

Uncanny Orania: White Complicity as the Abject of the Discursive Construction of Racism

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Abstract : This paper builds on a reflection on an autobiographical experience of uncanniness during fieldwork in the white Afrikaner settlement Orania in South Africa. Drawing on Kristeva's theory of abjection to establish a theory of Whiteness which is based on boundary threats, it is argued that the uncanny experience as the emergence of the abject points to a moment of crisis of the author's Whiteness. The emanating abject directs the author to her closeness or convergence with Orania's inhabitants, that is a reciprocity based on mutual Whiteness. The experienced confluence appeals to the author's White complicity to racism. With recourse to Butler's theory of subjectivation, the abject, White complicity, inhabits both the outside of a discourse on racism, and of the 'self', as 'I' establish myself in relation to discourse. In this view, the qualities of the experienced abject are linked to the abject of discourse on racism, or, in other words, its frames of intelligibility. It then becomes clear, that discourse on (overt) racism functions as a necessary counter-image through which White morality is established instead of questioned, because here, by White reasoning, the abject of complicity to racism is successfully repressed, curbed, as completely impossible in the binary construction. Hence, such discourse endangers a preservation of racism in its pre-discursive and structural forms as long as its critique does not encompass its own location and performance in discourse. Discourse on overt racism is indispensable to White ignorance as it covers underlying racism and pre-empts further critique. This understanding directs us towards a form of critique which does necessitate self-reflection, uncertainty, and vigilance, which will be referred to as a discourse of relationality. Such a discourse diverges from the presumption of a detached author as a point of reference, and instead departs from attachment, dependence, mutuality and embraces the visceral as a resource of knowledge of relationality. A discourse of relationality points to another possibility of White engagement with Whiteness and racism and further promotes a conception of responsibility, which allows for and highlights dispossession and relationality in contrast to single agency and guilt.

Keywords : abjection, discourse, relationality, the visceral, whiteness

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