” in the nineties, offered that it “...uses speculative design proposals to challenge narrow assumptions, preconceptions, and givens...” (Dunne & Raby 2013, 34). Critical design offers a set of semiotic tools to render implicit signs embedded in myth explicit (Sériot 2016, 407). This is the primary operation carried out in *Mapping Myths*: Through its command of illustrated metaphor, this project lays plain the absurdity of the myths it critiques. By contrast, in addition to elucidating myth and the mechanisms by which it constructs illusions that shape social life, *The Social Body* takes this approach a step further by offering what one might call “testimonials to what could be” (Dunne & Raby 2013, 35). In it, I imagine an alternative way to conceive of social systems, social change, and systemic evolution.

In this essay, I concentrate on excavating the theoretical foundations and examining the material outcomes of these two projects in the interest of advancing discourse about the material effects of systemic racism and the capacity for systemic change to resolve them. If myth is an operative tool in constructing and maintaining power, might that same tool play a role in dismantling power? Or, might dismantling myth itself enable a dismantling of power?

Part 1. The Mythical Black Body

In large part, Black death at the hands of law enforcement is rationalized by a set of long-held legitimizing myths about Black people. Among these myths, the most common suggest that Black people are innately dangerous and threatening, inhumanly strong, and inherently criminal. For me, as for Barthes, the excision of the sign from the signifier “...was a question, in short, of understanding (or of describing) how a society produces stereotypes, i.e., triumphs of artifice, which it then consumes as innate meanings, i.e., triumphs of Nature.... Language worked on by power” (Barthes 1982, 471).

Myths at Work

The imagery and language employed to document and depict these murders demonstrate that mythologies are employed to convict the victims of responsibility for their own deaths and acquit the police responsible. Police murders of Black people are often replayed in language and form in various media: As cell-phone or body camera footage of the killings circulate; as images of the victims are selected and shared publicly; as news coverage details the incidents; as court transcripts are released or police departments’ statements are issued; and as protesters of these events adopt both linguistic and material vernacular (e.g. “I can’t breathe” chants) for their causes.

In September 2016, Tulsa Police Officer Betty Shelby shot and killed Terence Crutcher—an unarmed 40-year old Black man whose SUV broke down in the middle of a roadway as he drove home from Tulsa Community College where he studied music appreciation. According to video footage and the autopsy report, Crutcher’s arms were raised above his head at the time of the shooting (Briquelet 2017). Shelby claimed that Crutcher refused to follow officers’ orders even as he appeared to follow them as seen from a helicopter hovering above the incident. From the helicopter, Tulsa Police Officer Michael Richert described Crutcher as a “bad dude” who “must be on something” (Vicent 2017). Though not Shelby’s words, this language is indicative of the justifications employed in her defense: The signifier, here, is Terence Crutcher, a tall, wide Black man in a car stopped on a roadway. The signified, according to the officers in the helicopter, is that the man in question is “bad,” unstable even. And the sign, is that regardless of confirmation, a Black man is so *potentially* dangerous, so fear-inducing and threatening purely by his constitution—and even more so if impaired by drugs—that the preservation of social order justifies shooting to kill even when less deadly alternatives to subdue him exist. The sign, in this case, holds that a “bad”

person is undeserving of justice and, perhaps more importantly, that their “badness” can be observed from a distance possibly hundreds of feet above the scene: It can be inferred—most importantly—from his discernable appearance, his Blackness and his size. It is in this moment that his unique identity or distinguishing features are rendered wholly insignificant; there need not be any specific identity, beyond his Blackness: Every big, Black male becomes “bad” (Patton & Snyder–Yuly 2007, 879).

In her interview with the lead homicide detective, Shelby said: “I’ve never been so scared” (Burris 2017). In her first public statements about the murder, she explained that “I’m feeling that his intent is to do me harm, and I keep thinking, ‘Don’t do this. Please don’t do this. Don’t make this happen’” (Phillips 2017). When asked by the Assistant District Attorney if Crutcher’s death was *his* fault, Shelby replied “Yes...if he would have only communicated with me and complied with what I asked, none of this would have happened.” Shelby maintained that her fear was aroused by Crutcher’s behavior—allegedly reaching into his car’s window, an act that cannot be observed on any of the footage of the scene—and his *disobedience*; not his appearance. With this context, the signifier is slightly different: A tall, wide, Black man in a car stopped on a roadway *disobeying* a police order. What is signified is a veritable threat to the officer’s physical safety and the idea that his disobedience implies guilt and/or culpability for whatever follows from his disobedience. The cumulative sign, then, holds that the victim is guilty not only of whatever presumed act for which he might be under suspicion (i.e. driving under the influence of drugs), *but also for his own death*: For inspiring such fear that he forced his own inevitable end. Shelby was charged with first-degree manslaughter, acquitted, and was soon employed by a neighboring police department as a deputy (Massey 2016; Pitts 2016; Vicent 2017).

These same types of myths were at work in countless other high-profile deaths replayed in cell phone footage and media accounts of Black people during or after run-ins with police. Mike Brown for instance—killed by Ferguson Police Officer Darren Wilson in 2014 and left laying in the the middle of Canville Road for four hours—was posthumously mythicized in the words of his murderer: A disobedient, evil, hulking, super-strength predator who could run through bullets unharmed. In Wilson’s own words (Glenza 2014):

“I see [Brown and Dorian Johnson] walking down the middle of the street. And the first thing that struck me was, they’re walking down the middle of the street ... And the next thing I noticed was the size of the individuals, because either the first one was really small or the second one was really big.”

“And when I grabbed him, the only way I can describe it is I felt like a five-year-old holding on to Hulk Hogan.”

“He looked up at me, and had the most intense, aggressive face. The only way I can describe it – it looks like a demon. That’s how angry he looked.”

“At this point it looked like he was almost bulking up to run through the shots, like it was making him mad that I’m shooting at him ... And the face that he had was looking straight through me, like I wasn’t even there, I wasn’t even anything in his way.”

As signified, Brown represents the “Black Buck:” A hyper-violent, hyper-sexualized, bodily manifestation of sheer physical strength (Kocić 2017). In sign, he is the ultimate threat to white safety and, by extension, to society.

A Speculative Planisphere

Mapping Myths is a project that questions the absurdity of legitimizing myths through the implications of its form and the significance of its content. The form of the map is modeled after a planisphere: A rotating

celestial map used to learn how to recognize stars and constellations. As a viewer turns the central disc, they reveal the label of the myth represented by the constellation and quotes in which police or law enforcement representatives responsible for each killing expose the nature of the myth used to defend their use of deadly force.

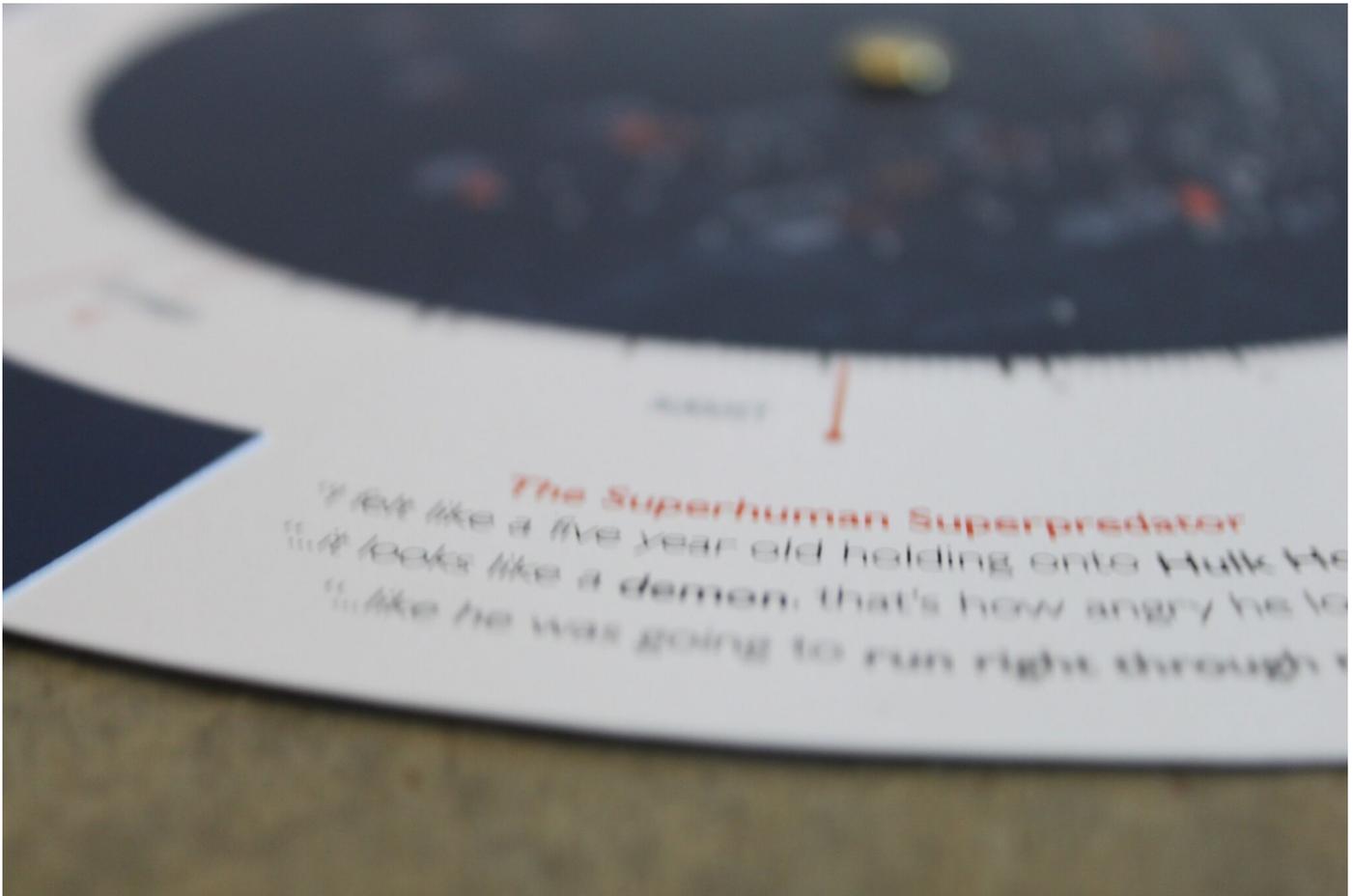


Figure 1. A close-up image of the planisphere.

Constellations are collections of stars that form patterns in the sky with no astronomical significance. They are often named after their apparent form, and many are represented by some mythological figure. In part, constellations have been identified and afforded artificial significance in order to help us navigate the physical world. Much in the same way, we create and perpetuate legitimizing myths about groups of people to navigate our social environments and maintain an order that preserves control for the prevailing system of power. White Supremacy, in particular, relies on a set of myths about Black people that allow the State to murder Black citizens with impunity.

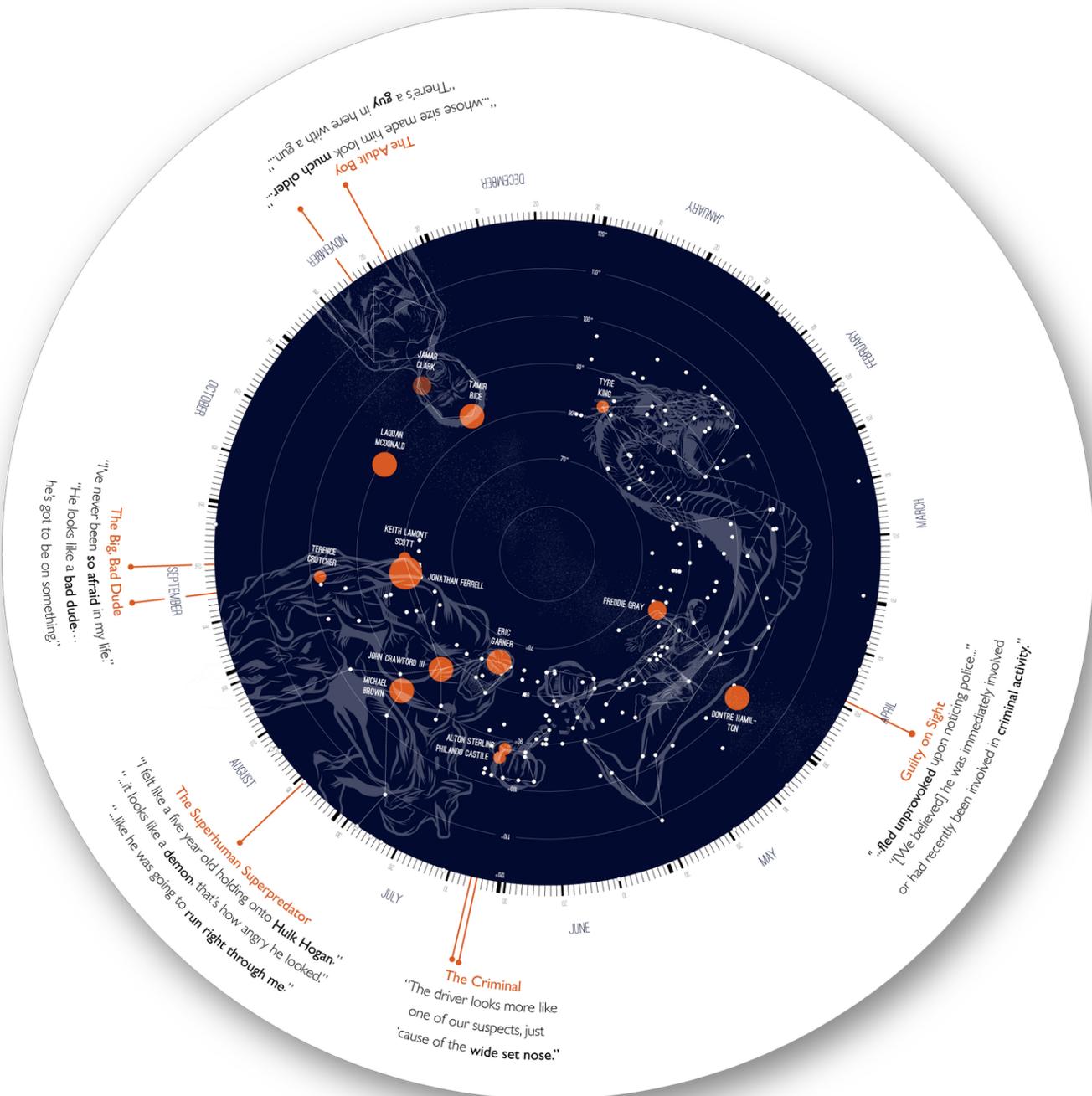


Figure 2. A detail image of the planisphere wheel; to see it rotate, [click here](#).

Like stars, these deaths are inscribed on our collective memories with relative permanence: We all see the same stars, more or less. All Americans witness the same deaths on our nation’s stage. But, our views of the sky vary and perspectives on who is at fault and what is justifiable inevitably differ depending upon the mythologies to which we subscribe.

In its form, *Mapping Myths* posits parallels between the mythical nature of constellations and the legitimizing myths undergirding White Supremacy, particularly in the context of police killings of Black people. Each star represents a death and each constellation represents a legitimizing myth leveraged to justify use of lethal force against Black citizens. The stars are plotted according to two features of each event: The date on which they occurred—indicated along the circumference of the map—and the longitudinal location of the state in which they occurred (along the radius). This arrangement of information is relatively

unimportant, except in its signaling of the underlying fact of these murders: That these lives were taken at a particular point in time and space. The coordinates are necessary only to ground the map with an objective visual framework against which my more central argument can be made: That the rationale used to normalize the murder of Black people by police is rooted in mythicized perceptions about how threatening they are, which is just as arbitrary, make-believe, and socially constructed as the constellations. The initial form is a relatively small print product, an easy-to-assemble map that can be spun around its brass fastener as an axis. The map is somewhat playful, as a child's planisphere would be. This belies the gravity of its content. This contradiction of form and content depicts a sense of the unassuming nature of myth when naturalized.

Part 2. Mythology Renders Power

In Barthes' estimation, myth is equivalent to ideology. According to Marx and Engels, ideology is "false consciousness," an illusion that performs an intentionally deceptive operation on the members of a society in such a way that it normalizes or renders natural an unjust power structure (Eagleton 2016, 7): "Such 'mystification', as it is commonly known, frequently takes the form of masking or suppressing social conflicts, from which arises the conception of ideology as an imaginary resolution of real contradictions" (Eagleton 2016, 5-6).

In the context of racialized police brutality, myth offers a set of rationalizations—ethical or logical reasonings that conceal a true motive—for behaviors and systemic outcomes that fundamentally undermine the social contract that police are presumed to protect. Beyond simply justifying these present-day miscarriages of justice, myth also attempts to nullify the very source of its origin: It obscures the myth of race itself and the resulting racialized difference that colors daily life and long-term opportunity in the United States. Ideology seeks "to mask the very conflicts from which it springs, either by denying that they exist, or by asserting their unimportance or inevitability" (Eagleton 2016, 7-8). Mythologies about Black people, our bodies, and embodied traits, maintain a system of oppression that privileges white fragility and absolution.

In a different way, Foucauldian concepts of power—especially biopower—and Foucault's later work on racism, examine acts of state-sponsored violence in a way that articulates how social norms function to determine which lives are worth preserving and which are not (Bhandaru, 230). A biopolitical society creates a binary that positions a normalized race and the marginalized in direct conflict with one another: "[A] battle that has to be waged not between races, but by a race that is portrayed as the one true race, the race that holds power and is entitled to define the norm, and against those who deviate from that norm, against those who pose a threat to the biological heritage" (Foucault 2003, 61).

Foucault defines biopower, the dominant system of social control in Western society, in contrast to sovereign power. In a sovereign society, power relied on the sovereign's right to kill or to spare a subject's life. In a biopolitical society, power is derived from the right to *enhance* life. Racism is just one example of this affirmation of the norm—in preserving the norm's right to life—which in turn enables neglect of the abnormal—letting the marginalized die: "At this point, we see the emergence of the idea of an internal war that defends society against threats born of and in its own body" (Foucault 2003, 216).

To be clear, in his analysis, Foucault includes death by abandonment or refusal to support life, not solely by murder (Bhandaru 2009, 230). "When I say 'killing,' I obviously do not mean simply murder as such, but also every form of indirect murder: the fact of exposing someone to death, increasing the risk of death for some people, or, quite simply, political death, expulsion, rejection, and so on" (Foucault 2003, 256). In the cases of police brutality that go unpunished, however, the underlying assumption that enables this behavior—and all those actions that lead up to the act of murder—is that the victim's right to live—to drive on a public roadway, sell cigarettes, walk down the middle of a street—is superseded by the best interests of the *normalized* members of the social body. I would argue, then, that this interpretation of "killing" encompasses cases of police murders of Black citizens, if only because the effect of these incidents resounds beyond the killing itself to shape policing practice more broadly: The over-surveillance of

Black-majority neighborhoods, stop-and-frisk policies, broken window policing, racial profiling, and so on. The underlying premise driving any and all of these practices is racism, as Foucault writes: “Once the State functions in the biopower mode, racism alone can justify the murderous function of the State” (Ibid.).

In Foucault’s estimation, power is dispersed—it is everywhere—precisely because it is engrained in the norms and routines of our everyday lives (Pylypa 1998, 23). In that sense, biopolitical power is not exercised by top down force; it is exercised as myth enables the practices of individual officers and policing institutions. As such, biopower is most effective when it is indiscernible (Pylypa 1998, 24) and myth—as a form of the knowledge produced by power that Foucault references—carries out this objective expertly. As Foucault writes: “...power is strong...because, as we are beginning to realize, it produces effects at the level of desire—and also at the level of knowledge. Far from preventing knowledge, power produces it” (Foucault 1980, 59).

This type of power is at work when the fear of Black bodies—unarmed, unobtrusive, and unmoving—becomes so normalized that such fear can be levied as a defense for using lethal force and when that defense can be codified and upheld in legal code, criminal justice studies, and other forms of knowledge. It is in these moments that myth transforms into a rigorous “scientific” reasoning, not just social lore. It becomes “knowledge.” In this way, the myth becomes “scientific” in the sense that it is upheld by the measures we use to evaluate use of “reasonable force” or what constitutes a veritable threat to one’s safety and a *normative* (white) person’s life. The George Zimmermans of the world remind us that it matters less that an accused murderer is a police officer and more that they represent a normative citizen in the eyes of the social body.

It is this state of naturalization or embedment in social systems—and the accompanying assumptions we hold about those systems and their capacity to change—that *The Social Body* brings into question.

Part 3. Constructing Fiction to Unsettle Myth

The Social Body imagines a fictional scenario in which the collection of individuals that make up society—represented as a human body—experiences some social ailment—which presents as an illness. To be clear, the “social body” here encompasses the population and all of its systems: Of governance, policing, exchange, education, and so on. The core of the project focuses on imagining a set of medical instruments that would be used to treat this fictional body if it experienced some illness. The larger objective, however, was to trouble the metaphor at every possible step, from the stage at which we define the social body, to the “caregiver” who diagnoses and treats it, to the tools they might use to do so.

This is a bit of an aside, but a necessary one in order to add some context to the varied interpretations of the social body’s constitution that this project brings into question. In *Necropolitics*, Achille Mbembé builds on Foucault’s analysis of biopolitics by incorporating a biopolitical analysis of American slavery, an account that is notably missing from Foucault’s initial discussions on race. Of the slave’s condition, Mbembé writes: “Slave life, in many ways, is a form of death-in-life” (Mbembé 2003, 21). Afro-Pessimist theory today—a critical framework which posits that Blackness is synonymous with slaveness and positions Blackness relative to non-Blackness, not whiteness—argues that there has never been and does not exist today a moment in which Black people were considered a part of American social life, of the social body. Frank Wilderson writes: “Afro-Pessimism argues that Blacks do not function as political subjects; instead, our flesh and energies are instrumentalized for postcolonial, immigrant, feminist, LGBT, and workers’ agendas” (Wilderson 2018). How, then, in the light of the “social death” that defines Black subjectivity, would the body be constituted? How could Black people be positioned within an American social body?

Simply imagining the social body as a *human body* is a design choice that intends to contradict a set of assumptions about society and its systems as we perceive them today. In large part, systems and institutions of governance, exchange, social order, and more are regarded as immovable or immutable by

way of their naturalized condition in the social imaginary, their scale, and their perceived permanence. These perceptions are, for all intents and purposes, another set of mythologies. They are made manifest by doctrines such as “Too Big to Fail,” which suggests that large firms and financial institutions must be bailed out by the government for no reason but their size (Moosa 2010) or the misled but commonly held belief that the criminal justice system is inherently fair (Robinson & Williams 2009). These myths subtly imply, then, that these types of systems ought not evolve or be subject to reform. But, a human body and its systems are fallible, soft, susceptible to illness or injury, modifiable, and—in relative terms—small. The body falls ill and recovers; it lives and dies. What changes, then, when we consider these systems and the social bodies from which they emerge in such a visceral, bodily way? In analyzing systems, we tend to look for ways to “zoom out” to get perspective on the entire messy, complex arrangement of parts. But, what happens if, instead, we zoom in as a laparoscopic tool would? How, then, might we intervene in these systems and this body in order to observe symptoms?

How might social problems present themselves as ailments within a metaphorical human body? How would those maladies be diagnosed? How would the police murder of a Black citizen, for example, manifest as a bodily ailment? One person might conclude that the ailment is the marginalized person themselves: They would see this alternative to the norm as something that must be rooted out, eliminated, *abandoned* from the social body. In that case, the ailment *is* the Black body; the Black subject, in their marginality and distance from the norm, is causing the larger social body distress in a way that cancels their right to life. Terence Crutcher, as Betty Shelby argued, *caused his own death* by purely existing in contradiction to the white norm.

How, then, might the ailment of racialized police brutality be diagnosed differently by a caregiver with a different set of knowledge? Perhaps a different caregiver would interpret an incident of police murdering a Black subject as a *systemic* ailment of the social body. She might conclude in her diagnosis that an institution—a sub-system within the body—represented by individual members of the social body (i.e. the officer involved), has malfunctioned; that the social body is attacking itself. To inform this caregiver’s positionality, capacities, and tools, I combed Patricia Hill Collins’s *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* for tenets of the theory that could inform the formal, visual, and functional elements of the fiction. I chose Radical Black Feminist theory to counter the positioning of the reality—a biopolitical liberal democratic society—that this fiction aims to subvert.



Figure 3. Several of the prototyped tools juxtaposed against antique medical tools.

One of the prototyped medical tools is “the Kettle,” shown in Figure 4. “The Kettle” is an implant inspired in part by laparoscopic instruments but, instead of serving as a tool for entering and viewing or modifying the body, it is implanted *within* the social body in order to offer it a view of itself from the perspective of an “outsider–within.” Hill Collins’s discussion of the *outsider–within* positioning that informs “distinctively Black and female forms of resistance” as a driving force behind U.S. Black women’s critical social theory informed the “Kettle” tool shown in the image below (Hill Collins 2000, 10). Hill Collins explains that Black women domestic workers were simultaneously positioned squarely within the homes and families of white elites *and* solidly excluded from them, as economically exploited workers who knew they could never “belong to their White ‘families’” (Ibid.). Hill Collins reflects on an anecdote about a Black inner-city resident, Nancy White, who was a “perpetual outsider” with significant access by virtue of her role as a caregiver: “Her

work...allowed her an insider's view of some of the contradictions between White women thinking that they are running their lives and the patriarchal power and authority in their households" (Ibid., 11).

This placement is advantageous, in a sense: It permits the Black woman a perspective on her own oppression *and* that of others which would be impossible to acquire from any other vantage point.



Figure 4. The Kettle.

Hill Collins also introduces Maria Stewart, an intellectual who challenged U.S. Black women to investigate and critique their oppression and, more importantly, to form their own self-definitions, self-reliance, and independence in spite of it (Hill Collins 2000, 2). In 1831, Stewart questioned: “How long shall the fair daughters of Africa be compelled to bury their minds and talents beneath a load of iron pots and kettles?” The economic oppression she sought to free herself and other Black women from is symbolized, in a way, by the weighty, enduring nature of the cast iron pots and kettles she encouraged them to cast aside. The black clay used to render these prototypes intends to mimic the appearance of cast iron. In doing so, these objects contemplate what might happen if Black feminists as caretakers of the social body repurposed and wielded an instrument of their oppression—an oppression inflicted *by the body itself*—in an attempt to diagnose or cure it of an illness.

“The Inter-Kettle” (Figure 5) is a variation of “The Kettle.” Once implanted within the body, it unravels to a self-determined form and draws together seemingly disconnected systems. Its form is based on two other central tenets of Black Radical Feminist theory: Intersectionality and self-determination. Intersectionality refers to a framework for analyzing oppression that recognizes how they collaborate to cultivate injustice across domains such as race, gender, sexuality, nationality, and class.

Self-determination and self-definition are essential to the empowerment of Black women, Hill Collins explains, and challenging intersectional oppressions requires Black women's empowerment.



Figure 5. The Inter-Kettle

This tool may serve multiple purposes: on one hand, identifying intersections between oppressive systems may make it simpler to isolate the strands that connect them in order to weaken their oppressive power. For instance, how might illuminating the intersections between policing and capitalism help us interrogate the idea that protection of property takes precedence over protection of Black lives? How might these understandings shape a body's response—its own resistance—to its ailments?

The formal qualities of the prototyped tools and surrounding fictions were designed to create a dialectical opposition between reality and the fiction presented in order to create space for dialogue around these questions, not necessarily to respond to those questions in any conclusive way (Dunne & Raby 2013, 35). The aim was to communicate critical thought through formal choices, materiality and storytelling (Ibid.). At the same time, although these design decisions were at times strategically made to communicate a particular tenet of radical Black feminist thought, I also used the process of crafting each object to inspire emergent questions about what the tools *could* achieve and why.

While *Mapping Myths* stopped at presenting a visual manifestation of a critique of police brutality, *The Social Body* has evolved into a series of increasingly complex fictions, formal explorations, and participatory engagements. In these engagements, contributors have been invited to react to the social body as living body, inform its visual constitution, and reflect the questions and considerations that this proposed mythology raised for them. In this way, *The Social Body* serves as both a formal embodiment of critique and the basis of a methodology to discursively engage participants in critique.

These engagements with people brought key turning points to pass in the course of the larger project. For instance, in the first iteration of *The Social Body* presented here, the body is implied but never materialized. That the body itself is a crucial aspect of this fiction to make tangible or at least visible emerged from introducing this set of medical tools to contributors, one of whom responded more naturally to the idea of an ailing body than to the tools themselves. This person could fluidly draw metaphorical parallels between a

contemporary event—Colin Kaepernick’s protests of the national anthem—and an experience with an epidural needle: Both events are painful and cause people to recoil for fear of discomfort or pain, but both must penetrate the “body” deeply in order to work.

The social body’s composition can help articulate how we imagine ourselves in relation to others within society and in relation to society as an idea or entity of its own. Beyond that, the influence social systems hold over individuals’ bodies—whether in terms of one’s access to medical care, life prospects as determined by geography, or treatment in the hands of police—render the physicality of this body even more central in advancing this line of questioning. Later engagements with people involved in some way in activism, many through art and community organizing, brought into question key elements of the notion of the social body itself. Seven contributors in Detroit were invited to visualize themselves and their social networks as part of an imaginary, collective social body. Some illustrations echoed my own questions about whether “harm” done to a social body might be caused by its own systems; others questioned whether they would even count themselves as part of a collective social body or apart from it; others still articulated the salience of a chosen body part’s ability to act on the larger body from its positioning within. Each of these revelations unveils an understanding about how people see themselves as actors within society and their ability to act on society.

Conclusion

Mapping Myths and *The Social Body* are critical design projects intended to provoke questions, investigate theory through form and materiality, and unearth different ways of framing age-old discourse around mythology and its role in maintaining or disrupting systems of oppression. Neither aims to lead to conclusions.

Both projects are linked by a common thematic focus—policing practice and its influence—and the significance of embodiment. *Mapping Myths* is centered on delegitimizing myths affixed to Black people and their capacities and behaviors in relation to policing. *The Social Body*, instead, concentrates on a metaphorized body. In relation to Barthes, if *Mapping Myth* is an exercise in dissecting myth in order to detach the sign, signified, and signifiers assigned to Black bodies from one another and unsettle the foundations of those legitimizing myths, then *The Social Body* is, by contrast, an experiment in intentionally assembling a fictional sign in order to provoke questions and new ways of thinking about the function, dysfunction, and mutability of systems of power within and around the social body. Both projects are informed by critical theory, but vary in process and intent. From translating critiques of myth into form and materiality to sparking discursive exchange that questions those myths, these two projects attempt to unsettle racialized mythologies through critical design.

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