

Urban Heterotopias and Racialization in Kim Barry Brunhuber's *Kameleon Man*

Michel Foucault elaborates on the concept of heterotopia—a compound term derived from classic Greek meaning *other space*—in his 1967 lecture “Des espaces autres.” He used the term, initially coined in medicine to refer to normal tissues that grow in unexpected places in the body, to denote “real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (“Of Other Spaces” 4). The term’s penchant for ambiguity was already present in its medical use, “questioning binary divisions between healthy/normal and sick/abnormal” (Cenzatti 75). Following Foucault’s discussion of heterotopia, the concept has attracted widespread interest in social theory, connecting, for example, with Henri Lefebvre’s work on the production of space, as Edward Soja remarks when he himself undertakes the study of heterotopias as particular spaces of representation “linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life,” retaining “a partial unknowability . . . mystery and secretiveness” (67).

Focusing on *Kameleon Man*, a first novel by Kim Barry Brunhuber, a CBC reporter and investigative journalist turned fiction writer, I aim to explore the mixed race body as a heterotopia of *difference*, a third term in the equation normality/deviance on which Foucault based his theory of heterotopias, thereby underlining the relationship between place, positionality, and race. Heterotopias of difference, Marco Cenzatti argues, “are still places in which irreconcilable spaces coexist,” but in a context where what constitutes

irreconcilability is constantly contested and changing (79). Accordingly, I consider the mixed race body as heterotopic, an irreconcilable, fluid space in constant transformation, which blurs the boundaries between normalcy and deviance, sameness and difference, invisibility and recognition, contested by the gaze of others and contesting received notions of race, class, and even gender and sexuality. *Kameleon Man* probes the shifting positionality of mixed race subjectivity in terms of the production and consumption of culture, racialization, and identity in the globalization era through the figure of Stacey Schmidt, a twenty-one-year-old part-black college student, turned fashion model. Upon its publication, the book received strong reviews by renowned critics such as George Elliott Clarke, and was excerpted in Donna Bailey Nurse's anthology of black Canadian writing *Revival*. However, it has hardly elicited any critical attention since then, despite the novel's interesting problematization of Michel Pêcheux's notion of *disidentification* in terms of "pheneticizing," a neologism recently coined by Wayde Compton to refer to the phenomenon of "racially perceiving someone based on a subjective examination of his or her outward appearance" (*After* 25). Under the influence of the pheneticizing gaze, Stacey's mixed race subjectivity is caught between the performance of what Pêcheux calls the "good subject," who *freely* identifies with the dominant ideology and willingly assimilates into it, and the counter-identification of the "bad subject," who, though rebelling against dominant ideology, often reinscribes it by simply reversing its tenets. However, Stacey's attempt to control and thrive on pheneticizing leads him initially to embrace what I call *deceptive disidentification*, which proves as threatening to his freedom of self-definition as both identification and counter-identification. If for Pêcheux *disidentification* involves a third mode of relating to dominant ideologies by simultaneously working on them and against them, Stacey's early move is that of the disidentifying subject who opts for subversion rather than for a direct struggle to put an end to racialization. Hence, he tries to turn pheneticizing to his advantage, allowing himself to be misrecognized by the subjective gaze of others in his longing for approval and success, while keeping his secret self to himself. Like a chameleon, he attempts to preserve his integrity by changing colours on the surface, thus passing for whatever race he is perceived as belonging to. However, Stacey's agency is put into question when considered in the light of Compton's *pheneticizing*, which by shifting the racializing gaze from the viewed to the viewer corrects the misleading implications of the term "passing"—a term that "grammatically absents the person who reads someone's race" (*After* 22). Stacey's quest for

self-empowerment and control also foregrounds the role of the viewer in turning mixed race subjectivity into a fantasy locus, but the novel more importantly highlights the ambiguous status of the mixed race subject who hovers between the agency of passing and the objectification of pheneticizing. I argue that in the early stages of the novel, Stacey practises a deceptive disidentification because he fools himself into believing that he can practise deception as a subversive strategy, complying with people's misrepresentations of him in order to become a famous model. All along, he believes he can keep his inner self untouched by the pheneticizing gaze. His disidentification, however, proves a treacherous strategy, because his chameleonic strategy of passing for whatever race or nationality is in demand in the fashion business reinforces rather than deconstructs racialization, resulting in the expropriation of his own complexly blended identity. Consequently, Stacey evolves from his initial tentative strategy of deceptive disidentification to attempting counter-identification as black. Yet, neither his light colour nor his socio-cultural background allow for his uncomplicated assimilation into blackness and the oppositional performance attached to black nationalism. Only at the end of the novel does Stacey eschew his prior deceptive disidentification and subsequent counter-identification in favour of an honest disidentification that exchanges his previous chameleonic strategy—which aimed to melt with his surroundings by adapting to or complying with outer expectations of who he is or should be—for one of metamorphosis. Unlike the chameleonic surrender to pheneticizing, metamorphosis does not imply mimicking and adaptation, but transformation and evolution, even self-affirmation against the pheneticizing gaze. Thus, metamorphosis implies the rejection of both the instability of compliant chameleonic change, and the fixity or immutability of essentialisms.

My reading of Stacey's chameleonic racial quality brings Foucault's theories about the utopian body, heterotopian spaces, and the panopticon into conversation with the theories on dominant ideology interpellations forwarded by Michel Pêcheux, Judith Butler, Fred Wah, and Wayne Compton, among others, as well as with the thought of black intellectuals such as Aimé Césaire, W. E. B. Du Bois, Frantz Fanon, and Toni Morrison. This interdisciplinary methodology reads the presence of the mixed race body in various heterotopian spaces that amplify the effects of pheneticizing, making it evident for the reader that race is a pseudoscientific "folk taxonomy," only as real—or unreal—"as our current social consensus" (Compton, *After* 25), but also dispelling any claim that we have entered a post-racial era.

Stacey's pilgrimage through various cityscapes becomes both trans-national and trans-racial—and arguably trans-sexual—when he moves from his native small-town Nepean-cum-Ottawa suburb to Toronto, and from there to Europe, where he briefly visits Munich, Germany, and later, Alicante and Granada, Spain. In the process, the presence of his heterotopic body in other typical heterotopias, such as the mirror, photography, the fairgrounds, the airport, the train, or the fashion show runway, boosts the recognition of the racializing forces that imprison him, jeopardize his sense of identity, and even put his physical and mental health at risk. As a *flâneur*, Stacey is a detached but highly perceptive bourgeois dilettante, as Walter Benjamin would have it. However, class and race collide in his racialized body as his identity as a middle class, suburban (“white”) Canadian is unsettled, questioned, and practically dissolved by the social thrust to make him, first, an icon of urban male blackness, as distant as this identity may be from his own experience, and later on, a racialized unidentified *other*, signifying both difference or uniqueness, and sameness or the common human condition. As a result, although Stacey continues performing his role as a *flâneur* for the rest of the novel—i.e., as the stroller of global urban landscapes who ambiguously acts as both a disengaged, cynical voyeur on the one hand, and as a full participant in the urban reality he portrays, on the other—he is denied the social class and economic status attached to this figure. Thus, while offering poignant social commentary as he captures the life around him with his camera—the tool of the modern *flâneur*, according to Susan Sontag—he stands unsteadily between his middle-class origins and aspirations, and his precarious economic situation as a mixed-race model, which leads him to literal starvation and to take huge risks running drugs to pay for cosmetic surgery. Stacey's status as an unconventional *flâneur* is further accentuated by the way in which the different urban spaces he briefly inhabits, revealed as heterotopias, transform him under the pressure of the pheneticizing gaze, since he is not just a viewer but also the conscious—and complicit—object of the commodifying stares of others. In his quest for *recognition* (Fanon, *Black Skin* 210-222), he will drift between trying to conform to racializing expectations—linked to *identification* with the dominant ideology in Pêcheux's terms—and resisting the cooption of his mixed racial self—*counter-identification* and *disidentification*. The ambivalence and instability of heterotopias, described as sites with “the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspend, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they

happen to designate, mirror, or reflect” (Foucault, “Of Other Spaces” 3-4) aptly matches and reverberates with the ambiguous social position Stacey occupies as a mixed-race subject. Thus, Stacey’s tour through the physical geographies of urban space foregrounds “the very contradictions that this society produces but is unable to resolve” (Dehaene 25). Among these contradictions and paradoxes are the coexistence of the progressive policies of multiculturalism vis-à-vis the conservative multiracial discourses aiming at a colour-blindness that denies difference and makes it impossible to address inequalities and racist discrimination.

The Fashion Show as Heterotopia

The novel’s first heterotopia is the mall, this semi-public *space of representation*, in Henri Lefebvre’s terminology, where mass consumption is the social norm. At the novel’s opening, the mall has been transformed into a fashion platform in order to promote the consumption of articles sold by the firms that sponsor the show. The fashion show appears as a heterotopia, a thrilling space that instils imagination as it erases time. According to Foucault, the “heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time” (“Of Other Spaces” 7) and find themselves in a type of heterotopia that he terms “heterochrony.” Thus, as the models walk down the runway wearing wedding dresses, tuxedos, and other clothes for different social events at various stages in life, different times and spaces coalesce and overlap, creating the effect of a counter-site which reflects all the real sites and times found in a person’s life. The runway is transformed into a heterochrony where time appears “in its most flowing, transitory, precarious aspect,” as in festivals (“Of Other Spaces” 7), holding for Stacey the promise of freedom: “For some reason, the runway is also called the ramp, which evokes images of takeoffs and landings. Magical properties. Models suddenly gifted with the power of flight” (*Kameleon* 4). Stacey hopes to fly away from mediocrity and stagnation by simultaneously thriving on and subverting racial essentializing on a runway that he envisions as the locus of his “enacted utopia” (Foucault, “Of Other Spaces” 4). The in-betweenness of his hybrid self allows for the creation of a shifting, ambiguous, and elusive persona, similar to that of the trickster, a role in which Stacey excels when he is given the chance to perform on a similarly transformative runway. Thus, to Stacey the ramp is “[a] perceptual illusion. It bends light, it’s curved. It’s tilted, enabling models to ascend or descend to different levels” (4), reminiscent of the different stages in Dante’s quest from Hell to Paradise in his *Divina*

Commedia. Furthermore, the fashion show appears throughout the novel as a symbolic as well as a physical space, not just for the transformation of models, but as an escapist site for the spectators, who project their illusions or aspirations onto the models, thus reflecting Stacey's own dreams of success, admiration, and recognition.

At the novel's starting point, Stacey is determined to leave Nepean, a town he describes as "a model's purgatory" (9) because of its homogenizing parochialism, and to try his luck in Toronto. In contrast with suburban Nepean, Toronto appears as a place of plurality where he could thrive on his alterity and reclaim places of otherness without eschewing his role as "both a deceptive insider and deceptive outsider" (Minh-ha 74) destabilizing ethnic/ethnic paradigms. Therefore, from the beginning, Stacey's stance regarding the dominant symbolic system is that of deceptive *disidentification*, because despite his critical awareness of the nefarious racialization processes at work in society, he becomes complicit with pheneticizing, attempting to comply with the ever-shifting distorting misrecognition of his mixed-race body in order to draw social approval and professional success.

The Heterotopias of the Mirror and the Body

After defining heterotopias, Foucault proceeds to consider the mirror as an in-between experience set between utopias and heterotopias. The utopia of the mirror allows him to see himself where he is not, "in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface . . . a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent" ("Of Other Spaces" 4). However, he adds, the mirror "is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position I occupy" ("Of Other Spaces" 4). Aptly, one of the novel's central tropes is that of the mirror. Hence, the mirroring effects of reflection, inversion, fragmentation, agglomeration, and distortion are produced not just by everyday reflecting objects, but also by our subjective projections upon the body, and more specifically, upon Stacey's racialized hybrid body.

Interestingly, Foucault's radio lecture "Les Hétérotopies" in 1966 was followed by another titled "Le corps utopique," where he establishes the body as a utopia, "a fragment of imaginary space, which will communicate with the universe of divinities, or with the universe of the other . . . the product of its own phantasms" ("Utopian Body" 232). Despite Foucault's insistence on presenting the body as a utopia, its own materiality—which he both

acknowledges and eschews—rather inscribes it in the realm of his previously theorized heterotopias, as the mirror assigns “a space to the profoundly and originally utopian experience of the body” (233).

Under the transfiguring mirroring effect of his audience’s pheneticizing gaze, Stacey’s body is, in Foucault’s words, “torn away from its proper space and projected into an other space” (232). Moulded and consumed by the stares of others, his body becomes an ontological and epistemological site through which he can get to know himself in relation to others in what he perceives as a densely racialized space. While on the runway, Stacey becomes “a great utopian actor” (Foucault, “Utopian Body” 231), wearing a mask and enacting the utopian dreams of his audience, who in exchange return to him an image of desire and admiration. Hence, Stacey’s body disappears, only to reappear as a utopia in the heterotopian mirror of the gaze of others: “All staring back at me. What do they see, anyway? They are not looking at Stacey—he does not exist anymore” (7). Thus, his biracialized and imperfect body—uneven teeth, inconvenient bodily hair—is transformed into Foucault’s utopia of the “incorporeal body” (229), which allows for the fantasy of eternity, invulnerability, and perfection. Stacey is keenly aware that he is precious for the fashion industry because his mixed race body is considered “a rare breed” (6), charged with the legacy of violence and desire associated with miscegenation in the history of Western colonial imperialism, which makes even grubby kids and old ladies wish to touch him, while wondering, “is he real?” (9). However, much as he wants to peddle his brownness in exchange for recognition, Stacey cannot allow for this complete erasure of his self. He is confronted with Du Bois’ conundrum of “double consciousness,” immersed in “a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world” (Du Bois 2). Nevertheless, he fools himself into believing that he can avoid being trapped in the mirage produced by the mirroring effect of the gaze of others—or “the ruse of the mirror,” as Foucault puts it (“Utopian Body” 231)—and thinks: “Or maybe I’m still there. Essentially Stacey, but made up, dressed, camouflaged, disguised by the art of powerful illusionists, obeh men. Maybe the disguise is really my own. I’m a chameleon. A mimic, like a stick insect, like those yellow-and-black-striped flies that pretend to be bees” (7).

By means of the (military) technique of camouflage, Stacey actively tries to oppose, disturb, dislocate, or displace “a nationalistic [Canadian] aesthetic that continually attempts to expropriate difference into its own consuming

narrative” (Wah 75) while profiting from it. The novel foregrounds the nationalistic dimension of this aesthetic in the scene where Stacey poses as a Canadian Olympic runner at Pearson Airport. Again, the setting chosen functions as a heterotopia. As Steen Christiansen explains, “[t]he ontology of the airport is peculiarly split between a sense of placelessness, while at the same time being a place of material organization and social complexity. It is a system of interconnected material worlds, and thus a heterotopia; a blending space of overlapping ontologies” (“Airport Heterotopias”). In the novel the airport is portrayed as a fantasy locus of smug Canadian nationalism packaged and sold to travelers moving in a network of national and international flight connections. In the context of the duty-free shops, selling “novelty jams, maple syrup, maple jelly, maple mustard; spoons of all kinds; cups that say DAD; Lilliputian SkyDomes and CN Towers” (107), the group of models posing as the black sportsmen who won the gold medal for Canada at the Olympics sell an ideal multicultural Canada, where blackness is embraced and extolled as representative of the country’s best. However, the heterotopia of the airport reveals the superficial, banal quality of this nationalism, which turns into an “inadvertent charade” (115) when passersby passengers mistake the black models for the real athletes and ask them to sign autographs and to be photographed with them. The misperception of Stacey as black demands that he pass as Floyd Stanley, although in Stacey’s opinion, the Olympic runner is as “[u]gly as this terminal. Dark as my sneakers” (115). Due to the pheneticizing processes at work in Canadian society, the models are pushed to become impostors, and deprived of their individuality. They become also interchangeable, disposable, with no identity of their own, something the fashion Mogul Chelsey Manson confirms when he fires Stacey, telling him that anyone can replace him. The airport as heterotopia promising movement and flight paradoxically reflects the immobility inflicted upon racialized subjects who, like Stacey and his team, are only allowed to run “stationary relay races” (151), remaining fixed in space, essentialized in the social imaginary.

Stacey’s technique of camouflage is a dangerous move, as Siemen, a successful part-black fellow model who has clearly chosen to adopt a black nationalist stance, warns him: “[N]ever let them create your image for you. I don’t have to tell you what happens when they do. Why do you think black people are so messed up? Our image has been repackaged and sold off to the highest bidder. Soul is for sale. Our own souls are disposable, like gloves. . . . You can’t carry two faces under one hat” (135). Stacey’s plight lies in this

impossible negotiation of space and race famously articulated by Du Bois as a “two-ness—an American [or, in this case, an unmarked (white) Canadian], a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (2). Disregarding Siemen’s advice, Stacey is sent “wooing false gods,” to continue using Du Bois’s religious imagery, “and invoking false means of salvation” (5), those of global capitalist commodification, in the hope that he be allowed “into the invisible network of society” (Foucault, “Utopian” 232). Hence, the heterotopia of the gaze of the audience gathered around a runway, or around the models in the airport, becomes suffused with symbolic violence and turned into Stacey’s battleground, as George Elliott Clarke persuasively argues in “The Perils of Pluralism” (17).

The ambiguity produced by the heterotopia of the mirror raises the important question of authenticity, repeatedly alluded to by Canadian mixed race critics and writers such as Wayde Compton, Lawrence Hill, and Suzette Mayr, and made explicit in Fred Wah’s title *Faking It: Poetics & Hybridity*. Stacey’s complicity with his audience’s pheneticizing turns his utopia into a recurrent dystopian nightmare in which, as he walks down an endless runway, his face freezes into a smile that is described as “an impossible rictus stretching from ear to ear” (7). Like Fanon, Stacey seems determined “to laugh [him]self to tears, but laughter had become impossible” (Fanon, *Black Skin* 112). As a result, “no one’s fooled. The audience sees through my face, howls at the deception, rushes the stage, tears me to bloody ribbons” (Brunhuber 7-8). Reversing Fanon’s metaphor of black skin in a white mask, Stacey sees himself as a minstrel show white actor in a black face, impersonating ludicrous—but also potentially violent—black characters for the benefit of a white audience. His bad conscience as an impostor is enhanced by his flawed impersonation of black masculinity for his white girlfriend, Melody Griffin, who is portrayed as a consumer of Stanley Fish’s “boutique multiculturalism,” lured by the exoticism of the racially different, but rejecting *essential* or *pure* blackness as represented in the novel by the couple of loud Jamaican Canadian young men in the “exotic” clothes of urban blacks. Whereas Stacey “sniff[s] to inhale their negrosity” (165), Melody whispers, “I’m glad you’re not like them” (165). So, Stacey is first troubled by his own insincerity: “I’m not the genuine article. I come with no pedigree of negritude” (49), until he understands that what Melody seeks in him is a tamed blackness, less threatening or disturbingly *different*, obligingly packaged to be consumed as palatably exotic: “She told me on our

first date,” Stacey recalls, “that she liked me because I wasn’t too dark. I took that as a compliment then. Now I know better. I’m not like ‘them’” (169), referring to the Jamaican Canadian youths. Rebelling against the distortion, commodification, and appropriation of his persona, as well as against the disparaging stereotyping of black maleness, Stacey reaffirms his black nationalism by acting out the socially construed role of the black rapist. In a retaliatory move reminiscent of Fanon’s “lust for revenge” (*Black Skin* 14), Stacey uses the morally suffused Western colour imagery to describe his symbolic rape of his white girlfriend as she poses for him naked while he uses his camera to shoot at her, penetrating her inner self: “Stepping out of the light and into the shadows, I can hardly see my hands. I’m black like me” (169). The reference to John Howard Griffin’s book *Black Like Me* (1961), where the author describes his experience as a white journalist passing as a black man in the segregated South of the US, underlines the fact that Stacey, too, is performing a role, putting on a black mask that confirms the racist stereotyping of the black man, as a way of embracing black nationalism. Rather than grasping “white civilization and dignity” (Fanon 63) with the symbolic rape of Melody, Stacey completely reverses Fanon’s terms and “across the zebra striping of [his] mind surges this desire to be suddenly” *black*, rather than white (*Black Skin* 63). Melody’s symbolic violation takes the shape of a photo shoot in which the tables are reversed and she, instead of Stacey, becomes the object of desire and is reduced to “abject game” (Clarke, “Perils”). This time, Stacey thinks, “[i]t’s somebody else’s turn to be the beast” (169), in a clear allusion to Fanon’s affirmation that “[t]he white man is convinced that the Negro is a beast” (*Black Skin* 170), and to his own experience as a mixed-race model. However, as a result of his impersonation of the stereotypical black rapist, he does not recognize himself, nor his hands, the perpetrators of Melody’s abuse.

If, as Fanon—and Toni Morrison after him (see below)—argues, “The Negro is comparison” (*Black Skin* 211), Melody’s white womanhood also becomes at this point a mediating symbol used to capture those “uncontrived, unalloyed states a photographer searches for, almost never finds” (Brunhuber 170). The photographs Stacey takes of her encapsulate “[a]n ideal. Vulnerability. Shame. Contempt” (170). As a conveyor of purity and authenticity Melody becomes a sacrificial figure—“My ideas are expressed through her. She’s both the medium and the message” (170)—foreshadowing Stacey’s acknowledgement of his own objectification as a mirror to and a redeemer of society at the end of the novel: “I’m both the genius and the masterpiece” (274). It is this

agency as a “genius” that he struggles to keep all along his quest for recognition, minimizing the effects of his objectification into “the coloured clown . . . ready for [his] final tumble” (8).

Torontonian Heterotopias and Heterochronisms

As Stacey tours the megacity in search of his opportunity to be picked up by a major fashion or advertising firm, Toronto appears as a multicultural capital of extremes. Emerging from the subway onto Bloor Street, he is confronted with the polar realities of luxury in the shape of “Lexuses and BMWs” (16) and, on the other hand, with an army of bums “gumming for change” (16). He feels trapped in the junction of these binary realities, unable to cross the street because the drivers of luxury cars, “distracted by falling stock prices and cell phones” (16) tend to “ignore streetlights” (16), while one of the bums abuses him, calling him “Nigger” (17) when he politely refuses to give him money. “I can’t escape” (17), Stacey thinks while he waits to cross the street. The scene foregrounds Stacey’s emplacement for the rest of the novel, standing in an in-between space hovering between bare survival and the glamour and glitz of modelling, but also between his acculturation as a white Canadian and his racialization as black, and between his middle-class status and that of the destitute.

In Toronto, Stacey drifts between the fashion shows and a number of other public and private heterotopian spaces such as the basketball court, night clubs, ethnic diners, the Caribana Festival, a fashion workshop, and the annual Wines of the World trade show, all of which fit the definition of *heterochronisms* due to their suspension of traditional time-coordinates (Foucault, “Of Other Spaces” 7). This break with traditional time takes two opposing representations, according to Foucault. On the one hand, there are heterochronies of indefinitely accumulating time, such as museums and libraries, the result of a “will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes” (7). Following Foucault, the fashion district, which Stacey compares to a museum, is a product of modernity as it constitutes “a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages” (“Of Other Spaces” 7). From Stacey’s perception, the fashion district appears as a heterochrony conflating Canada’s colonial past as the site of fur trading posts for Western consumerism with a present of commodified models: “Walking through that neighbourhood is like strolling through a museum exhibit of an old trading post: ancient warehouses storing pelts of animals long extinct, stores with racks of petrified furs in the windows. Then I arrive at

the audition—a warehouse packed with petrified models” (140). As a result, Stacey appears entrapped in the historical perpetuation of the processes of objectification, commodification, and consumption.

On the other hand, there are heterotopias that instead of being oriented toward the eternal—like museums and libraries—are rather linked “to time in its most flowing, transitory, precarious aspect, to time in the mode of the festival” (7). Foucault sets the fairground as the epitome of such a heterochrony, and like him, the novel, too, foregrounds the Scarborough Fair as a paradigmatic heterochrony. Fairgrounds, described by Foucault as “marvelous empty emplacements at the outskirts of cities, which fill up, once or twice a year, with stands, displays, heteroclit objects, wrestlers, snakewomen, fortune-tellers” (7), appear as ephemeral spaces for merrymaking, which interrupt the apparent continuity and normality of ordinary everyday space. However, when Stacey gets to the Scarborough fairgrounds, it is an ordinary day, the carnies are “everywhere, putting up tents, assembling booths” (146), and all the magic and suspension of disbelief are deferred until the following day, when the fair opens. For Stacey, too, it is a working day. He is first photographed in a roller coaster carriage where the models pretend to be “traveling incredibly fast while [they] remain stationary” (151). Later on the photographer will digitally blur the background to give the impression of speed. This “heterotopia of illusion” which is the cart with the models within another “heterotopia of illusion”—the fair—is further enhanced by the feelings of fear and ennui experienced by the models while up in the rickety roller coaster. The scene is a *simulacrum* reflecting a society that pretends to be happy in the face of existential ennui. The mirroring of society becomes even more revealing when the photographer decides to recreate a circus scene, with the models as lion tamers. However, when Stacey—the only non-white model—puts on his bathing suit exposing his skin and all his chest hair (a symbol of his masculinity), the photographer decides to transform him into “The Beast,” as the caption under the ensuing published picture announces, thus making explicit society’s historical, though apparently subdued racism (cf. Fanon, *Black Skin* 170). Through the exaltation of Stacey’s difference, the heterotopias created at the Scarborough Fair effectively work to exclude him from the modeling business. Utterly humiliated, he thinks, “Because of the Beast, Toronto’s fashionables are looking and laughing. Who’s going to hire a beast to launch their new lines? This is not the way I drew it up. What are my choices? . . . My window of opportunity is being sealed” (158). Thus, Stacey’s

transformation into the beast reveals the racism underlying the celebration of plurality and ethnic and racial diversity.

However, as Marco Cenzatti puts it, “power, in Foucault’s words, also ‘percolates upward’ and thus the imposition of deviance (subjugation), with its rules, spaces and times, is countered by the making of self-identity (subjectification) by the ‘deviant’ groups who re-code these other spaces with their own informal and often invisible meanings, rules and times” (77). Stacey senses in his buddies’ performance of blackness a certain empowerment that he wishes for himself. However, on the edge of the black and the white worlds, he is not able to identify completely with his black mates, nor is he accepted by them as a *brother*. Involved in the strenuous game of disidentification with whiteness, he wishes to be able to counter-identify as black, but has to struggle with the fact that, “[m]y negritude is invisible to everyone but myself” (172).

Art and Photography as Mirror

Stacey’s racial dilemma is built upon the concept of *artistic creativity*, where art is used for the double purpose of expressing one’s self and for reflecting the world. To Stacey, photography is the ultimate heterotopian space that allows him, on the one hand, to express his perspective of himself and of life around, and on the other, to create an illusion when he poses as a model. Invisible, camouflaged within his mixed-race body, Stacey only feels close to expressing who he really is—a chameleonic figure on whom to project one’s illusions/delusions—when he is photographed on the reflection of everyday objects, “Reflected in the penthouse windows. Reflected in the shiny toaster. Reflected in a large soup spoon. The light bends, I’m Daliesque, melted, like time” (92). Hence, his utopian body is actually a “phantom that only appears in the mirage of the mirror, and then only in fragmentary fashion” (Foucault, “Utopian” 231). Although as a model, Stacey wishes to “show some personality, tell the camera who I really am, establish an identity” (92), he is usually “condemned to explore and exploit sex and vanity, everything that’s most narcissistic, superficial and unsavory” (168), thereby not exerting control but being controlled by the gaze of others, or as a friend photographer puts it, “by the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” (92). By quoting Hamlet at the moment when the Shakespearian character is considering suicide, the novel points to Stacey’s tragic plight, foregrounding death as the ultimate site for his utopian body once the mirror—his alternative heterotopia—only produces the erasure of his self by denying control over his own life.

The Panopticon

Seeing, but above all, being seen is the theme running through all Stacey's experiences. His feeling of imprisonment is easily understood if we read his total exposure to the pheneticizing gaze through Foucault's discussion of the panopticon effect. Like the panopticon, race difference induces "a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" by never letting the profiled person know "whether he is being looked at at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so" (Foucault, "Discipline" 201). Consequently, both the inmate and the racialized subject, aware of the possibility of being constantly under surveillance, are led to modify their behaviour to either conform to or subvert their watcher's expectations. In Foucault's parlance, all the mechanisms of power "are disposed around the abnormal individual, to brand him and to alter him" (199) with the objective to make him fit smoothly back into a highly hierarchically segmented society. Before Foucault, black intellectuals such as Du Bois, Césaire, and Fanon had theorized about the panopticon effect on the racialized black individual, noting that he/she is fixed to stereotypes by white definition, which leads, first, to double consciousness—"this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (Du Bois 2)—and, secondly, to accepting the objectification of oneself—"One day, completely dislocated, unable to be abroad with the other, the white man, who unmercifully imprisoned me, I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object" (Fanon, *Black Skin* 112). Similarly, Stacey allows himself to be observed, singled out, and altered by the pheneticizing gaze that commodifies him.

This is most apparent when Stacey is videotaped at an audition to choose the next season's model for Kameleon Jeans. Isolated in a dark room, facing a video camera, Stacey is asked to talk about himself. The physical conditions he finds himself in recall those of the inmate in the panopticon, allowing for the obvious differences between the inmate's physical incarceration and Stacey's professional option to be the object of a commodifying gaze: "The klieg lights in front of me are blinding. I have no idea if the video camera has even started recording my pitch. A man in a short pink sweater told me to begin talking once the little red light went on, and to stop when it went off, but I don't see a red light of any kind. I'm alone in the room. What to do but keep going?" (143). Unable to decide whether he is being watched or not, Stacey continues playing his assigned role. After talking for a while, he sees

from the corner of his eye the light indicating the camera is recording, but he notices, “when I try to peer at it directly, it disappears” (144), again denying him the possibility to relax and be himself off the record. Stacey finds himself totally exposed: “I wasn’t ready to talk about me” (144), he confesses while he starts taking off his clothes and revealing not just his minor and intimate bodily flaws but also his psychological vulnerability. Feeling totally powerless and controlled by the supposed gaze behind the camcorder, Stacey outspokenly expresses his disidentification when he gets angry and rebels by rejecting all the clichés about black maleness he is made to conform to: “I don’t play basketball. I hate rap music . . . and I pretend I like to talk to cameras. To tell you the truth, I hate talking to cameras, especially when there’s no one behind them” (145). All of a sudden, he does not care about the job any more, and vents his fury and frustration against the camera, only to find himself finally trapped by it. Unexpectedly, his challenging attitude in this moment of utter exposure and vulnerability is exactly what the fashion firm is looking for and he is chosen as the new Kameleon Man.

By reacting against the oppressing gaze of the camera or of the unidentified/absent observer behind it, Stacey inadvertently turns into the constructed (invented) punk, “hip, sophisticated, ultra-urbane” (Morrison 52) and racially ambiguous figure he is expected to perform or be, thus appealing to adolescents of all nationalities who will buy Kameleon jeans and imitate his defiant urban attitude. His disidentification with both whiteness and blackness is co-opted anew by the mercantile system in which he chose to try out his dreams of success, allowing for the panopticon mechanism to be definitely installed in his life when he yields to Kameleon’s conditions and agrees to perform an assigned ambiguous identity which differs from his authentic one in that he is made to hide or suppress his black component.

Stacey’s eventual rise in the modeling industry is intrinsically linked to the evolution of racialization in the West at the end of the twentieth century, from the celebration of racial difference to the enhancement of racial sameness, of a *new ethnicity* in which “individuals who, in some way or other, represent all races in one are held up as ideals . . . [in] an attempt to erase the political significance of race” (Lury 163). Stacey’s agent Dat Win makes this explicit when he explains: “A couple of years ago everyone was caught up celebrating difference, the exotic. The blacker the better” (204). Now, however,

[t]hings are different. We’re done with the idea of legitimacy, pureness. The essential African, the essential Asian. All of that’s done. Our ideas about race are changing. Gradually the world is swallowing the idea. That we’re all the same.

And I don't mean that we're all the same inside. One day, we'll all be the same outside. If we stir the pot long enough, you're what's left at the bottom. Kameleon isn't just about jeans anymore, it's about us. It's about humanity. It's about the net result, and you're it. (204)

Stacey's wish to succeed and be accepted, and his experience of belonging neither in the white nor in the black worlds—"you can't have the best of both worlds when you belong to neither" (169)—problematically leads him to accept Dat Win's terms—"You want me to say I'm not black?" (204)—even when he had previously longed to belong with his black pals. Hence, by agreeing to downplay his blackness in favour of the indeterminacy of his phenopolysemic looks, he becomes complicit with multiracialism's anti-blackness, somehow confirming Fanon's branding of the mixed race black as "a ready *collaborateur* with white supremacy" (Clarke, "Canadian Biraciality" 213). Stacey himself recognizes his mistake at the end when he says, "[m]y punishment is hereditary. I belong to a half-race of traitors," and decides to change: "I've learned my lesson" (274). At this point in the novel, Stacey travels to Germany, his white grandfather's homeland, where he expects to officially become the new Kameleon Man. Again, however, his body is torn away from its proper space of social recognition and acceptance—to paraphrase Foucault ("Utopian" 232)—and projected into the space of the marginal outlaw when he is slashed on the face after a skirmish with American Marines. Because, instead of being considered a "mark of distinction" (220)—the symbol of one's manliness—Stacey's scarred face threatens to put an end to his career just as it is about to take off, he agrees to smuggle drugs into Spain so that he can pay for the plastic surgery needed to fix his now imperfect face. Stacey Schmidt, the gentrified Carlton College student of his Nepean days, readily becomes in Germany a black thug cliché. Paradoxically, however, this happens when he has just been led to eschew his incipient adherence to blackness. Trapped in this nonbeing zone, his circumstances worsen in a train bound for Spain when the drug-filled bag he has concealed in his rectum breaks and, unable to deliver it to his contact person, he becomes sick and paranoid, thinking that the drug dealers are after him to kill him. From then on, feeling constantly observed and threatened, he starts a descent into hell which, according to Fanon, could nevertheless be his chance to transcend the polarities of racialization that imprison him, and be reborn: "There is a zone of nonbeing, an extraordinary sterile and arid region, an utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born. In most cases, the black man lacks the advantage of

being able to accomplish this descent into a real hell” (*Black Skin* 8). Yet, the protagonist may be better suited to transcend racial objectification than Fanon’s black counterparts due to his mixed race condition. The answer to Stacey’s ontological question seems to lie in adopting an uncompromising, albeit engaged, attitude from his embattled position as a mixed race subject, to enact a forthright disidentificatory subjectivity—rather than his previous devious one—that may situate him in a position to work on, within, and against the cultural form that imprisons him, to paraphrase Pêcheux.

Unsurprisingly, the train appears at this point as another classic heterotopian space, a nowhere place, a “heterotopia without geographical markers” (Foucault, “Of Other Spaces” 3) that is at the same time self-enclosed and moving through geography and across national borders, and where history conflates in the shape of the multifarious stories, places, and times which are the baggage of its mobile passengers. The spatial suspension and indeterminacy starts already in the train station, where Stacey cannot find his departure gate, and after consulting a map that tells him “YOU ARE HERE,” he thinks to himself, “Only I can’t tell where that is” (226). His spatial disorientation recalls Northrop Frye’s famous question “Where is here?” (338) and suggests a parallel between the nation’s grappling with its colonial legacy in the Western context and Stacey’s hybridity. Thus, Stacey’s unspecified or ambiguous racial status appears as a colonized and dislocated site. In the train, Stacey turns into a clandestine, marginal character linked to the Western notion of blackness when he finds out that his Eurorail pass is no longer valid and he is compelled to hide in the washroom for most of the trip to avoid the conductor, losing track of where he is at any given moment, losing also his criminal merchandise, and inadvertently going past his destination, Barcelona. Interestingly, Stacey’s experience in the train echoes Fanon’s when the latter becomes aware of his body not just “in the third person but in a triple person. In the train I was given not one but two, three places. I had already stopped being amused. It was not that I was finding febrile coordinates in the world. I existed triply: I occupied space. I moved toward the other . . . and the evanescent other, hostile but not opaque, transparent, not there, disappeared. Nausea . . .” (*Black Skin* 112). Like Fanon’s, Stacey’s dislocation leads him to make himself “an object” (112), and to be physically nauseated by the drugs he is carrying inside.

Still feeling under constant surveillance, Stacey will confusedly struggle to regain control over his own image and his soul. The myth of the soul is, according to Foucault, the most important of all the utopias of effacement of

the body created by adults, lodged in the body but able to escape in order to see out of the windows of the eyes, “to dream when I sleep, to survive when I die—It is beautiful, my soul: It is pure, it is white” (“Utopian” 230). It is not surprising then that “eyes” become an important trope in the novel. While stranded in Alicante, Stacey decides to earn some money by posing as a naked model for an art class. The lesson is about eyes—though, ironically, he is still required to pose naked. While the instructor reminds his students that “*Los ojos son el espejo del alma*” (248)—The eyes are the mirror of the soul—Stacey glimpses through a mirror on the wall at the drawings of his body the students are working on, and, in an ontological experience of platonic overtones, discovers himself doubly removed from his self-image as, first, the students’ subjectivity and then the mirror, totally distort and transform him.

At this point a new heterotopia is created, which both erases the present time as it incorporates a long shared history of colonization of black subjectivity and commodification of the black body. When an African American woman called B (an initial that could stand both for an ontological command to *be*, and for the embodiment of a black Beatrice finally guiding Stacey through Heaven in his particular Divine Comedy) enters the room, he wishes he could paint himself painting her (249), and when their eyes finally meet, “there passes between [them] that unmistakable flash that happens between two black people who find themselves outnumbered. The invisible nod, acknowledgement of the past” (249). After this spontaneous connection, Stacey feels that this woman artist can really see his true self, and not the distortion of self he performs compelled by panopticism. His impression is confirmed at the end of the novel, when B uses Stacey’s photographs in her installation to create a tableau depicting a beach scene, where everybody is on the verge of a catastrophe. Stacey discovers himself there as an existential figure pointlessly sweeping the sand on the beach. Through the heterotopian mirror of his own photographs, B’s installation reveals in a way that cannot be obviated the negative result for the mixed race subject who underplays the ongoing impact of race in the construction of his/her own subjectivity. As Wayde Compton puts it, to concede that “‘race doesn’t matter,’ . . . will leave you absolutely powerless and abject” (“Epic Moment” 135), something that Stacey himself had eloquently pointed out at the beginning of the novel:

[W]e’re shades. Insubstantial images of something real. Reduced almost to nothing. The only thing worse than living in that black-and-white world is living in a grey one, in which *race doesn’t matter except to everyone else*. In which

nothing's black or white and everything's both. The problem with living in grey is that one does not grow natural defences. Growing up grey is like growing up weightless on the moon. To return to earth is to be crushed by the weight of one's own skin. (49) (Emphasis added)

Although Stacey initially panics and runs away from the exhibition, feeling indeed crushed and torn apart by his biracialized condition, he will try to be saved from becoming a ghost, an individual “without an anchor, without a horizon, colorless, stateless, rootless” (Fanon, *Wretched* 218) by following Fanon's advice and turning “backward toward his unknown roots” (218). Embracing his blackness and its historicity implies becoming also thoroughly aware of his role as what Morrison has termed an *Africanist persona*, an interpreter of society whose very racialized body serves as a reflection of that society's fears, anxieties, and desires (Morrison 17). This happens while he contemplates the use B has made of his photographs. In this epiphanic moment, Stacey comes to understand himself as a sacrificial figure, very much like his former girlfriend Melody when she posed for him: “the sole purpose of my life is to make a statement about life itself. I'm the real exhibit here. Temporary art that falls apart before your eyes. I'm both the genius and the masterpiece” (274).

Stacey's Christ-like role emerges in the context of another heterotopia of mythical and historical dimensions that sets Granada as a zone of ethnic and cultural confluence, both a real and unreal space where the architecture becomes the repository of history and ethnicity. While Stacey looks down on the city of Granada from the Sierra Nevada, he establishes a parallel between his vanished “distant cousins, the Moors” (273) and himself, implying that just as Europe profited from the civilization created in Al-Andalus by the Moors, his racialized persona is being appropriated and exploited as a means of ontological meditation on contemporary culture and society.

However, counter-identification, or wanting to embrace a strategic black essentialism, only leads Stacey to the reversal of the established order and to renounce “the present and the future in the name of a mystical past” (Fanon, *Black Skin* 14). When he wakes up from a sunstroke convalescence after running away from B's installation and he finds B at his bedside, he eschews the invisibility provided by camouflage and his complicity with the establishment. In Du Bois's words, “[H]e began to have a dim feeling that, to attain his place in the world, he must be himself, and not another” (5), which is exactly the advice he was given before leaving Nepean (*Kameleon* 16). This implies the rejection of willingly lending oneself to be transformed

by the pheneticizing gaze. Determined to “learn to see the world through compound eyes” (281), like butterflies after their metamorphosis, Stacey faces the challenge of revaluing his hybridity and its inherent “synchronous foreignicity” (Wah 83), hence embracing disidentification—“the ability to remain within an ambivalence without succumbing to the pull of any single culture” (83)—as his key strategy for the assertion of his own subjectivity. Moreover, because disidentification “tries to transform a cultural logic from within, always laboring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of local or everyday struggles of resistance” (Muñoz 11-12), it holds the promise of “a more democratizing affirmation of internal difference” (Butler 219).

This reading, therefore, differs considerably from George Elliott Clarke’s conclusion that “*Kameleon Man* allows a stereotypical black salvation,” through which Stacey emerges as a “decidedly *black* artist” and “an unambiguous heterosexual” (“Perils”). While agreeing with Clarke that, “[a]lthough he reinforces his heterosexuality by aligning military and fashion-industry metaphors, Stacey is as apparently a ‘chameleon’ sexually as he is racially” (“Perils”), my reading of the novel’s ending as a reaffirmation of the in-betweenness attached to Stacey’s hybridity runs contrary to Clarke’s conclusion that “No in-between status—racial or sexual—is permitted” (“Perils”). Actually, Stacey is last found in “what appears as an evening gown” (Brunhuber 277) while he lies down in bed, convalescent after a sun stroke, and his enumeration of all the instances in which he has cross-dressed does not help to disambiguate his sexual orientation. The sight of a weak, sick man lying in bed in an evening gown does not accord with that of a Black Panther or a Malcolm X. On the contrary, I contend that Stacey’s resolution to learn to see through compound eyes indicates his rejection of essentialisms, including a black nationalism that just reinforces white Eurocentric essentialism by reversing it.

The novel’s open ending has Stacey imagining himself taking a 360 degree photograph encompassing B, the window, the mountains, the greenhouse, but also himself: “That’s it. The first shot. I raise the loupe, hold the picture to the light, examine it from all angles. This single photograph almost makes up for everything that went into the taking” (282). Stacey’s metaphor of inclusion and self-visibility based on his imagined use of a wide-angle lens indicates that he will keep his position on the hyphen as a comprehensive site of resistance. It thereby anticipates his engagement with a poetics of opposition based on what Fred Wah calls “the poetics of the ‘trans-’” (90),

which, by situating the mixed race subject “in an aperture . . . offers a greater depth of field, a wide-angle lens that permits distortion at the edges” (91), allowing perhaps for what Daniel Coleman calls a *wry civility* (*White Civility* 42), or an ethical stance that is aware and critical of the historical project of normative white civility in Canada. Thus, positioned on the edges of a forthright disidentification that shuns his former attraction to the exploitation of pheneticizing, Stacey’s new control over his fluid subjectivity gestures toward self-assertion. The result of his journey through the various multilayered heterotopian spaces he briefly inhabits serves to further magnify the mirroring effect produced by his heterotopic mixed-race body, which tests (Canadian) multiculturalism, but also the Western constructions of space and race as they intersect with history. “For a beginning” Stacey thinks, “it’s not a bad start” (282).

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