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# Skin of memory

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## Abstract

The focus of this thesis is *Untitled 2018*, a multi layered black and white photographic collage, pieced together with split paper pins and mounted on aluminium by the Norwegian contemporary artist Frida Orupabo (1986-). By focusing on *skin* itself and using Frantz Fanon's concepts of "epidermalization of inferiority" and the "racial epidermal schema", I analyse *Untitled 2018* using trauma theory and affect theory. I also engage with the work of scholars who have discussed what may be termed the "phenomenology of race", such as George Yancy and Sarah Ahmed to approach the question: "In what way can we understand the fragmented body of *Untitled 2018*?"

In my analysis of *Untitled 2018*, art historian Jill Bennett's concept of "empathic vision" is central. Empathy as a mode of seeing, explains Bennett, combines both affective and intellectual processes as we engage with the art object beyond the iconographical or symbolical interpretation. The concept of "sense memory", a form of bodily memory that exists outside ordinary memory and registers as an affective imprint of a traumatic event, that was defined by Charlotte Delbo, is also central to my discussion. In addition I have discussed *Untitled 2018* in relation to the concept of "postmemory" as formulated by Professor Marianne Hirsch. Postmemory, argues Hirsch, "describes the relationship that the "generation after" bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before."

In this thesis I have also discussed in which ways methods of display can influence perception of the art work.

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# 1 Introduction

We encounter the world in our bodies, and through our bodies' most exquisitely sensitive sense, our skins, we take the world into ourselves. We have made and remade a world where nearly every experience is shaded and shaped by the color of those bodies, the tones of those skins.<sup>1</sup>

Born to a Norwegian mother and Nigerian father, Frida Orupabo's (1986-) background bridges the very power structures she engages with in her work. Situated in-between, simultaneously within and against the power and knowledge networks that produce the division of "north" and "south" she works, in a Foucauldian sense, from a place of possibility and resistance. In his seminal work *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, Roland Barthes claims that the transformation of light into an image produces "a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed."<sup>2</sup> Skin, he is implying, is a place of contact and interconnectedness. "Sharing skin" also implies a shared experience. However, as political theorist and psychiatrist Frantz Fanon argues, skin in a racialized society is given differentiating meaning and value depending on its colour.<sup>3</sup> In his book *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon discusses how the white racializing gaze compels the Black subject to internalize the eurocentric image of the Black man and how he then comes to experience his being through others.<sup>4</sup> The internalization of the white gaze, argues Fanon, transforms the black subject's bodily existence and profoundly alters and limits the Black subjects' being-in-the-world.<sup>5</sup> Professor of philosophy George Yancy argues that there are forms of trauma that are specific to Black people in an anti-Black society.<sup>6</sup> Following Fanon's description of the phenomenology of blackness, Yancy asserts that the white racializing gaze is a source of perpetual violence, a "racialized regulatory surveillance" that occludes the Black subjects' lived mobility and produces what Yancy calls "a phenomenology of traumatization".<sup>7</sup>

In her book *After-affects/After-Images* art historian Griselda Pollock writes that the affective quality of art can create "experiential sites of encounter" that may put the viewer into contact

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<sup>1</sup> Lazzar, *Beyond the Whiteness of Whiteness: memoir of a White mother of Black sons*, 94.

<sup>2</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida -Reflections on photography*, 81.

<sup>3</sup> Fanon, *Black skin, white masks*.

<sup>4</sup> Fanon, *Black skin, white masks*, 82-83.

<sup>5</sup> Fanon, *Black skin, white masks*, 82-84.

<sup>6</sup> Yancy, *Black embodied wounds and the traumatic impact of the white imaginary*, 147.

<sup>7</sup> Yancy, *Black embodied wounds*, 147.

with the non-cognitive affective experience of trauma.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, in her book *Empathic vision: Affect, trauma and contemporary art*, art historian Jill Bennett builds on the work of Gilles Deleuze and argues that by engaging affectively with work that exists in a relationship with trauma, one might produce a new form of thought that arises *from the body* to produce a «seeing truth». When set against a backdrop of cultural knowledge, this can thrust the viewer toward a deeper awareness of different modes of inhabitation and about “the nature of relationships to others and (...) the political nature of violence and pain”. This in turn may allow the work to “fold back into the world”.<sup>9</sup>

The focus of this thesis is *Untitled 2018* (Fig 1), a multi layered black and white photographic collage, pieced together using split paper pins and mounted on aluminium by Frida Orupabo. By focusing on *skin* itself and using Frantz Fanon’s concepts of “epidermalization of inferiority” and “the racial epidermal schema”, I will be analysing the work using trauma theory, affect theory, and memory studies. I will also engage with the work of scholars who have discussed what can be termed the “phenomenology of race” to approach the question: “In what way can we understand the fragmented body of *Untitled 2018*?”

In my analysis of *Untitled 2018*, Jill Bennett’s concept of “empathic vision” will be central. Empathy as a mode of seeing, explains Bennett, combines both affective and intellectual processes as we engage with the art object beyond the iconographical or symbolical interpretation.<sup>10</sup> By approaching the work with empathic vision the encounter with sensation in the artwork may, according to Bennett, engender other forms of knowing that does not seek to seize, that is, preserving alterity even as it knows.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Pollock, *After-affects/ after-images: Trauma and aesthetic transformation in the virtual feminist museum*, 9.

<sup>9</sup> Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Art, trauma and contemporary art*, 12; Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 54-56.

<sup>10</sup> Bennett, *Empathic vision*, 21; Bennett, *Empathic vision*, 8-10.

<sup>11</sup> Bennett, *Empathic vision*, 8-10.

## 1.1 Purpose

The main question in this thesis is: In what way can we understand the fragmented body of *Untitled 2018*? To answer my research question, focus will be put on the concept of “epidermalization of inferiority” and “the racial epidermal schema” as described by Frantz Fanon.<sup>12</sup> I will also draw upon the work of George Yancy and feminist writer and independent scholar Sarah Ahmed who have elaborated on Fanon’s work and discussed what can be termed as a “phenomenology of race”.

The concept of “sense memory”, a form of bodily memory that exists outside ordinary memory and registers as an affective imprint of a traumatic event, that was defined by Charlotte Delbo, will also be central in my discussion.<sup>13</sup> In addition I will discuss *Untitled 2018* in relation to the concept of “postmemory” as formulated by Professor of comparative literature and gender studies Marianne Hirsch. Postmemory, argues Hirsch, “...describes the relationship that the “generation after” bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before.”<sup>14</sup>

I will also discuss in which way methods of display can influence perception.

## 1.2. Theoretical approach

Epistemologically the point of departure is hermeneutic-phenomenological. Theoretically, my approach is multifarious, I will use trauma theory, affect theory and the work of Frantz Fanon and other philosophers who have discussed what can be termed the “phenomenology of race” such as George Yancy and Sarah Ahmed.

In my analysis of *Untitled 2018* art historians Jill Bennett and Griselda Pollock’s work on trauma and its cultural representations will be important. The work of Professor Marianne Hirsch and Professor of literature and trauma theorist Cathy Caruth will also be central in my discussion. Furthermore, in my approach to *Untitled 2018* Jill Bennett’s concept of “empathetic vision” will be central in my analysis. Empathetic vision combines affect and cognition as analytical tools.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Fanon, *Black skin, white masks*.

<sup>13</sup> Bennett, “The aesthetics of sense memory: Theorizing Trauma through the Visual Arts”, 84.

<sup>14</sup> Hirsch, *The generation of postmemory: writing, and visual culture after the Holocaust* 5.

<sup>15</sup> Bennett, *Empathic vision*, 21.

### **1.21 Thesis structure**

The thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter consists of an introduction, an outline of the theoretical framework and an introduction of the artist and the material. The first section of chapter two outlines briefly the emergence of trauma studies. I then go on to examine Frantz Fanon's concepts of the epidermalization of inferiority and the racial epidermal schema, before examining key aspects of traumatic memory; traumatic temporality, the missed moment, the belated return and Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory" that describes a form of transmission of trauma across generations. The remaining part of chapter two examines the relation between trauma and how it can be seen as being expressed in art, as well as "empathy" or "empathic vision" as a way of engaging with art that exists in a relationship to trauma. The third chapter of this thesis is devoted to an analysis of *Untitled 2018*. The first section of the chapter is a description of the work and a discussion of how different stagings of the work impacts the viewers affective experience of it. This will be followed by four "themed" sections each pertaining to a different aspect of the work: The gap as sense memory, the gap as Otherness of Self, the gap as the phenomenology of traumatization, and the gap as postmemory. This will be followed by a concluding remark.

### **1.22 Scope**

Given the relatively limited scope of this thesis (30stp) I will focus my discussion on traumatic memory. Although I will describe central characteristics related to traumatic memory, my aim is not to engage in a deep analysis of the underlying mechanisms of traumatic memory. A criterion has been that the theory should illuminate and open up the work, not the other way around.

Elements of the work that could have been discussed in terms of gender and intersectionality have not been included, but would be important aspects of the work to address in the future. Furthermore, the artist's biography and her experiences with racism, although creating an important backdrop for these works, will not be discussed in the analysis.

### **1.23 Existing research**

To date there has been little research on Frida Orupabo's work, however her work was included in "Arts Council Norway's" research project *Kunst som deling, delingens kunst* by



Merete Jonvik, Eivind Røssaak, Hanne Hammer Stien og Arnhild Sunnanå. Their findings were published in a book by the same name in 2020. The focus of their research was primarily on what the authors term “instagrammatics” which Røssaak describes as being about “[H]ow one medium (Instagram) affects another (in this case art and the gallery space)”.<sup>16</sup> Orupabo’s work in an art historical context was also briefly discussed.<sup>17</sup>

Frida Orupabo’s work has also received widespread attention in the press. Although it has not been discussed as directly relating to trauma, it has been discussed as engaging with “colonial violence”. In an article on Artsy, art critic Harley Hong writes that “Orupabo’s portraits of disembodied, anonymous Black women demonstrate the violent and violating legacy of colonialism.”<sup>18</sup>

### 1.31 The artist: Frida Orupabo (1986-)

Born to a Norwegian mother and Nigerian father, the self-taught contemporary artist and sociologist Frida Orupabo was raised in Sarpsborg, Norway and now lives and works in Oslo. Orupabo started working on digital collages in 2006.<sup>19</sup> Initially posting her work on Facebook, she moved her artistic practice to the social media platform Instagram where she began posting in 2013.<sup>20</sup> In 2016 American artist and filmmaker Arthur Jafa discovered Orupabo’s Instagram feed @nemiepeba that consisted mostly of found colonial and cultural images consistently black and white. At the time Orupabo worked as a social worker at a center helping sex workers and victims of trafficking in Oslo.<sup>21</sup> Jafa encouraged Orupabo to expand her practice to physical works, leading her to start making multi layered photographic collages that have been referred to as “paper dolls” by critics.<sup>22</sup> The images used in these collages are from the same sources as those of her instagram feed. Orupabo has commented that she “finds” most of her images in colonial archives and combines these images with contemporary archival material from sources such as youtube, film and music videos.<sup>23</sup> In an article for *Kunstkritikk* one of the researchers behind *Kunst som deling, delingens kunst*

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<sup>16</sup> Røssaak, Pre-Cinema, Post-Internet, *Kunstkritikk.no*. accessed 9 June 2021.

<https://kunstkritikk.com/pre-cinema-post-internet/>

<sup>17</sup> Jonvik, Røssaak, Hammer Stien, Sunnanå, *Kunst som deling og delingens kunst*, 47.

<sup>18</sup> Hong, “The newly emerging, Frida Orupabo - The artsy vanguard 2020”, *Artsy.com*, 2 June 2021, <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-artsy-vanguard-2020-frida-orupabo>

<sup>19</sup> Jonvik et al, *Kunst som deling, delingens kunst*, 42.

<sup>20</sup> Jonvik et al, *Kunst som deling, delingens kunst*, 42.

<sup>21</sup> Ramm, “I kunstverden er jeg en nobody”.

<sup>22</sup> Jonvik et al, *Kunst som deling, delingens kunst*, 53-54.

<sup>23</sup> Stevenson, “Frida Orupabo Hours After”

Eivind Røssaak writes: “The images presented in the gallery are not enlarged versions of those found on her Instagram profile; they are new collages created from the same global reservoir of postcolonial documents.”<sup>24</sup>

In 2017 Jafa invited Orupabo to exhibit her work at his solo exhibition at the Serpentine Galleries called “A Series of Utterly Improbable, Yet Extraordinary Renditions”. Serpentine Gallery states on their webpage that; “the title of the exhibition relates to the sense of *absence* that Jafa observes as *haunting* Black life.”<sup>25</sup> Jafa remarked in the pamphlet produced in relation to a later exhibition that he thought of Orupabo’s work as “limbic expressway to our newly mediated black sociality”.<sup>26</sup> The exhibition in London was quickly followed by an exhibition at the Julia Stoschek Collection in Berlin where she was also invited by Jafa.<sup>27</sup>

The following year Orupabo presented her first solo exhibitions at Gavin Brown’s Enterprise in New York and at the Nordenhake gallery in Stockholm. In March 2019, Orupabo’s work earned the artist her first institutional exhibition in Norway, “Medicine for a Nightmare” at Kunstneres Hus in Oslo. The exhibition included Orupabo’s black and white paper collages juxtaposed with images from her Instagram feed that were mounted on nine wall-mounted tablets.<sup>28</sup> These 9 tablets were subsequently bought by the Norwegian National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design.<sup>29</sup> Orupabo also invited Jafa to show his acclaimed 7-minute-long video “Love Is the Message, the Message Is Death” (2016) at Kunstneres Hus, alongside her work. Later that year Orupabo was invited to the Venice Biennale 58th central exhibition “May You Live in Interesting Times” curated by Ralph Rugoff and in the fall of that same year she presented a solo exhibition “The Mouth and the Truth” at Portikus. Since then, her work has been featured in numerous exhibitions and solo shows. Recently, Orupabo was shortlisted for the 6th edition of the Future Generation Art Prize, and will consequently exhibit her work at Pinchuk Art Centre in Kiev in 2021 and in Venice in 2022. She will also participate in the 34th São Paulo Bienal and present a solo show at Kunsthall Trondheim in 2021. Orupabo’s work is included in the collection of the National museum and Astrup Fearnley museum in Norway, in addition to a number of other international collections.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Røssaak, Pre-Cinema, Post-Internet, *Kunstkritikk.no*, accessed 9 June 2021  
<https://kunstkruttikk.com/pre-cinema-post-internet/>

<sup>25</sup> Serpentine Galleries, “Arthur Jafa: A Series of Utterly Improbable, Yet Extraordinary Renditions”.

<sup>26</sup> Kunstneres Hus, “Frida Orupabo and Arthur Jafa – Medicine for a Nightmare”.

<sup>27</sup> Jonvik et al, *Kunst som deling, delingens kunst*, 54.

<sup>28</sup> Jonvik et al, *Kunst som deling, delingens kunst*, 54.

<sup>29</sup> Nasjonalmuseet, “Nye innkjøp av kvinnelige kunstnere”.

<sup>30</sup> Nordenhake, “Frida Orupabo, CV”.

Orupabo now employs a range of mediums and practices, including digital and physical collages, film and, most recently, sculpture.<sup>31</sup> However it is her social media presence on Instagram and her physical collage's that have received most attention from critics. Her work is often discussed as relating to themes of race, gender, identity, sexuality, family relations, the gaze and colonial violence. Orupabo herself has also emphasized these themes in interviews.<sup>32</sup> Although trauma has not been a theme discussed directly in relation to Orupabo's work she expressed to me in our talk October 2020 that the topic of trauma in relation to colonial violence and racism "resonated with her", and that the book *Plantation memories* by Grada Kilomba was a book that is important to her. In the book, Kilomba describes racism not only as a restaging of a colonial past, but as a traumatic reality. Everyday acts of racism such as; "...discourse, images (..)gestures, acts and gazes", argues Kilomba, are experienced as violent shocks that suddenly places the Black subject in a colonial scene where one is imprisoned as the subordinate and exotic 'Other.'"<sup>33</sup> Orupabo has in several interviews discussed how racism impacted her as a child. In the D2 article "In the artworld I am a nobody" from March 2018 Orupabo talks about how being seen as different when she grew up was a painful experience that impacted her greatly.<sup>34</sup> Later on she elaborated on this, stating that she grew up with the "feeling of being determined, given an identity that I didn't understand or agree with."<sup>35</sup> She also states that:

...being brought up in Norway in a predominantly white society, in a white family (except for my sister). I felt for a very long time that I was unable to speak. The only thing I had was my eyes and my anger. Anger is a form of resistance. It sends out a message to your whole body that something is wrong – that what is being done towards you is not OK, even when you remain quiet as an oyster.<sup>36</sup>

## 1.32 Material

In this thesis I will be engaging with Frida Orupabo's work *Untitled 2018* (Fig 1). *Untitled 2018* is a photographic multilayered paper collage, held together with paper pins and mounted on aluminium (75 x 134 cm / 29 1/2 x 52 3/4 inches).<sup>37</sup> The work was first exhibited

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<sup>31</sup> Stevenson gallery, "Frida Orupabo".

<sup>32</sup> Moloi, "Frida Orupabo Asks; 'Who Belongs Where and Why?'" , Bubblegum Club, 10 May 2021

<sup>33</sup> Kilomba, *Plantation memories: Episodes of everyday racism*, 42; Kilomba, *Plantation memories*, 17-22

<sup>34</sup> Ramm, "I kunstverden er jeg en nobody".

<sup>35</sup> Ose, "Frida Orupabo Hours After", 8.

<sup>36</sup> Ose, "Frida Orupabo Hours After", 7.

<sup>37</sup> Note there is a significant size discrepancy in what the Nordenhake gallery and the Norwegian National Museum has registered the collage as being. The NMK has registered the work as being 60 cm x 120 cm x 2 cm, while the Nordenhake gallery states that it is 75 x 134 cm . The size listed above is the one provided by the Nordenhake gallery.

at Frida Orupabo's first institutional exhibition that took place at Kunstneres Hus in Oslo (2019) and was later that same year purchased by the Norwegian national museum. This work is one of 18 works by Orupabo that are named Untitled 2018, but the work is also identified by the Norwegian National Museum as NMK.2019.0054 and by Nordenhaak gallery, the gallery that currently represents Orupabo, as "FO C/17".<sup>38</sup>

## Chapter 2 Theory

### 2.0 The wounding of the mind

Etymologically, trauma derives from the Greek word for "wound".<sup>39</sup> Originally situated in the realm of medicine, trauma throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was thought of as a physical injury. It was not until the late nineteenth century, originating in the anxiety and crisis brought upon by modernity, that the notion of trauma as a "wounding of the mind" was conceptualized.<sup>40</sup> In the early 1990s, trauma studies emerged in the humanities. This new interdisciplinary field was a product of the "ethical turn" and grew out of an attempt to found an "ethical response to human suffering" and its artistic and cultural representation.<sup>41</sup> Trauma theorist and Professor of English Cathy Caruth's monograph "Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History" has had a significant influence on the humanities at large, as well as on art theorists engaged in cultural trauma theory.<sup>42</sup> Cathy Caruth defines trauma as:

..the *response* to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena.<sup>43</sup>

It is thus not the "content" of the event that determines if something constitutes a trauma. Rather, it is the response to an event that was not fully experienced and assimilated as it occurred, but emerges as symptoms after a period of latency to haunt the survivor.<sup>44</sup> These symptoms, writes Caruth, may manifest themselves as isolated, non-verbal, sensory, motor, and emotional fragments that lack the narrative structure that comes with processing.<sup>45</sup> The symptoms described have gone by many names over the past four centuries, but are now

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<sup>38</sup> Email correspondence with Andrea Kroksnes at the Norwegian National museum 13/10-2020 and with Ben Loveless at /the Nordenhake gallery the 27/10-2020

<sup>39</sup> Pollock, *After-affects/ After-images*, 3.

<sup>40</sup> Bond, *Craps, Trauma* (New Critical idiom), 2.

<sup>41</sup> Andermahr, *Decolonizing trauma studies*, 1.

<sup>42</sup> Pollock, "Art, trauma, representation", 15.

<sup>43</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 107. (my emphasis)

<sup>44</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 19; Pollock, *After affects/ after images*, 24.

<sup>45</sup> Visser, "Decolonizing Trauma Theory: Retrospect and Prospects", 8-9.

understood as the effects of "post-traumatic stress disorder" (PTSD).<sup>46</sup>

While PTSD is most commonly understood as a psychiatric condition that haunts the individual, there emerged around 2008 the need to rethink trauma from a postcolonial and global perspective.<sup>47</sup> Following the traditional model of trauma there arose a more pluralistic model of trauma in the early 2000s. Scholars such as Michael Rothberg, Jill Bennet and Stef Craps argue that this individuated, event-based, singular and time-framed definition of trauma has a eurocentric and cultural bias that does not take into account the accumulated, prolonged, repeated, and ongoing suffering of non-western others or minority cultures.<sup>48</sup> Racial trauma and other forms of trauma that are continuously present, posed a challenge to the traditional definition of trauma that defines trauma as originating in an overwhelming event in the past.<sup>49</sup>

The realization that "everyday" microaggressions such as racism can act as traumatic stressors was foreshadowed by political philosopher and psychiatrist Frantz Fanon's critical analysis of the psychological conditions of black subjectivity under colonialism in "Black Skin White masks".<sup>50</sup> Drawing on Fanon's insights professor of English literature at Ghent University and the director of the Cultural Memory Studies Initiative Stef Craps discusses how racial trauma is not the product of an isolated event to argue the need for a more inclusive and culturally sensitive model, that includes individual and collective forms of racially-based trauma that are historically rooted in the global systems of slavery and colonialism.<sup>51</sup> The need for a more inclusive definition includes vicarious or secondary (indirect) trauma; trauma incurred by witnesses or others exposed to the *residue* of traumatic events such as that transmitted across generations.<sup>52</sup> This constitutes a move away from thinking exclusively of trauma as the result of a sudden and singular event in the past, to include vicarious, accumulative and ongoing forms of trauma.<sup>53</sup>

While traumatic experiences can differ in "content" from isolated events such as sudden and extreme events to the accumulative trauma of racial abuse and the indirect trauma affecting

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<sup>46</sup> Caruth, Unclaimed experience, 72-73

<sup>47</sup> Caruth, Unclaimed experience, 72-73

<sup>48</sup> Craps, Postcolonial witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds, 13-16; Andermahr, Decolonizing Trauma Studies: Trauma and Postcolonialism, 2.

<sup>49</sup> Andermahr, Decolonizing Trauma Studies: Trauma and Postcolonialism, 2.

<sup>50</sup> Craps, Postcolonial witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds, 42-43 .

<sup>51</sup> Craps, Postcolonial witnessing: Trauma out of bounds, 16.

<sup>52</sup> Visser, Decolonizing Trauma Theory: Retrospect and Prospects, 11.

<sup>53</sup> Andermahr, "Decolonizing Trauma Studies Trauma and Postcolonialism", 9.

the next generation(s), what remains largely uncontested is the notion of the impact of trauma as “enduring...ultimately unknowable and inexpressible.”<sup>54</sup>

## 2.1 The epidermalization of inferiority

In *Black skin white masks* (1952), Frantz Fanon’s account of colonialism and racism, Fanon draws on the phenomenological existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty to describe his lived experience as a Black man in a white racialized society.<sup>55</sup> Fanon’s book draws on personal narratives and begins and returns repeatedly to an encounter with a white woman and her child on a train, where an act of racism produces within him a fracture that Fanon describes forces him to exist through the alienating presence of the white other. In his description of the encounter, Fanon describes how the white child becomes frightened at the sight of him and cries “Look, a Negro!”, a declaration, writes Fanon, that is akin to a racial slur that has its origin in how the black subject is viewed by white dominant others.<sup>56</sup> Drawing on Sartre’s account of the gaze, Fanon describes how the racilizing gaze “fixes” him and how he becomes “scripted” as the inverse image of the white dominant other where “whiteness”, in the collective unconscious, is seen as a symbol of “purity, of Justice, Truth, Virginity” and “blackness”, contrary to this, is seen as a symbol of; “ugliness, sin, darkness, immorality.”<sup>57</sup> Differentiated through the skin, Fanon describes the violent shock of being placed as other and having these different meanings projected on him as a traumatic intrusion.<sup>58</sup> Professor of Philosophy George Yancy argues:

The importance here is to conceptualize this trauma within the context of a shared *symbolic world*, a world whose meanings are both explicit and implicit, whose meanings can impact and undo us in violent and harrowing ways.<sup>59</sup>

Unable to reconcile the attributes connected to his skin colour with himself, the black subject becomes alienated from himself: A “doubleness” within the psyche is formed, where the black subject comes to see himself through the white gaze and “experience his being through others.”<sup>60</sup> In a sense, what Fanon is telling us is that every act of racism is an act of

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<sup>54</sup> Visser, “Decolonizing Trauma Theory: Retrospect and Prospects”, 14.

<sup>55</sup> Homi Bhabha notes in his foreword to *Black skin, White masks*: “Fanon’s use of the word “man” usually connotes a phenomenological quality of humanness, inclusive of man and woman and, for that very reason, ignores the question of gender difference”.

<sup>56</sup> Fanon, *Black skin white masks*, 84-86.

<sup>57</sup> Fanon, *Black skin white masks*, 139; Fanon, *Black skin, white masks*, 87.

<sup>58</sup> Nielsen, *Foucault, Douglas, Fanon, and Scotus in dialogue*, 77-78.

<sup>59</sup> Yancy, *Black Embodied wounds and the traumatic impact of the white imaginary*, 143.

<sup>60</sup> Fanon, *Black skin, white masks*, 82.

colonization of the mind.<sup>61</sup> Stuart Hall contends that this insight is Fanon's major contribution: The power of the hegemonic culture is manifested not only in its construction of the black person as "other", but in its power; "...to make us see and experience ourselves as Other".<sup>62</sup> Confronted with the painful event of racism, Fanon asserts, the subjugated begins to accept and internalize the mythology the white subject has "woven" out of anecdotes and stories.<sup>63</sup> The internalization of these different perceptions of his race is what Fanon calls "the epidermalization of inferiority".<sup>64</sup> Stripped of his subjectivity, Fanon argues, the Black subject is confined to the mode of objecthood:

On that 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.<sup>65</sup>

Objecthood here is discussed by Fanon not as an ontologically distinct *external category* but as the internal reality of the black subject in a racialized society that forces upon the black subject a third-person consciousness. Reduced to a cultural stereotype "overdetermined from without", rendered a non-being, a thing, Fanon is separated from the community and then again from himself.

## 2.2 The racial epidermal schema

The internalization of the different perceptions of his race also transforms the black subject's *bodily* existence, Fanon argues. Describing the corporeal impact of the racist encounter with the child and his mother Fanon writes; "...[m]y body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning in that white winter day."<sup>66</sup> He has become disconnected from his body and subsequently his body is metaphorically *returned* to him altered, discursively re-constructed; the surface of the body now inscribed with the Eurocentric discourse that surrounds the Black body. Fanon, argues Yancy; "...experiences an embodied trauma through the racial fixity of his embodiment; he becomes a racialized object, one that bears the weight of the materialization of the white mythos."<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Fanon, *Black skin white masks*, 115.

<sup>62</sup> Hall, "Cultural identity and diaspora", 224-225.

<sup>63</sup> Fanon, *Black skin, white masks*, 84.

<sup>64</sup> Fanon, *Black skin, white masks*, 4.

<sup>65</sup> Fanon, *Black skin white masks*, 85.

<sup>66</sup> Fanon, *Black skin, white masks*, 86

<sup>67</sup> Yancy, *Black embodied wound*, 145.

Fanon describes his encounter with the white gaze as making his corporeal schema “crumble”, overtaken by what he terms “the racial epidermal schema”. This new bodily schema affects and restricts the black body’s being- in- the-(white)- world; how they “do” their body and how they inhabit the world, profoundly altering the black body's mode of existence.<sup>68</sup> Where for Merleau-Ponty the (habitual) body does not command attention, Fanon describes how he after experiencing an act of racism becomes *conscious* of his body schema.<sup>69</sup> For Fanon the Black body under racism poses an *obstacle* to be overcome.<sup>70</sup> Ahmed explains: “For Merleau-Ponty, the habitual body does not get in the way of an action..they do not get ‘stressed’ in their encounters with objects or others, as their whiteness ‘goes unnoticed’.”<sup>71</sup>

Unlike the white subject that is free to actively act and respond to the world non-cognitively and develop their individual style, the Black subject, argues Fanon, finds himself imprisoned in his blackness.<sup>72</sup> Race has “interrupted” the corporeal schema and he describes himself as “hamstrung” suggesting that he is being limited in his movement.<sup>73</sup> Thus, what Fanon is offering us is the insight that corporeality is charged with psychological significance. George Yancy writes in “Black Embodied wounds”:

Indeed, [Fanon’s] body undergoes a process of social ontological lived amputation. He lives fragmented (..)He no longer lives the world with implicit knowledge.. Fanon has been uprooted from his *familiar* mode of being-in-the world. (..) There is a fissure in Fanon’s spatial movement and social engagement. ..In short Fanon has been traumatized.<sup>74</sup>

Unlike the white body, the discursively produced *raced* body is a “thematized” body that moves in accordance with the expectations associated with his skin colour. Fanon writes: “A man was expected to behave like a man. I was expected to behave like a black man... I was told to stay within bounds..”<sup>75</sup> Following Fanon, racism can be thought from a phenomenological viewpoint as the bodily inferiorization of the racialized, or as an inner overdetermination of the bodily expression of the racially dominated.

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<sup>68</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 84-86.

<sup>69</sup> Fanon, *Black skin white masks*, 84.

<sup>70</sup> Ahmed, “A phenomenology of whiteness”, 156-157.

<sup>71</sup> Ahmed, “A phenomenology of whiteness”, 156.

<sup>72</sup> Nielsen, *Foucault, Douglas, Fanon, and Scotus in dialogue*, 77-78.

<sup>73</sup> Fanon, *Black skin white masks*, 99.

<sup>74</sup> Yancy, *Black Embodied wounds*, 145-146.

<sup>75</sup> Fanon, *Black skin white masks*, 86.



### 2.3 Traumatic temporality

The Freudian concept of *Nachträglichkeit*, the temporal displacement of trauma, is central to the psychoanalytic understanding of trauma.<sup>76</sup> If we normally envisage time as progressing along a continuous trajectory, trauma disrupts the usual linearity and unity of temporality.<sup>77</sup> The overwhelming event, Caruth explains, is too shattering in its occurrence to be processed and assimilated into consciousness and is therefore not experienced at the moment of the traumatic event, but emerges *later* on in displaced ways in an endless repetition of the past.<sup>78</sup> The original event is therefore not marked as traumatic in its occurrence, but exists in a dialectical relationship with a subsequent event that triggers the memory of the event that only *retroactively* becomes traumatic.<sup>79</sup>

When, after a gap in time, the memory unexpectedly returns, it is experienced not as a memory, but as if it is occurring in the here and now, confusing the mind's experience of time. What defines trauma, according to Caruth, is thus not the initial “event”, but the delayed effect; the period of latency *between* the traumatic event and the subsequent unbidden *experience* of the event: The period of latency delays both the effect and meaning of the past. Trauma, thus, *emerges in repetition*, in the mind's continued attempt to comprehend the initial experience.<sup>80</sup>

### 2.4 The missed moment

Caruth builds on Freud's understanding of trauma in thinking of trauma as the result of “the lack of preparedness to take in a stimulus that comes too quickly.”<sup>81</sup> Anxiety in this thinking acts as a “protective shield” of the psyche; without it the psyche carries no defense. This lack of affect leads to that the event is “missed” as it bypasses consciousness unprocessed. The experience of trauma then becomes one of oscillation between an overwhelming unmediated stimuli of the psyche, and an *absence* of affect during the initial event that hinders processing of the traumatic event.<sup>82</sup> Although the traumatic event has indisputably occurred, Caruth argues, the event has not truly been *experienced* in its time of occurrence, and remains

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<sup>76</sup> Bistoën, “Vanheule, Craps, *Nachträglichkeit*: A freudian perspective”, 668-669.

<sup>77</sup> Pollock, *After Affects/ After images*, 3.

<sup>78</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed experience*, 16.

<sup>79</sup> Bistoën, Vanheule, Craps, “*Nachträglichkeit*: A freudian perspective”, 674-675.

<sup>80</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed experience*, 17; Caruth, *Unclaimed experience*, 31

<sup>81</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 76.

<sup>82</sup> Bennett, *Empathic vision*, 5.

incomprehensible and unobtainable to the traumatised subject.<sup>83</sup> Trauma can thus be thought of as “non-experience” and a “permanent absence” or “voidness” in the psyche of an experience that indisputably has happened, but has not truly been experienced, as argued by Griselda Pollock. Pollock describes:

*It happened but I do not know it -that it happened or what it was that happened. It is the eventless event, unremembered, because never being known, it could not be forgotten..<sup>84</sup>*

This non-experience, argues Pollock, nevertheless becomes a structural part of the traumatized subject, colonizing and inhabiting the subject “in incognizable ways”.<sup>85</sup> It is because trauma is not truly *experienced* in the moment of its occurrence the traumatic event is often perceived and discussed as “missed”, or as Caruth describes it, as an “unclaimed” experience.<sup>86</sup>

## 2.5 The belated return

In his influential article “The body keeps score: Memory and the evolving of psychobiology of posttraumatic stress”, Bessel van der Kolk builds on the work of French psychiatrist Pierre Janet to argue that the high level of stress hormones released in the system during a traumatic event disrupts memory consolidation of the event into what we may think of as “ordinary” verbalizable memory; the type of memory that is available to conscious recall.<sup>87</sup> This results in traumatic memories being stored and “represented” differently than memories of everyday events.<sup>88</sup> Trauma however, argues van der Kolk, has no effect on sensory, motor, or affective “representations”. Traumatic memories are therefore preserved as affect states; images, somatic sensations and feelings, bodily responses that lie outside verbal-semantic-linguistic representation.<sup>89</sup> Psychiatrist Judith Herman and author of the acclaimed “Trauma and recovery” makes a similar observation when she describes traumatic memories as having a “frozen and wordless quality” and that they lack context; “rather, they are encoded in the

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<sup>83</sup> Greenberg, “The echo of trauma”, 320.

<sup>84</sup> Pollock, *After Affects, After Images*, 2-3.

<sup>85</sup> Pollock, *After Affects, After Images 2*.

<sup>86</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed experience*, 76

<sup>87</sup> van der Kolk terms these two different types of memory “explicit” (ordinary memory available to conscious recall) and implicit memory (the memory system van der Kolk argues controls conditioned emotional responses, habits, and sensorimotor sensations related to experience).

<sup>88</sup> As argued by Bessel van der Kolk in *The body keeps the score: Memory and the evolving of psychobiology of posttraumatic stress*, 253-265.

<sup>89</sup> Kolk, “The body keeps the score”, 253-265.

form of vivid sensations and images”.<sup>90</sup> Stored or “encoded” in a different way than ordinary memories they remain inaccessible to awareness and conscious recall.<sup>91</sup> However, these affects states can emerge after a gap in time to intrude unbiddingly on consciousness where they are experienced not as “memories”, but as if they were *occurring in the present* interrupting the subject's experience of time and “confus[ing] the primacy of present reality”.<sup>92</sup> According to Professor of Literary Studies Ernst van Alpen this creates an experience of “still [being] inside the event”.<sup>93</sup> This temporal confusion that is characteristic to trauma is due the unprocessed nature of the original event that leaves the event arrested in time. Bessel A. van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart explain: “Trauma stops the chronological clock and fixes the moment permanently in memory and imagination, immune to the vicissitudes of time”.<sup>94</sup>

This accounts for what Pollock calls the “perpetual presentness” of trauma as the return presents as a re-living of the experience.<sup>95</sup> Where ordinary memory allows the subject to recognize that an event is from the past, traumatic memory lacks the “spacing” and “temporalizing” that comes with processing of an event.<sup>96</sup> The return therefore has a fragmentary structure that defies any effort of constructing a cohesive narrative or meaning.<sup>97</sup><sup>98</sup> In what Caruth argues is the psyche's eternal quest to understand and narrate, what returns to haunt the survivor then, is the “gap in knowing”, that which remains *not known*. In this way, the repetition is precisely the repetition of the failure to witness; for what emerges on its return is not so much the original event, but rather, the unexpected “impact of its incomprehensibility”.<sup>99</sup>

Although their ideas about the underlying mechanisms may differ<sup>100</sup>, these scholars agree that “memories” of traumatic events are encoded by processes that render them unattainable

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<sup>90</sup> Herman, *Trauma and recovery*, 37-38.

<sup>91</sup> Kolk, Fislser, “Dissociation and the fragmentary nature of traumatic memories”, 508

<sup>92</sup> Greenberg, “The echo of trauma”, 320.

<sup>93</sup> van Alpen, “Caught by images”, 211.

<sup>94</sup> Kolk, Hart, “The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma”, 174-175.

<sup>95</sup> Pollock, *After- Affects/ After-Images*, 3.

<sup>96</sup> Pollock, *After- Affects/ After-Images*, 3.

<sup>97</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed experience*, 15-16.

<sup>98</sup> Pollock, *After- Affects/ After-Images*, 3.

<sup>99</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed experience*, 52-53; Caruth, *Unclaimed experience*, 19.

<sup>100</sup> Although there are important conceptual differences between dissociation and repression, both processes agree that traumatic memories are unavailable to conscious awareness and voluntary recall resulting in them primarily being experienced as isolated, non-verbal, sensory fragments. For further reading see for example Singer, J.L. (Ed.). *Repression and dissociation* (1990)

to conscious recall and unaffected by the vicissitudes of time. The result is that traumatic memories are primarily stored as isolated, non-verbal, sensory, motor, and emotional fragments that lack the narrative structure that comes with processing.

## 2.6 Postmemory

Professor of English and Comparative Literature and Professor in the Institute for Research on Women, Gender, and Sexuality Marianne Hirsch, adds an additional perspective on traumatic memory. Combining feminist theory with memory studies in a global perspective Hirsch argues that memories of violence or trauma can be transmitted across generations. Hirsch has formulated the term “postmemory” that she describes as the relationship that:

...subsequent generations bear to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma or transformation of those who came before—to events that they “remember” only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up.<sup>101</sup>

Significantly, Hirsch does not restrict postmemory to the immediate survivors, but emphasizes that it can act; “...across the difference of gender, race, and generation.”<sup>102</sup> Although, postmemory was initially elaborated in relation to Holocaust remembrance and trauma there is presence in applying the term to other traumatic pasts such as slavery and colonialism and the subsequent generations that “...gr[ew] up dominated by.. narratives that preceded their birth.”<sup>103</sup> These experiences of trauma, argues Hirsch, can transcend the familial and are transmitted through “...traumatic fragments of events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension” and, argues Hirsch, even though these events have not been experienced directly they are passed on “...so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right”.<sup>104</sup> This way, argues Hirsch, traumatic events continue to affect lives long after those who experienced the original source of trauma are gone.<sup>105</sup> This trans- and intergenerational form of transmission, writes Hirsch, relies on “multiple embodied, affective as well as symbolic scenes of transfer.”<sup>106</sup> For postmemories connection to the past, is according to Hirsch, “...mediated not through recollection” but through an “...imaginative

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<sup>101</sup> Hirsch, *School photos in liquid time, reframing difference*, 24; Initially Hirsch describes postmemory as being linked to the “second” generation. In later works such as in the essay “Touching memory” (October 10/2017) and her book “School photos in liquid time” she does not limit the term to the “second” generation (see bibliography for further details about these sources)..

<sup>102</sup> Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 8.

<sup>103</sup> Hirsch, *The generation of postmemory*, 5.

<sup>104</sup> Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 5.

<sup>105</sup> Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 5-6.

<sup>106</sup> Hirsch, “Touching memory”, III.

investment, projection and creation.”<sup>107</sup> Hirsch asserts that it is the task of the belated witness of trauma, to those affected by transgenerational trauma, to mediate the postmemory.<sup>108</sup>

According to Hirsch, the affective qualities of postmemory can allow contemporary witnesses to mediate the past in ways that can compliment history in promoting a form of affective understanding of historical traumas. Hirsch writes:

Postmemorial work (...) strives to reactivate and re-embody more distant political and cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression. In these ways, less directly affected participants can become engaged..<sup>109</sup>

Postmemory work may also, according to Hirsch, provide hope for the past to be worked through.<sup>110</sup>

Hirsch foregrounds photography as the premier medium of historic transmission and postmemory. Building on cultural theorist Roland Barthes’ phenomenological reflections on the presence and authenticity of the referent in the photographic image, Hirsch discusses how photographs have a certain indexical relationship to its subject and how certain images gain symbolic value.<sup>111</sup> In his seminal work “Camera Lucida” Roland Barthes writes:

“By nature, the photograph has something tautological about it (...); a pipe here is always and intractably a pipe. It is as if the Photograph always carries its referent with itself.”<sup>112</sup>

Where Barthes in his earlier semiological texts argues that images operate as signs, his later work focuses on the elements in an image that eludes signification such as the idea of the sensory and intensely subjective effect of “the punctum” of the photograph.<sup>113</sup> The punctum of a photograph, argues Barthes, cannot be verbalized, because; “...what I name cannot really prick me”.<sup>114</sup> To use Hirsch’s description, the punctum can be described as a detail that gives “the shock of recognition” or the “piercing insight” that allows for an emotional connection to the past that can, as Barthes writes, “prick us”, “bruise us” or even “wound us”.<sup>115</sup> The punctum liberates the photographic image from its frame and creates a “blind field of contemplation” that allows us in our engagement to move “*beyond*” the photographic

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<sup>107</sup> Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 5.

<sup>108</sup> Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 107-109.

<sup>109</sup> Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 33.

<sup>110</sup> Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 108.

<sup>111</sup> Hirsch, *The generation of Postmemory*, 37.

<sup>112</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 5.

<sup>113</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 27.

<sup>114</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 51.

<sup>115</sup> Hirsch, *The generation of postmemory*, 61-63.

frame.<sup>116</sup> Echoing Barthes belief that photography is a carnal medium that can produce a physical connection to the viewer Hirsch reminds us that Barthes punctum may also be found in the realization of the passage of time; through its reminder of absence — or death — the “having-been-there”, that is constitutive of photography.<sup>117</sup>

Following Barthes and Susan Sontag, Hirsch argues that photographs that survive traumatic historical events function as “ghostly revenants” that can “emanate” something from the past.<sup>118</sup> In addition to serving a memorial function, archival photographs, even if flawed as historical documents or evidence, serve as “points of memory”. As points of memory, Hirsch asserts, that archival photographs can; “...supplem[ent] the accounts of historians and the words of witnesses, and sign[al] a visceral, material, and affective connection to the past.”<sup>119</sup> Archival imagery may therefore be powerful in its ability to aid transmission and bridge “temporal, spatial and experiential divides” creating a connection between past and present, memory and postmemory, and personal and cultural memory.<sup>120</sup>

Archival photographs however, Hirsch argues, often prompt in the beholder the urge to “dissect” the photograph. To enlarge them, study them, and research every aspect of them in a search for *meaning*. Stepping back from this cognitional form of engagement with the photograph may however reveal other truths, alternative forms of knowing. Hirsch calls for a “reparative reading” of archival photographs that in contrast to an excavation of the image may open up for affective knowing.<sup>121</sup> Scrutinizing photographs, Hirsch warns, may reveal more about *our* needs than the lived experience of a traumatic past. The indexicality, she points out, is more performative than factual.<sup>122</sup>

## 2.7 (Re)presenting trauma

If trauma is unknown, how then may we begin to think of (re)presenting an absent origin? Exploring traumatic memory through literature and language Caruth uses the film *Hiroshima mon Amour* to illustrate the limitations of language in conveying the impact of trauma. Although Caruth emphasizes the unspeakability of trauma she does not deny the possibility

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<sup>116</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 57- 59.

<sup>117</sup> Hirsch, *The generation of Postmemory*, 61.

<sup>118</sup> Hirsch, *The generation of Postmemory*, 61-63.

<sup>119</sup> Hirsch, *The generation of Postmemory*, 61.

<sup>120</sup> Hirsch, *The generation of Postmemory*, 61-62.

<sup>121</sup> Hirsch, *The generation of Postmemory*, 74-76.

<sup>122</sup> Hirsch, *The generation of Postmemory*, 59-60.

that trauma can be narrativized or put into words after “working through” trauma. Caruth, however, emphasizes that such a “translation” may lose something along the way:

[T]he transformation of the trauma into a narrative memory that allows the story to be verbalized and communicated, to be integrated into one’s own, and other’s knowledge of the past, may lose both the precision and the force that characterizes traumatic recall.<sup>123</sup>

The representation of trauma, argues Caruth, may therefore fail to capture the lived *experience* of trauma; “The danger of speech..may lie., in that it understands too much”<sup>124</sup> Similarly, art historian Griselda Pollock describes how narrativization and representation necessitates a structuring of the event in time and how this in itself constitutes a move or passage *away* from trauma.<sup>125</sup> Representation in itself produces, argues Pollock, both a “relief” and a distancing from the unprocessed “thingness” that is trauma.<sup>126</sup>

What Caruth and Pollock seem to be warning us of here is that a narrative of trauma may fail to convey the impact of trauma's incomprehensibility. If trauma can be conceived of as a *missed moment*, a “successful” representation of the traumatic event(s) would fail to capture the essence of the *experience* of the event. In its very reproduction, one may say, it would cease to be traumatic.

How then may we begin to think about (re)presenting trauma? Caruth argues that trauma calls for a manner of cultural (re)presentation that *performs* trauma and its incomprehensibility, through a form that suggests the temporal fragmentation, discontinuity, and collapse of unity that is characteristic of traumatic memory in “a language that defies, even as it claims, our understanding.”<sup>127</sup> This may, according to Caruth, be conveyed through notions of absence or silence; intervals, spaces, or gaps that indicate a collapse of understanding where: “The “interval” .. marks, implicitly, the space of a trauma.”<sup>128</sup>

Griselda Pollock argues that the affective quality of art may create “experiential sites of encounter” that may put the viewer into contact with the non-cognitive affective experience

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<sup>123</sup> Caruth, “Recapturing the past”, 153.

<sup>124</sup> Caruth, “Recapturing the past”, 154.

<sup>125</sup> Pollock, *After-Affect/ After Images*, 2-3.

<sup>126</sup> Pollock, *After-Affect/ After Images*, 3.

<sup>127</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed experience*, 103-104; Caruth, “Recapturing the past”, 153-55; Caruth, *Unclaimed experience*, 17.

<sup>128</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed experience*, 35.

of trauma.<sup>129</sup> This view is shared by fellow art historian Jill Bennett who argues that the affective quality of art is unique in its engagement with the bodily, physical, or affective impact of trauma. Art, argues Bennett, can contribute to a new understanding of the lived experience of traumatic memory, enabling us to inhabit the past as *lived*—rather than *recounted*—experience.<sup>130</sup>

Following French poet and Holocaust survivor Charlotte Delbo's work, Jill Bennett finds "...a category of memory that becomes at the same time an aesthetic category".<sup>131</sup> Delbo distinguishes between two types of memory. This distinction is comparable to that of van der Kolk and Pierre Janet. "Ordinary memory" where "...events are interpreted and placed within a temporal and narrative framework"<sup>132</sup> and "sense memory", alternatively termed "deep memory", that is an affective type of memory that is related to traumatic experiences and registers the physical affective *imprint* of the inner experience of trauma. Sense memory, Bennett describes following Delbo, exists outside, segregated, and distinct from ordinary memory. Where ordinary memories are interpreted, narrativized and integrated and therefore more easily communicated and *represented*, sense memory distinguishes itself as it "lies outside verbal-semantic-linguistic representation".<sup>133</sup> Bennett argues that by distinguishing between ordinary and sense memory;

...allows us to conceive of a realm of imagery that maps onto the latter. Rather than reducing itself to a form of representation, such imagery serves to register subjective processes that exceed our capacity to 'represent' them (...) The imagery of traumatic memory deals not simply with a past event, or with the objects of memory, but with the present *experience* of memory.<sup>134</sup>

The unprocessed *imprint* of trauma available through "sense memory" can, according to Bennett, operate *from* the body to communicate on the level of bodily affect.<sup>135</sup> Building on Deleuze and his concept of the *encountered sign*; "a sign that it felt, rather than recognized or perceived through cognition"<sup>136</sup> Bennett explains how *sensation* is not "an end in itself", but may function as a catalyst allowing affect to be a "trigger for profound thought".<sup>137</sup> Producing a somatic experience where; "...the image [is], in a very palpable sense, 'felt' rather than

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<sup>129</sup> Pollock, *After-affects/ after-images*, 9.

<sup>130</sup> Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 2.

<sup>131</sup> Bennett, *Empathic vision*, 25.

<sup>132</sup> Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 355.

<sup>133</sup> Bennett, "The Aesthetics of Sense-memory: Theorizing Trauma through the Visual Arts", 28.

<sup>134</sup> Bennett, "The Aesthetic of Sense-memory", 79-80. (my emphasis)

<sup>135</sup> Bennett, *Empathic vision*, 26.

<sup>136</sup> Bennett, *Empathic vision*, 7.

<sup>137</sup> Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 7.



merely observed”, and engaging the viewer through its capacity to transmit sensation art may thrust the viewer toward an encountered or embodied form of critical and creative inquiry. This, argues Bennett, may potentially give rise to a “seeing truth” rather than a “thinking truth”.<sup>138</sup> An encounter with an artwork can be generative and transformative;

...affective imagery promotes a form of thought that arises from the body, that explores the nature of our affective investment and that ultimately has the potential to take us outside the confines of our character and habitual modes of perception.<sup>139</sup>

Art, as Bennett explains is in this Deleuzian view, “...an embodiment of sensation that stimulates thought.”<sup>140</sup>

## 2.8 Empathic vision

How can we engage with art that relates to trauma? In her discussion of how to engage ethically with images that exist in a relationship with trauma, Jill Bennett warns of appropriative identification, what Bennett describes as “...a feeling for another based on the assimilation of the other’s experience to the self”.<sup>141</sup> Similarly, although much of Hirsch’s concept of postmemory revolves around the empathic access to the experiences of the victims of cultural or collective trauma, Hirsch, like Bennett, warns against overidentification with the other saying that we must; “...resist annihilating the distance between self and other, the otherness of the other.”<sup>142</sup>

An empathic approach in engaging with trauma related art is also discussed by Professor Griselda Pollock. Pollock discusses how Brahcha Ettinger introduces the concept of “aesthetic wit(h)nessing” and describes it as a way of; “...being with and remembering for the other through the artistic act *and through an aesthetic encounter*.”<sup>143</sup> The encounter with the artwork may induce an internal subjective transformation or what Pollock calls “affective apprehending” where aesthetics “approaches ethics beyond the artist’s conscious control”.<sup>144</sup> This can, according to Pollock, lead to a turning toward and sharing in a “*wit(h)ness*” in the

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<sup>138</sup> Bennett, “Kama and Eroticism”, 131-132; Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 26.

<sup>139</sup> Bennet, *Empathic Vision* 44.

<sup>140</sup> Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 8.

<sup>141</sup> Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 8-10.

<sup>142</sup> Hirsch, “Surviving images”, 10-11.

<sup>143</sup> Pollock, *Aesthetic Wit(h)nessing in the Era of Trauma*, 831 (my emphasis)

<sup>144</sup> Pollock, *After-affects /After images* , 13.

pain of the other and a *witnessing*; that attests to the veracity of the others' experience through one's bodily presence.<sup>145</sup>

Jill Bennett suggests “empathic vision” as a method of approaching trauma-related art.<sup>146</sup> Bennett sees this form of empathy as a self-reflexive *mode of seeing* that is “not grounded in affinity (*feeling for* another insofar we can imagine *being* that other), but on a *feeling for* another that entails an encounter with something irreducible and different, often inaccessible.”<sup>147</sup> Bennett’s concept of empathy builds on Dominick LaCapra’s concept of “empathic unsettlement” that was developed in his studies on the representation of the Holocaust experience, and Kaja Silverman's term “heteropathic identification” that describes an aesthetic encounter that is “predicated on an openness to a mode of experience beyond what is known by the self”.<sup>148</sup> Related to Silverman’s term, LaCapra defines “empathic unsettlement” as a “feeling for” the other while being aware of and respecting the difference between one's own experience and that of the other.<sup>149</sup> To counteract the process of appropriative identification, Bennett suggests that in our engagement with the artwork we “focus more sharply on affect itself” to explore how art can facilitate the transmission of affect, establishing an affective connection that may drive us toward a mode of critical inquiry.<sup>150</sup> Empathic vision for Bennett thus combines both affective and intellectual operations, and a dynamic oscillation between these two.<sup>151</sup> Opening up for empathic engagement with art, writes Bennett, may thrust us toward a deeper understanding of; “..both about the nature of relationships to others and about the political nature of violence and pain” and may allow art, according to Bennett, to “..fold back into the world”.<sup>152</sup>

## Chapter 3

### 3.0 *Untitled 2018*

Orupabo’s black and white photographic collage *Untitled 2018* consists of two bodies; a larger almost natural-sized nude female body, and the smaller body of a “child” positioned

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<sup>145</sup> Pollock, *After-affects/After-images*, 13.

<sup>146</sup> Bennett, *Empathic vision*, 8-10.

<sup>147</sup> Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 10. (emphasis in original)

<sup>148</sup> Silverman as quoted by Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 9.

<sup>149</sup> Bennett, *Empathic vision*, 8-10; LaCapra as quoted in Bennett *Empathic vision*, 9.

<sup>150</sup> Bennett, *Empathic vision*, 10.

<sup>151</sup> Bennett, *Empathic vision*, 10-11.

<sup>152</sup> Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 26; Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 56

between the naked legs of the larger. The black and white photographic paper collage's layers are held together, seemingly provincially, by split metal pins that underscore a fragmented sense of body and connotes that of an articulated paper doll (Fig 6).

The larger of the two bodies is a body in a state of suffering and duress, and bears indexical traces of past violence such as extensive bruising on her legs. The violence to the body is accentuated by the many material "cuts" where the photographic images of different body parts come together. The incision-like preciseness in which Orupabo has cut out the body parts invite forensic metaphors or torture; whipping or even dissection and amputation.

This is not a classical female nude where the body is "closed" and sealed off. On the contrary, the larger body is presented in an exposed and vulnerable position. The air of vulnerability, rawness and suffering is underscored by the harshness of the light in many of the photographic fragments and by how her underwear are cut open, exposing her pubic area. The legs are parted, one leg bent at the knee and her breasts are full, while her stomach is soft and appears "deflated". One wonders if this is the body of a woman that has just given birth. Between her naked legs floats a smaller peaceful looking "child" clad in a layered white gown and bonnet that connotes christening and rebirth (Fig 6). The rebirth is also suggested by the positioning of the smaller body between the larger body's legs, and by how the "child" bears the same face as its "mother". However, this rebirth can also suggest a separation, or a sense of alienation from the self.

The larger female's arms are tied behind her back, fully exposing her breasts and stomach and suggesting a lack of freedom. Visually her clenched hands form a dark mass sustaining a sense of agony or defiance that stands in contrast to the seemingly lifeless body. Whatever pain the larger female must be experiencing it does not register in her face which seems neutral. The identical faces are turned towards us and their eyes closed, suggesting either death or sleep. In the case of the latter alluding to the unconscious. This gives us the opportunity to view the work in psychoanalytic terms employing trauma theory to explore Orupabo's work in relation to the concepts of traumatic temporality and the inability to "see" the missed moment.

The collage is pieced together using body parts that belong to individuals of different ages and of different pigmentation. The face and most of the larger female's upper body is that of a

young strong black woman. The body below the waist, however, is white and appears to be from individuals of older age. Visually the combination of a black upper body and white body splits the larger body in two. The fragmented yet joined pieces of photographs convey a sense of both disruption and cohesion. Sharp lines form where one body part meets and overlaps the next, forcing the former to protrude slightly outwards into our space. This detail of space or “gap” allows the collage to take on a three-dimensional sculptural quality.

Orupabo has “mined” these photographic images from the internet, using disparate archival sources such as colonial imagery, film stills and social media content, sometimes mixing them with images from her personal sphere.<sup>153</sup> These images are subsequently enlarged, sometimes to the point of degradation. Grainy images exist alongside images where pixelation is visible. In other areas such as that of the upper chest area of the larger body, we encounter an overexposed whiteness that nears abstraction. The existence of different temporalities within the collage is also rendered visible in how the texture of skin varies throughout the body. Most noticeable is how the smooth skin on the face and upper body stands in contrast to the skin on the lower body that seems to belong to older individuals. Together this makes us aware of the disparate origins of the archival images and contributes to a sense of disruption and incoherence.

Orupabo leaves much of the construction of the collage visible. In most places, the limbs are pieced together using flat metal split pins that penetrate the photographic layers and form “joints” in sometimes unexpected places. In other places, images are placed on top of each other, but in a way that leaves the bottom layer slightly visible: The larger body's face is placed on top of another face, a centimeter off, so that the layer below is somewhat visible, but still remains mostly masked. In other instances, it appears that one limb is sprouting out of the other: Like where the little toe seemingly “grows” out of the right foot. (Fig. 3)

The way the collage is constructed connotes hinged articulated paper dolls or puppets, suggesting infantilization and denied autonomy. The collage can be seen as both human and toy and speaks of distance, objectivization and the dehumanization of the black body. The connotation of puppetry suggests movements dictated by an external force, but the joints formed by these hinges are also a sight of instability and uncertainty: The body of the collage

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<sup>153</sup> Ose, *Frida Orupabo Hours After*, 7

constantly teetering on the verge of animation, oscillating between human and object.

### 3.1 Displaying affect

*Untitled 2018* has been exhibited both hanging on the wall in eye height and placed flat, enclosed in a glass cabinet.<sup>154</sup> These different stagings of the piece profoundly altered the experience of the work and its bodily impact. Professor Jennifer Fisher, an art historian, critic and curator specializing in contemporary art and curatorial studies, has discussed how different viewing conditions facilitate different forms of engagement that in turn impact the viewer's engagement.<sup>155</sup> Exhibition sites act as sites for affective and experiential relationships between artworks and audiences. The curator, explains Fisher, may organize *affect* by controlling and constructing environmental stimuli, both representational and non-representational, in ways that influence how viewers engage with, experience and understand the artwork.<sup>156</sup> Fisher goes on to argue that:

Art and its choreographies of presentation become the means to enter into other dimensions of sensation and possibility. The transmission of affect in curating configures events that *intensify connection*, that open bodies of beholders to synaesthetic cognition, that push beyond the boundaries of representation, and that ultimately transform registers of subjectivity.<sup>157</sup>

Similarly, Bennett, has discussed how viewing conditions can result in what she calls “a failure to witness” thus indicating how curating strategies can also *disrupt* affective connection to a work.<sup>158</sup> By encasing the collage in a glass case reminiscent of the ethnographic museum, the body of the collage was placed in the realm of objecthood. Although the positioning in the cabinet had a certain emancipating effect on the viewer; allowing the spectator to move around the collage to study it from different angles, this way of displaying the collage also had a distancing effect that impacted its presence and how it was experienced, in ways that exceed signification. Christopher Whitehead, Susannah Eckersley and Rhiannon Mason have in “Placing Migration in European Museums: Theoretical, Contextual and Methodological Foundations”, have discussed the sensory and affective dimensions of exhibition display and noted how this type of display invites a

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<sup>154</sup> The exhibitions I am discussing are the two times this work has been exhibited in Norway: Kunstneres Hus March- April 2019 and the exhibition “En samling blir til» i Nasjonalmuseet – Arkitektur.

<sup>155</sup> Fisher, “Exhibitionary Affect”, 32

<sup>156</sup> Fisher, “Exhibitionary Affect”, 27-28.

<sup>157</sup> Fisher, “Exhibitionary Affect”, 33. (my emphasis)

<sup>158</sup> Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 64.

“colonizing gaze” that bears with it the “moral certainty” of the colonial projects.<sup>159</sup> Staging work this way may, according to Eckersley, Mason and Whitehead, potentially disrupt the uncertain affective engagement with the art object.<sup>160</sup> Arguing along a similar vein, discussing the spatial enactment in exhibitions, Fisher quotes well renowned Ydessa Hendeles artist-curator in saying that “...the best initial access [with art] is with spontaneity.”<sup>161</sup> Displaying a piece in a way that hinders spontaneous engagement may, following Hendeles, impact the intuitiv “unthinking, unconscious” affective reaction that a viewer has with the work.<sup>162</sup>

Mounted on the wall at eye height the initial experience of *Untitled 2018* was one of intimacy and a marked sense of both material and sensuous proximity. (Fig 4) The faces of *Untitled 2018* were turned toward the viewer, evoking the face-to-face encounter, subjectifying the collage and intensifying the connection with the work. Adding to this experience of connection was the collage’s size that corresponds to that of a preadolescent: On the wall the body of the collage with its childlike size had an air of vulnerability and a distinct bodily presence that called on the body of the viewer to relate to it empathically. The viewer was also able to engage with the work from different distances: seeing it from a far the chromatic splitting of the body was striking, as was the experience of the body as “falling”: The arms of the collage seemed to be pulled backward and downward by a force that seems not to be a result of her own movement, but rather of a force that is acted upon her. This force seemed to be dragging her downward, giving the impression of a falling body. The collage also had a distinct sculptural quality caused by the overlapping photographic fragments.<sup>163</sup>

This experience of communality between “bodies” that had intensified the engagement with the work was stripped when the collage was laid flat, and so was the subjectifying effect as the faces of the collage were turned upward toward the ceiling. The display circumvented an immediate experience and engagement, and encouraged a more deliberate and analytical approach: The visitor had to walk up to the case and peer down and move along the case to see the whole body. The three-dimensional quality of the gaps was lost as the harsh light “flattened” the surface of the collage. (FIG 5) The placement also had another effect:

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<sup>159</sup> Whitehead, Eckersley, Mason, *Placing Migration in European Museums: Theoretical, Contextual and Methodological Foundations*, 97-98.

<sup>160</sup> Whitehead, Eckersley, Mason, *Placing Migration in European Museums: Theoretical, Contextual and Methodological Foundations*, 97-98.

<sup>161</sup> Fisher, “Exhibitionary Affect”, 32.

<sup>162</sup> Hendeles as quoted by Fisher in “Exhibitionary Affect”, 32.

<sup>163</sup> The sculptural quality of Orupabo’s physical collages (then compared to her digital work) was also noted by Røssaak, Eivind in the article Pre-Cinema, Post-Internet, *Kunstkrikk.no*.

Exhibited lying flat the hands took on a decidedly different character. The visual “pull” the hands had on the body when it was exhibited on the wall was gone, and the impression of a falling body was eliminated. (For the purpose of this thesis I will be discussing how the collage was experienced when hanging on the wall if not otherwise specified.)

### 3.2 Engaging with trauma

Orupabo’s use of photographs from the colonial archive, or images that suggest the colonial era, frames the collage against a historical backdrop. Contextualised by a broader cognitive knowledge of the subjugation of the black body, the “sting” of the collage is partially carried by our belief in the inherent indexicality of the photograph that gives rise to a sense of authenticity. Their inclusion provides the collage with a link, or to use Barthes words, an “umbilical cord” to the past that gives them a “having-been-there” quality.<sup>164</sup> The bound hands underscoring the torment of the black body and adding to it a symbolic value as it is an image already instilled in us as belonging to the visual trope of this era, thus inscribing the constructed body of the collage within the horrific visual legacy of slavery and colonialism.

The symbolism of the bound hands may initially bring on a sigh of recognition, confirming what we think we know and bringing us a strange comfort; the kind of comfort you find when you confirm the answer to a question you thought you knew the answer to. Our engagement with archival images from traumatic pasts, Hirsch has pointed out, is often guided by an initial impulse to dissect and excavate the image in search of details, probing them in a search for *meaning*.<sup>165</sup> However, when engaging with *Untitled 2018* the disorienting combination of different temporalities, body parts of different ages and pigmentation, soon leave the perceiver with little choice but to abandon meaning-making faculties, and instead consider the possibility that “answers” to the questions posed by the piece are potentially found as much in the affective experience of it. In such, it may remind us of how Hirsch discussed that listening *only* to what Barthes called “the voice of knowledge” may prove to be a detour, leading us astray and masking other truths.<sup>166</sup> Opening up for an affective engagement, however, in which the perceiver suspends what they already know in the encounter with the art object to focus on sensation itself, may reveal what Bennett calls a “seeing truth”.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 81.

<sup>165</sup> Hirsch, *The generation of postmemory*, 74-76.

<sup>166</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 7.

<sup>167</sup> Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 12.

To think of the encounter with the work this way brings with it questions about viewer and subjectivity as we engage with the art object beyond the iconographical or symbolical interpretation. It is to open up for a dialectical approach drawing on what is known, but momentarily suspending it to explore what is *not* known.<sup>168</sup> It is engaging the viewer as a sensing subject and opening up for affective knowing. By approaching the work this way what may initially have been considered detrimental; the material ruin of parts of the photographic image or the decontextualization of the body parts used in the collage, may present itself as a space in which we can engage. The lack of or erasure of detail, in some of the fragments, may instead tell us something about the lived experience of traumatic memory; the evacuation of meaning and the perpetual presence of the unknown. If we see it this way the overexposed whiteness and the grainy dark areas may emerge as instances of appearance and disappearance, as if memories are lost and *returning*. Revealing how trauma exists outside of ordinary memory, submerged and unclaimed, but still always present.<sup>169</sup>

### **3.3 The gap — a point of entry**

In *Untitled 2018* we have the “real” body of the photographic image, but also the constructed body of the collage. In the coming together of the real and the constructed, a material gap forms, a detail of space, where one fragment slightly overlaps the next. Visually these “gaps” present as cuts to the skin. How may we begin to think of these gaps? It is not “of” the photographic image and it is not quite “of” the constructed body. It is something in-between, something unstable, uncontrollable. This detail of “space” is at once a joining and at the same time a rupture: It is where one temporality collides with another. It is where black body parts meet white. A place of boundary, but also a place of connection. This material fissure that forms between the real and the constructed, I propose, offers the possibility of something ruptured, lost, emerging or even *returning*.

#### **3.31 The gap as sense memory**

I want to start by considering Orupabo’s *Untitled 2018* in relation to sense memory, a form of memory that Jill Bennett, following Auschwitz survivor Charlotte Delbo, argues is associated with trauma. Located *in the body*, outside of ordinary representational memory, sense memory registers as an unprocessed physical imprint of the traumatic event, preserved as

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<sup>168</sup> Bennett, *Empathic vision*, 25-26.

<sup>169</sup> Pollock, *After-affects/After-images*. 2-4.



sensation.<sup>170</sup> Bennett quotes Charlotte Delbo's description of sense memory as being:

... fixed and unchangeable but wrapped in the impervious skin of memory that segregates itself from the present 'me' (...) everything that happened to this other 'self' (...) it doesn't touch me now (...) so distinct are deep memory and common memory.<sup>171</sup>

I suggest that in *Untitled 2018* Orupabo presents the body as a site of memory where the indexical traces of past violence, visible in the photographic fragments, express how sense memory registers as physical imprints of the event. The division of the collage into different temporal layers divides the body into different *temporal zones*, a form of “compartmentalization” visualizing how sense memory is held *in* the body; preserved and isolated from ordinary memory.<sup>172</sup> This is made apparent to the beholder by how the skin in some areas belongs to that of a young person and in others of a much older. Skin, however, is a permeable layer. It may crack, rupture and leak. What Delbo termed the “skin of memory”; a protective and unconscious “second” skin, is no different.<sup>173</sup> Enclosing what one may think of as an abscess, this skin cannot contain pressure for more than a period of time before giving way and leaking its content. The traumatic “return” thrusts the traumatized subject into a confounding state where sensory impressions from the past invade that of the present.<sup>174</sup>

Bennett quotes Delbo:

I feel it again through my whole body, which becomes a block of pain..It takes days for everything to return to normal, for memory to be “refilled” and for the skin of memory to mend itself.<sup>175</sup>

In placing images from different temporalities overlapping one another Orupabo visualizes a collapsing of temporality and at the same time reveals something else; how trauma exists in a dialectical relationship between two moments in time: The moment of the event, and the moment when the event is retroactively experienced.<sup>176</sup>

A detail of space forms *between* these different temporal layers where one fragment overlaps the next forcing the outer layer to protrude slightly outward. As a space *between* temporal

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<sup>170</sup> Bennett, *Empathic vision*, 25.

<sup>171</sup> Charlotte Delbo, *Days and Memory*, as quoted in Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, 5 and re-quoted by Jill Bennett in *Empathic vision*, 25.. The translator of this quote is probably Langer as nothing else is noted in the footnote: Sense / deep memory are used interchangeably by Delbo to describe this form of memory.

<sup>172</sup> Bennett, *Empathic vision*, 25.

<sup>173</sup> Bennett, *Empathic vision*, 25,

<sup>174</sup> Bennett, *Empathic vision*, 42.

<sup>175</sup> Delbo as quoted by Jill Bennett in *Empathic vision*, 40.

<sup>176</sup> Pollock, *After affects/After images*, 8-9.

layers the gap emerges as *a rupture in time*. (Fig 2) Thinking of the gap this way, the space or void, this “no-thingness” that exists between the overlapping temporal layers, unfolds as the “missed moment”: The “gap” in knowing caused by the unexpected force of the traumatic event, so that instead of memory the event leaves a non-memory, a void or what Pollock describes as a “permanent absence” in consciousness of an event that was never fully assimilated, but exists as a “shapeless emanation” outside of ordinary memory, constantly exerting pressure on the psyche as it tries to retrieve that which is missing.<sup>177</sup>

The space or “emanation” between the overlapping temporal layers, expresses something *lost* or *returning*: The unassimilated memory’s attempt at *seeking form*: A flooding or flowing forward of a memory that according to Bennett is held *in* the body because it cannot find relief in representation.<sup>178</sup> This nothingness is a failed connection, a scream rent *from* the body, but never fully “heard” and understood. In such the gap in its “no-thingness” emerges as a failed connection or even as a charged suspension; a transmission site between body and consciousness embodying two contradictory traits at once: Both the shock of the initial “unmediated affective experience” of trauma and at the same time, due to the lack of cognitive processing of the event, a “total absence of affect”; alerting us to how, according to Bennett, trauma encapsulates and exists in the oscillation between these two.<sup>179</sup> The ebbing and flowing feeling of memory is underscored by the different exposures of the photographic fragments where the combination of areas with overexposed whiteness devoid of detail with dark grainy areas present as memories lost and returning. Together this play of temporalities endows the collage with what Griselda Pollock has called a “perpetual presentness” that is characteristic of trauma.<sup>180</sup> This perspective of the gap opens the gap up for perceiving them as what Jill Bennett calls an “affectively charged space”, in such the gaps are not just the expression of a certain inner experience, but an unfolding of an experience.<sup>181</sup>

Part of what the collage is conveying is the disorienting and fragmentary nature of traumatic memory. The collage is then *not* an attempt to convert sense memory into ordinary memory, but an expression of the breach in memory that, according to Pollock, prohibits precisely this conversion.<sup>182</sup> Representing the fragments cohesively would fall short of conveying the lived

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<sup>177</sup> Pollock, *After affects/ After images*, 3.

<sup>178</sup> Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 27.

<sup>179</sup> Bennett, *Empathic vision*, 5.

<sup>180</sup> Pollock, *After-affects/ After-images*, 2.

<sup>181</sup> Bennett, *Empathic vision*, 153.

<sup>182</sup> Pollock, *After-affects/after-images*, 2-3.

experience of trauma. It is in this disorienting ambiguity, in the very failure to comprehend, the collage unfolds and we can begin, as Caruth argues, to listen and see “*from the site of trauma*”.<sup>183</sup>

Sense memory, argues Bennett, is contrary to ordinary memory, experienced as if it is occurring *in the present*, a present that has an intensity that is felt more sharply than the actual present. This second present makes itself felt *in the flesh*.<sup>184</sup> Bennett quotes Delbo: Sometimes(..) it bursts and gives back its contents(..) and the pain is so unbearable, so exactly the pain I suffered there, that I feel it again physically.<sup>185</sup>

Visually the gaps that divide these temporal layers read as whip marks or *cuts to the skin*, expressing how sense memory on its return is “felt as wound”, communicating visually and sensually to the beholder how traumatic memories make their presence *felt* through bodily sensations when it returns and erupts in the present.<sup>186</sup> Bennett building on Delbo writes of the wound as a figuration of trauma:

It is precisely through the breached boundaries of skin in such imagery that memory continues to be felt as a wound rather than seen as contained other. One might say also, that it is through the breached boundaries of memory that skin continues to be felt as a wound rather than seen as contained other.<sup>187</sup>

The gap or “wound” between temporal layers is also where the collage engages the viewer and opens up for empathic engagement and between affect and cognition, functioning as a transmission site of affect between the body of the collage and the body of the viewer, the wound allows the viewer to *feel* the image and establishes what Bennett has termed as an “affective connection” communicating on the level of bodily affect, sense memory as “sensation rather than representation.”<sup>188</sup> In such, the gap opens up the lived *experience and* sensory pain of traumatic memory. Images that relate to sense memory, argues Bennett, memory “deals not simply with a past event, or with the objects of memory, but with the present *experience* of memory.”<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed experience*, 71 (my italic)

<sup>184</sup> Bennett, “The Aesthetics of Sense memory”, 94-97.

<sup>185</sup> Bennett, “The Aesthetics of Sense memory”, 95.

<sup>186</sup> Bennett, *Empathic vision*, 40.

<sup>187</sup> Bennett, “The Aesthetics of Sense memory”, 96.

<sup>188</sup> Bennett, *Empathic vision*, 50.

<sup>189</sup> Bennett, “The Aesthetic of Sense-memory”, 80.

Images of pain or bodily violence may, according to Bennett, map onto our bodily memory mediating an affective engagement of bodily understanding as we all know of pain from our own experience.<sup>190</sup> The shock of a violent image may, however, also stop short of inducing critical thinking and instead produce numbness. This anesthetizing effect of violent imagery has also been noted by Susan Sontag in “On photography”.<sup>191</sup> The issue, argues Bennett, “is where the work takes us after the initial affective connection is established”.<sup>192</sup>

Bodily reactions to a visual work of art may be seen as what Bennett calls “seeing feeling” described as “where feeling is both imagined and regenerated through an encounter with the artwork”.<sup>193</sup> According to Bennett this type of affective reaction to an image is what she calls as bodily “regrouping”; a feeling of one's own body that brings forth in us the awareness that what we are responding to is the pain of the *other*. Seeing feeling, explains Bennett, “lets us feel the image, but also maintain a tension between the viewer and the image.”<sup>194</sup> Viewing in this regard is not purely a cognitive engagement, it is a transformative process or event where the beholder is affected through the sensory engagement with the art object. Bennett argues:

By extracting affect from narrative or by isolating the embodied sensation from character, affective imagery promotes a form of thought that arises from the body, that explores the nature of our affective investment, and that ultimately has the potential to take us outside the confines of our character and habitual modes of perception.<sup>195</sup>

Confronted with the gaps that present the body as cut and mutilated we might experience a bodily “shudder”. This shudder produces in the viewer a recognition of the pain of the other, while as what Bennett calls a “bodily regrouping” it simultaneously gives rise to an awareness of difference and empathy, a sharing in the pain of the other.<sup>196</sup> However, the encounter with *Untitled 2018* also reveals something else: The shudder that is induced in the body of the viewer reaches us through the field of vision, but it arises nonetheless *from* the body. As an immediate affective reaction, the shudder as a bodily response triggered by the collage mimics the return of sense memory; an affective reaction that can be seen as placing the body momentarily “out of time”.<sup>197</sup> In this sense the gap represents a point of dissolution,

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<sup>190</sup> Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 47.

<sup>191</sup> Sontag, *On photography*, 19-20.

<sup>192</sup> Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 64.

<sup>193</sup> Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 43.

<sup>194</sup> Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 43.

<sup>195</sup> Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 44.

<sup>196</sup> Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 47.

<sup>197</sup> Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 11.

presenting to the eye and unfolding in the body as a sensation, *performing* rather than representing the unknown radical otherness of trauma.

Here it is important to make note of how the experience of artworks can be affected by other factors such as viewing conditions. As discussed earlier, this work was experienced very differently when placed in a case that connoted that of the ethnographic museum. Images that engage with sense memory, argues Bennett, present the lived experience of trauma *as it is felt in the present*. However, as Bennett points out, some viewing situations interrupt autonomic reactions such as the “seeing feeling”.<sup>198</sup> I suggest that by placing the collage in a way that evoked the ethnographic museum, the work was “staged” as something belonging to the past, temporally distancing it from the viewer and interrupting the “hereness” and “nowness” of the work and circumventing the empathic engagement with the work.

### 3.32 The gap and the otherness of Self

The body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and flesh expose us to the gaze of others, but also to touch, and to violence.<sup>199</sup>

There are places within the larger figure of *Untitled 2018* where the gap or *wound to the skin* is emphasized by chromatic differences. The upper body of the larger female is mostly black, and the body below the waist appears to be white.<sup>200</sup> The site where skin of different pigmentation meets visually splits or divides the body. However, this site can also be seen as pointing to something shared. In this sense, one may ask: What does it mean to share skin? In *Camera Lucida* Barthes writes about “[a] skin I share with anyone that has been photographed”<sup>201</sup> As in Barthes’ quote “sharing” may imply a shared experience.<sup>202</sup> Sharing, however, also implies ownership. Sharing *skin* may then imply that a person’s skin is not entirely their own. If one owns “a share” in something you have a say in the *value* of it. Black skin, argues Fanon, is in the collective unconsciousness seen as a symbol of “evil and

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<sup>198</sup> Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 64-65.

<sup>199</sup> Butler, *Violence, Mourning, Politics*, 15.

<sup>200</sup> This combination of a black upper body and white lower body is a common feature in many of Orupabo’s early works.

<sup>201</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 81.

<sup>202</sup> There is an important aspect that should also be noted in this context, but that the scope of the thesis does not permit a discussion of: That is that images are materializations of practices of seeing. Implying a shared experience before the camera is ignoring the power relations that are involved in different forms of looking.

ugliness”.<sup>203</sup> Whiteness, on the other hand, is seen as just, pure and virtuous.<sup>204</sup> Skin, a shared attribute, is in a racialized society given differentiating meaning and *value*.

Fanon tells us how the white gaze, the carrier of these social and historical collectively held meanings, haptic in this instance, “assails” and *wounds* the Black subject.<sup>205</sup> The white gaze gains this power to wound, Yancy tells us, through a shared symbolic world, what might be thought of as a (shared) social skin.<sup>206</sup> Being interpolated by the white gaze, Fanon writes, is to be stripped of your humanity and reduced to skin, which in the white racialized world becomes the sole category through which the Black subject is judged. This internal colonization forces the black subject to see himself through the objectifying and contemptuous white gaze, internalizing the negative stereotypes of his skin color. This internalization is what Fanon called “epidermalization of inferiority”:<sup>207</sup> Identifying with the attributes associated with the white man and striving for a white self, the Black subject, according to Fanon, is unable to reconcile the different meanings connected to his “race” with himself and as a consequence undergoes a splitting, alienating him from his black body.<sup>208</sup> Skin, a sight of connectedness, has become a sight of vulnerability and exposure. Describing his experience of internal fragmentation and alienation Fanon writes: “I burst apart. Now the fragments have been put together again by another self.”<sup>209</sup>

I suggest that in *Untitled 2018* the wound that is emphasised by the coming together of black and white body parts harbours a tension that foregrounds the specificity of this vulnerability and communicates it as a site of wounding, expressing what Fanon described as the Black subject's experience of internal splitting.<sup>210</sup> This sense of splitting is emphasized in the material layering of the collage: In how the face of the larger body almost entirely covers and masks *another* face. We can even perceive alienation or the otherness of self in how the softness of the belly together with the presence of the “baby” gives the association of *pregnant skin*: Skin that envelops the skin of the other *within* the self. The state of psychological fragmentation, an interval, or distancing between self and the *other within the self*, is accentuated in how the smaller body bears an identical face that takes leave, *separates*,

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<sup>203</sup> Fanon, *Black skin white masks*, 139.

<sup>204</sup> Fanon, *Black skin white masks*, 139.

<sup>205</sup> Fanon, *Black skin white masks*, 84-85.

<sup>206</sup> Yancy, *Black embodied wounds*, 142-143.

<sup>207</sup> Fanon, *Black skin white masks*, 4.

<sup>208</sup> Fanon, *Black skin white masks*, 82.

<sup>209</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 82.

<sup>210</sup> Fanon, *Black skin white masks*, 82-84.

from the larger body and profoundly with Judith Greenberg's description of how *trauma* “forces a separation from the self”<sup>211</sup> and Delbo’s description of trauma as belonging to *another self*.<sup>212</sup>

In discussing empathy as a mode of seeing Jill Bennet argues that empathic engagement implies more than an affective connection. It requires, she argues, an “acknowledgement of difference”.<sup>213</sup> Skin is lived not only as a point of boundary between ourselves and the world; but also as a site of connectedness and sharing. As Butler has argued; “The body is “constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is and is not mine. Given over from the start to the world of others, it bears their imprint.”<sup>214</sup> Within this lies a common vulnerability we as embodied species share; whatever can be touched and seen can also be wounded and violated. However, as Fanon has discussed, vulnerability is also socially created and differentially imposed. Indirectly criticizing the universalism of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of the body, Fanon emphasizes the sociality of embodiment in the racialized society, discussing how cultural differentiation impacts how bodies are ‘with’ other bodies and the way our *skins*, and as a consequence bodies, are experienced and lived.<sup>215</sup> Skin, the surface of the body that is supposed to protect, becomes in a racialized society that which “exposes”. In this sense “sharing” skin may be a source of vulnerability, as the colour of the skin is thought to give access to “truth” of the others being, reflecting the value of the other.<sup>216</sup>

*Untitled 2018* presents as a body invaded and torn asunder by whiteness. The gap where the different skin colours simultaneously folding-in under the pressure of the white gaze and opening up and unfolding towards us allowing us to apprehend the body of the other in a carnal way: Moving us closer to grasping what it may mean to bear a set of shared genetic traits that makes a person’s skin not entirely their own. By allowing the affective encounter with the work to open up for critical thinking the encounter with *Untitled 2018* orients us toward a *sharing within difference*: Empathy that is based not on identification, but on acknowledgement of difference, engendering what Bennett has called an “engagement of

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<sup>211</sup> Greenberg, “The echo of trauma”, 322.

<sup>212</sup> Bennett, “The aesthetics of sense memory”, 81.

<sup>213</sup> Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 145.

<sup>214</sup> Butler, “Violence, Mourning, Politics”, 15.

<sup>215</sup> Fanon, *Black skin white masks*, 82-86.

<sup>216</sup> Fanon, *Black skin white masks*, 82-84.

understanding”.<sup>217</sup> By engendering understanding, argues Bennett, the art work may “fold back into the world (...)inform[ing] understanding both about the nature of relationships to others and about the political nature of violence and pain”.<sup>218</sup>

### 3.33 The gap as the phenomenology of traumatization

And then the occasion arose when I had to meet the white man’s eyes. An unfamiliar weight burdened me. The real world challenged my claims. In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third person consciousness.<sup>219</sup>

Skin colour, argues Fanon, gives agency to certain bodies, and limits *other* bodies.<sup>220</sup> Sarah Ahmed explains that where the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty is about motility and agency, a body that “can” and is “able” to act and extend itself, Fanon’s phenomenology of the black body, can best be described as the “bodily and social experience of restriction, uncertainty and blockage”.<sup>221</sup> What Fanon describes as the embodiment of racial oppression is linked to the oppressive modalities of the white gaze. Fanon explains how the violent impact of the white gaze takes away his body and phenomenologically returns it to him in what he describes as a “distorted” form.<sup>222</sup> His body, Fanon tells us, has undergone a transformation, rendered unfamiliar to him and is now perceived through what he describes as a third person consciousness<sup>223</sup> that “shatters” his unreflected position, forcing him to *self-audit* his movements according to the (internalized) expectations placed on him as a black subject in a “white” world.<sup>224225</sup>

But how, exactly, does this relate to *Untitled 2018*? Orupabo has used metal split pins to pierce the layers of “body parts” that the collage consists of together. These pins are placed in connection to the many gaps and give, together with the gaps, the impression of forming articulated “joints”, evoking that of an almost natural sized human articulated paper doll or puppet. I suggest that the rendering of the black body “as puppet” is an expression of the

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<sup>217</sup> Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 54.

<sup>218</sup> Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 54.

<sup>219</sup> Fanon, *Black skin white masks*, 83.

<sup>220</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 85-86.

<sup>221</sup> Ahmed, *A phenomenology of whiteness*, 161.

<sup>222</sup> Fanon, *Black skin white masks*, 86.

<sup>223</sup> Fanon, *Black skin white masks*, 83.

<sup>224</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 82-83.

<sup>225</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 103.



collapse into the realm of non-being and objecthood that, according to Fanon, occurs when the Black subject comes into contact and internalizes the white gaze.<sup>226</sup> The human puppet expresses what it means to have a body replaced by what is perceived as an *alien* body, a *raced* body.<sup>227</sup> A body Fanon describes as being perceived as “distorted” —altered— implying a movement from the familiar to the unfamiliar; a body made *strange* and as a consequence a feeling of no longer being “at-home” in one's body .<sup>228</sup> The visibility of the construction of the collage, its provisional character and the use of body parts from different individuals generates a sense of an “artificial” body. The human puppet occupies a shifting liminal space that both encompasses and blurs the border between being and non-being endowing the collage with an unnerving and disquieting quality. However, for the viewer the sense of unease in encountering the work is not only in the human doll figure, however haunting it may be, but also in how the puppet-character points to a manipulating and controlling force “behind” the puppet.

On my first encounter with *Untitled 2018*, I stood in the midst of a cool white room and was immediately transposed back to my childhood bedroom: Dressing and undressing paper dolls, manipulating their limbs. I remembered the feel of the split pins under the soft skin of my young fingers applying pressure to the joint to reconfigure its position. I caught my adult self wondering if the collage would move if I applied pressure to it and jolted back. The disorienting realization that the split pin was piercing the indexical traces of the “real” skin present in the image hit me like a slap in the face: The presence of “skin” interrupting the object/ human divide.

With this encounter in mind, I now want to focus on the gaps or “joints” that endow the larger body of the collage with its puppet character. How may we begin to think about these joints? A joint is a construction that allows for different degrees and types of flexibility and movement. By endowing the body of the collage with what seems as joints Orupabo suggests motility. However, in a puppet, one may say, the joint is the very sight of manipulation and control, as a puppet is a figure that moves to the will of an outward force. The joints, rather than constructions of mobility, in *Untitled 2018* present as pressure points permeated with stress, uncertainty and blockage, endowing the body of the collage with a fraught sense of

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<sup>226</sup> Fanon, *Black skin white masks*, 82.

<sup>227</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 82.

<sup>228</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 85.

body: A body that has its movements “overdetermined” from without. Orupabo’s evocation of the puppet then points to the presence of the agential body of the puppet *master*, a position of dominance and control.<sup>229</sup> I suggest that we think of the implicit presence of the puppet master in *Untitled 2018* as the internalized white gaze; the third-person-consciousness of the body described by Fanon, that leads to a constant surveillance of one’s movements and restricts the black subject’s being-in-the world.<sup>230</sup>

Yancy, building on Fanon, tells us that for the Black subject in a racialized society the white gaze is a site of “perpetual violence” that “polices” and surveils the black body in ways that encroaches on the black subjects’ lived mobility. This is what Yancy calls “a phenomenology of traumatization.”<sup>231</sup> He goes on to argue that this is still prevalent today through practices such as racial profiling and border control, practices that affects how Black people move and behave when confronted with figures of authority such as police.<sup>232</sup> It is this “occlusion of lived mobility” that, according to Yancy, constitutes a site of traumatic wounding.<sup>233</sup> The internalized white gaze also corresponds to what Pollock has called traumas “perpetual presence” that “exerts its invisible pressure” on the psyche<sup>234</sup>, resonating with Pollock’s description of trauma as; “..lodged like a foreign resident in the psyche. Trauma colonizes its hosts by its persistent inhabitation of the subject..”<sup>235</sup> The way the metal split pins pierce and wound the indexical traces of the “real skin” present in the photographic images communicates to the beholder on the level of bodily affect this power relation as injurious and wounding.

Whiteness, argues Sarah Ahmed, gains power and privilege in going unnoticed.<sup>236</sup> By evoking the absent body of the puppet master Orupabo is holding whiteness in place as an object. It brings what does not get seen to the surface, inviting the hypothetical white viewer to *notice* whiteness and thrust us toward thinking about what whiteness in a racialized society “does”, how it affects on those non-white bodies subjected to it forcing the viewer to contemplate their own entanglement within the matrix of race.

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<sup>229</sup> Zamir, “Puppets”, 401.

<sup>230</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 83

<sup>231</sup> Yancy, “Black embodied wounds”, 147.

<sup>232</sup> Yancy, “Black embodied wounds”, 146- 147.

<sup>233</sup> Yancy, “Black embodied wound”, 147.

<sup>234</sup> Pollock, *After Affects/ After Images*, 3.

<sup>235</sup> Pollock, *After affects/ After images*, 2.

<sup>236</sup> Ahmed, “A phenomenology of whiteness”, 161.

Visual arts, argues Jill Bennett, “invites an awareness of different modes of inhabitation.”<sup>237</sup> By evoking the puppet and implicit puppet master Orupabo infuses her collage with the traumatic ontological uncertainty of the Black subject revealing to us that even though the chains of slavery have been shed, a debilitating psychological environment continues to limit the freedom of the Black subject in racialized societies where they remain *trapped*, or to use Fanon’s words, “imprisoned” within the white imaginary. Communicating on the level of bodily affect this power relation as injurious and wounding the collage creates an empathic connection with the viewer. However, the evocation of the implicit puppet master that invites the viewer to *notice* whiteness enables the viewer to keep a reflexive distance to the work that Bennett necessitates in her concept of “empathic vision”.<sup>238</sup> In such the work does not merely shock us, but “jolts” the viewer into a mode of critical inquiry.<sup>239</sup>

### 3.34 The gap in relation to postmemory

Remembering is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present.<sup>240</sup>

The image of the bound hands present in *Untitled 2018* references and establishes a connection to the trauma of slavery and serve as what Hirsch calls “a powerful “visceral, material, and affective” link to the past.<sup>241</sup> Pieced together using cut out body parts from both colonial and contemporary sources, the combination of these different temporalities may allude to how trauma brought upon by colonial violence cannot be consigned to a forgotten past, but continue to make themselves known in the present; offering us the opportunity to explore racial trauma from the position of the postcolonial.

In her work Marianne Hirsch has added an additional perspective to the transmission of trauma, describing how trauma is passed on through generations, marking the next generation(s) with the horror of the past.<sup>242</sup> I would now like to explore how *Untitled 2018* unfolds in relation to the temporality of inherited trauma. This way of seeing the collage opens up the possibility of seeing the constructed body not as an individual body, but a

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<sup>237</sup> Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 12.

<sup>238</sup> Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 10.

<sup>239</sup> Bennett, *Empathic vision*, 11.

<sup>240</sup> Bhabha, *The location of culture*, 123.

<sup>241</sup> Hirsch, *The generation of Postmemory*, 61.

<sup>242</sup> Hirsch, *The generation of postmemory*, 5-6.

“collective body” of multiple generations where the memories of others are internalized without being fully understood, but according Hirsch, nonetheless present themselves as memories in how they manifest psychologically.<sup>243</sup>

*Between* the photographic fragments from different temporalities there are gaps or separations, but also a connection or *joining* of conflicting temporalities.

Transgenerational trauma, argues Hirsch, is passed on precisely because of and through a *connection* with a preceding generation; but what is passed on is at the same time what *separates* them, because of the awareness that one can never fully inhabit the sense memory of others.<sup>244</sup> The gap between these different temporalities that co-exist on the same plane then expresses how transgenerational transmission of trauma is at once *both* a joining and a rupture. It is what brings together, but also separates: Passed on through fragments of narrative, but *known* only through its traces of gesture and affect,<sup>245</sup> the wound that is trauma, Hirsch tells us, reverberates across generations; invading, inhabiting and haunting the present through the transmission of traumatic knowledge and embodied experience; tethering the subsequent generations to events that precede their birth.<sup>246</sup>

This inherited trauma can truly be thought of as a “missed ” moment as it remains truly unavailable because the trauma that the “next” generation is burdened with, is not their own. In Orupabo’s piece, it is possible to recognize how the gaps between photographs bring attention to how certain experiences are unintelligible and inexpressible and open up an affectual engagement with this space. The many gaps, voids or fissures between the temporal layers of Orupabo’s collage then expresses this “marked” generational relation; gesturing towards the tension between past and present and the gap between self and other, making us aware how historical wounds leave an “infinity of traces”, deposited from both collective and individual histories without “leaving an inventory”.<sup>247</sup> For, as Hirsch has argued, trauma has different effects on the survivors than it does for those who inherit these memories. Hirsch writes: “The *gap* between generations is the breach between a memory *located in the*

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<sup>243</sup> Hirsch, *The generation of postmemory*, 31-33.

<sup>244</sup> Hirsch, *The generation of postmemory*, 80.

<sup>245</sup> Hirsch, *The generation of postmemory*, 5.

<sup>246</sup> Hirsch, *The generation of postmemory*, 1-6.

<sup>247</sup> Here I am borrowing Antonio Gramsci in Prison notebooks 1929-1935” describing a body situated in history as being marked by “infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory”, to describe a body affected by the legacy (postmemory) of racial trauma.

body and the mediated knowledge of those who were born after.”<sup>248</sup>

In instances of transgenerational trauma those affected by it are “compelled to negotiate a shared memory in which the sense memory of others touches the communal memory of those outside”.<sup>249</sup> Although much of Hirsch’s concept of postmemory evolves around empathic access to the traumatic experiences of the past, it also encompasses a perpetual experience of *difference* that leads to an awareness of separation. Postmemory, Hirsch tells us “is defined through an identification with the victim or witness of trauma, [and] modulated by the *unbridgeable distance* that separates the participant from the one born after.”<sup>250</sup>

Between the larger female and the smaller body of the collage there is also a *separation*; in the placing of the child and the movement that is suggested by the smaller “child” leaving the maternal body. The placement of the smaller body between the legs of the larger figure alludes to birth and may initially promise new life and future. Although, when we discover that the smaller body’s face is identical to the larger, it can be interpreted as a *re-emergence*, a repetition or “more of the same”, suggesting transmission of trauma over generations revealing how, in instances of traumatic histories, the future is contained in the past and how the past may be experienced in the future. However, Orupabo’s use of body parts from individuals where the skin in differing degrees are affected or marked by the passage of time also renders the larger body of *Untitled 2018* in a *constant state of becoming*. This way of seeing the collage is intensified by the promise of a different future that we can trace in the *spiritual* rebirth indicated by what can be read as a christening dress and bonnet on the smaller and more “whole” and peaceful looking body. This sense of “new” future is reinforced by how a “new” little toe seems to emerge from the decaying skin of her right foot. (Fig 3) The *potentiality* and future that is reclaimed here can be seen as a post colonial gesture of refusing closure, but can also be seen as a resistance to confinement and a refusal to be “fixed” within the determinative cycle of traumatic reenactment. Seeing it this way the temporalities embodied in the different skin surfaces may point to an alternate reading, for as Ahmed and Satchey points out; “..skin is not simply in the present(...)in so far as it has multiple histories and unimaginable futures.”<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> Hirsch, *The generation of postmemory*, 80 (my emphasis)

<sup>249</sup> Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 146

<sup>250</sup> Hirsch, “Surviving images”, 10. (my emphasis)

<sup>251</sup> Ahmed, Satchey, *Thinking through skin*, 2.

In relation to the history of slavery and colonialism Frantz Fanon has argued for resistance to the shackles of history and for creating and living alternative narratives that may open for “new, positive identities and conceptions of “blackness””<sup>252</sup> Writing in his eloquent prose Fanon declares:

“ I am not a prisoner of history. I should not seek there for the meaning of my destiny. I should constantly remind myself that the real leap consists in introducing invention into existence. In the world through which I travel, I am *endlessly creating myself*.”<sup>253</sup>

The potentiality embodied by *Untitled 2018* unfixes the Black body, releasing it from the cyclical confinement of repetition, and opens it up for a more porous and future oriented form of temporality that allows for the possibility of working through and for “black” skin being re-imagined and re-lived, providing hope for possible change and repair. This way of seeing *Untitled 2018* promotes a form of embodied transmission that Hirsch has argued can open up for alternative temporalities and reclamation of past hopes and futures,<sup>254</sup> reminding us of how Barthes inspired a more fluid and open-ended reading of photographs when he stated that the photograph is “...not a ‘copy’ of reality, but.. an emanation of past reality..”<sup>255</sup>

## Conclusion

In my analysis the main focus has been on the ways in which we can understand the fragmented body of *Untitled 2018*, a work by the contemporary artist Frida Orupabo (1986-). Empathic vision as defined by Jill Bennett was my point of departure in the approach to the work.<sup>256</sup> In my analysis I used Frantz Fanon’s concepts of “epidermalization of inferiority” and “racial epidermal schema”.<sup>257</sup> I have engaged with the concepts of sense memory as discussed by Bennett and Hirsch’s concept of postmemory. I have also discussed how methods of display can influence perception.

Taking the two different display methods employed by curators when exhibiting *Untitled 2018* as my starting point, an argument has been made, following Fisher, Bennett and

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<sup>252</sup> As argued by Cynthia Nielsen in Foucault, Douglass, Fanon, and Scotus in Dialogue, p 83-84.

<sup>253</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin White masks*, 179. (my emphasis)

<sup>254</sup> Hirsch, *The generation of postmemory*, 21; Hirsch, “Touching memory”, V-XI.

<sup>255</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 88.

<sup>256</sup> Bennett, *Empathic vision*, 8-10.

<sup>257</sup> Fanon, *Black skin, white masks*

Whitehead et al., that methods of presentation impact the affective experience of the work in ways that intensify or disrupt the empathic connection to the art object.

In the first section of my analysis of *Untitled 2018*, I used the concept of sense memory to argue that Orupabo presents the body as a site of memory. Building on Bennett I argued that “the gap” reads as a wound to the flesh and communicates to the viewer on the level of bodily affect, sense memory as sensation (rather than representation).<sup>258</sup> Further, I argued, building on Bennett, that the affective reaction induced in the viewer mimics the return of sense memory, and maps onto the viewers bodily memory to produce what Bennett has termed a “seeing feeling”; a bodily regrouping that “lets us feel the image, but also maintain a tension between the viewer and the image”, allowing for an empathic connection with the work.<sup>259</sup>

In the next section called «The gap as otherness of Self» I discussed *Untitled 2018* using Fanon’s concept of the “epidermalization of inferiority”.<sup>260</sup> The argument was made that “the gap” that is emphasised by the chromatic differences of skin and that visually splits the larger body of the collage, foregrounds the vulnerability of the Black subject in a racialized society where skin, the surface of the body that is supposed to protect, becomes for the Black subject that which exposes the body to others.<sup>261</sup> Further, I argued that *Untitled 2018* orients us towards a *sharing within difference*: Empathy based on the acknowledgement of difference, engendering what Bennett has called an “engagement of understanding”.<sup>262</sup>

In the third section of my analysis, Fanon’s concept of “the racial epidermal schema” and the work of Sarah Ahmed and George Yancy formed my point of departure. I argued that Orupabo evocation of the puppet and implicit puppet master visualises a third-person consciousness of the body, expressing what Yancy following Fanon has called the “phenomenology of traumatization”.<sup>263</sup> Furthermore, I argued that the evocation of the implicit puppet master invites the viewer to notice whiteness and contemplate their position in the matrix of race, thus enabling the viewer to keep a reflexive distance to the work that Bennett necessitates in her concept of “empathic vision”.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 43.

<sup>259</sup> Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 8-12.

<sup>260</sup> Fanon, *Black skin white masks*.

<sup>261</sup> Fanon, *Black skin, white masks*.

<sup>262</sup> Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 54.

<sup>263</sup> Yancy, “Black embroidered wounds”, 147.

<sup>264</sup> Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 10.

In the last section of my analysis I considered “the gap as postmemory”. Drawing on the concept of postmemory, as defined by Marianne Hirsch, I argued that *Untitled 2018* gestures towards the gap between generations, but also that the collage embodies a potentiality that opens up the possibility of Black skin being re-imagined and re-lived, providing hope for possible change and repair.<sup>265</sup>

Orupabo's collage unfolds gradually and disorientingly. The parallel unfolding does not, however, invite one reading over the other. The work's aesthetic vocabulary of uncertainty, openness and opacity allows for a *gap*, a spacing in the viewer's encounter with the work that permits it to flow and develop in unforeseen directions when it is encountered and re-encountered in different circumstances and by different people at different times. In a sense *Untitled 2018* is speaking with overlapping voices, telling us about the vulnerability of the body in the racialized society and the burden of trauma on the traumatized subject, but also of the burden of those who are marked by a trauma that never was fully their own. In doing so it propels us toward a form of “affective knowing” that preserves alterity even as it knows.<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> Hirsch, *The generation of postmemory*, 108.

<sup>266</sup> Bennett, *Empathic vision*, 12





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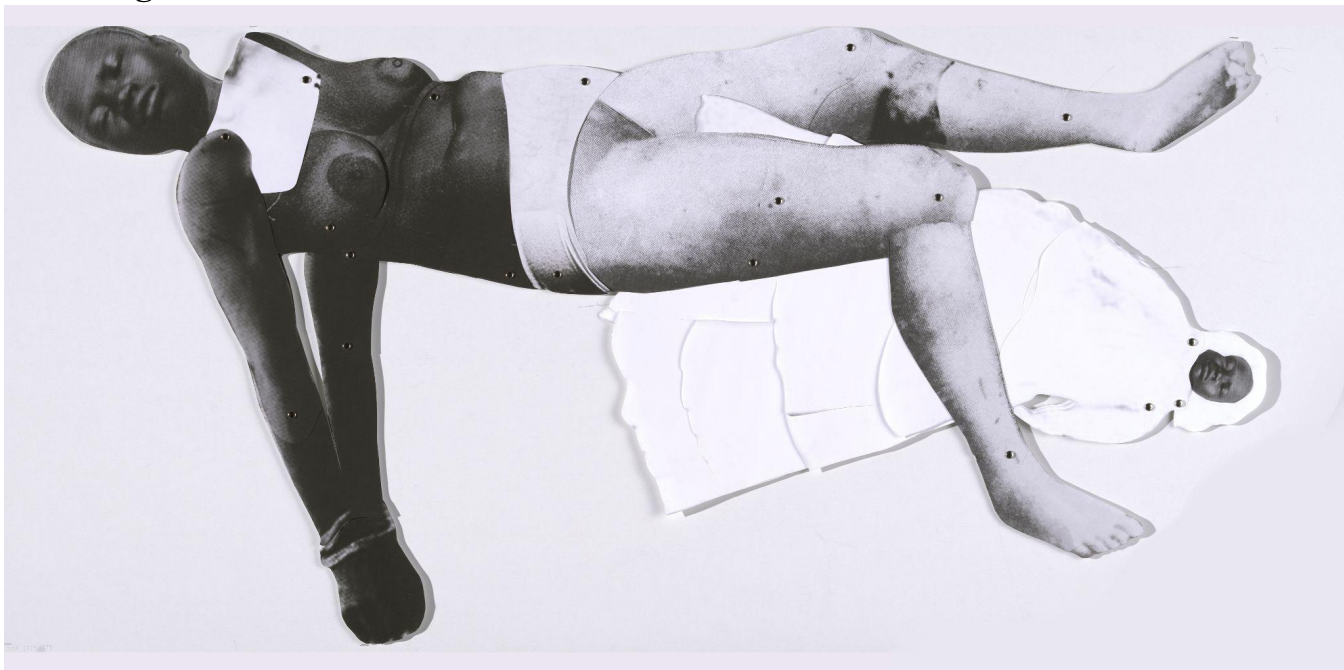
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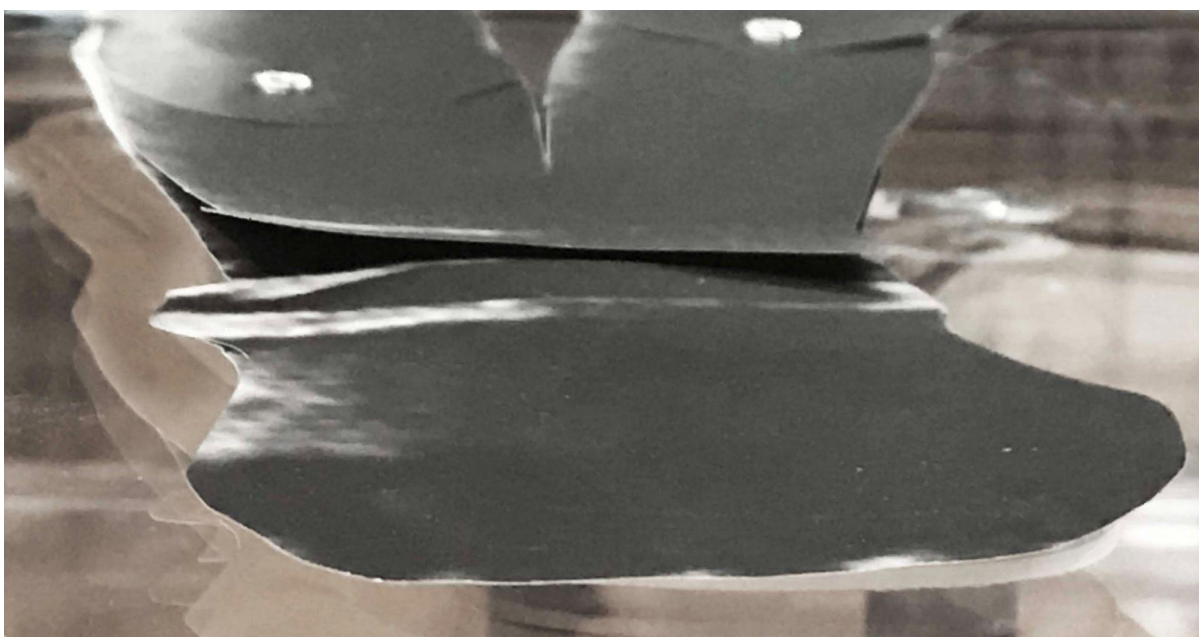
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**List of figures:**



**Figure 1:**

Orupabo. Frida, Untitled 2018, Date: 2018, paper collage mounted on aluminium, Size: 60 cm x 120 cm x D 2cm, Owned by The Norwegian National Museum of Art, Architecture and design, Inventory number: NMK.2019.0054. Photo: Børre Høstland. Reproduced with the permission of The Norwegian National Museum of Art.



**Figure 2:** Detail of Orupabo. Frida, Untitled 2018, Date: 2018, paper collage mounted on aluminium, Size: 60 cm x 120 cm x D 2cm, Owned by The Norwegian National Museum of Art, Architecture and design, Inventory number: NMK.2019.0054. Photo: Ingvild Melby



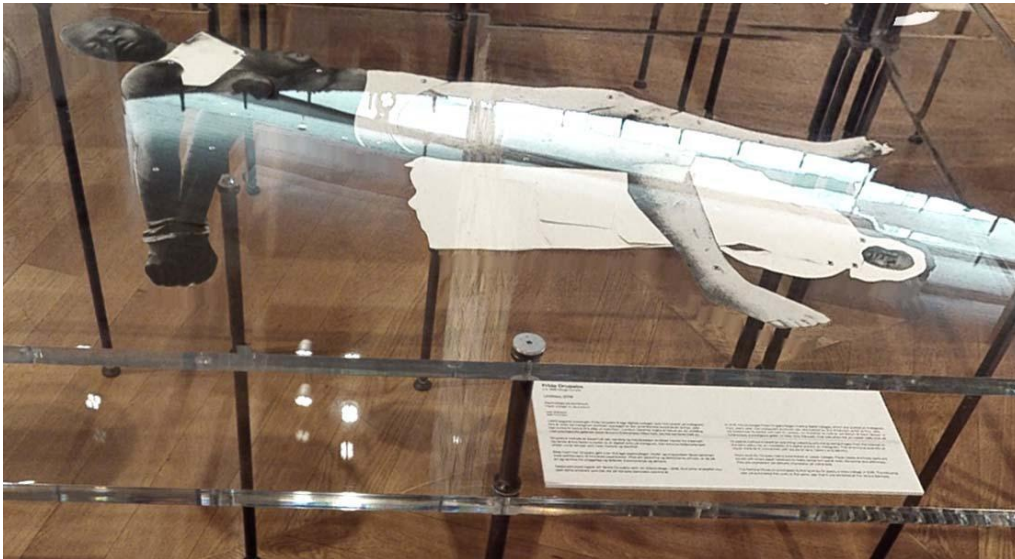
**Figure 3:** Orupabo. Frida, Untitled 2018, Date: 2018, paper collage mounted on aluminium, Size: 60 cm x 120 cm x D 2cm, Owned by The Norwegian National Museum of Art, Architecture and design, Inventory number: NMK.2019.0054.





**Figure 4:** Installation shot from Frida Orupabo's exhibition at Kunstneres Hus.

Photo: Vegard Kleven/Kunstneres Hus, Oslo. Reproduced with the permission of Kunstneres Hus.



**Figure 5:** Orupabo. Frida, Untitled 2018, Date: 2018, paper collage mounted on aluminium, Size: 60 cm x 120 cm x D 2cm, Owned by The Norwegian National Museum of Art, Architecture and design, Inventory number: NMK.2019.0054. Orupabo,

(“Untitled 2018” as displayed at the Norwegian National Museum exhibition “En samling blir til. Kunst – Arkitektur – Design”)





Detail of the right foot of Orupabo, Frida “Untitled 2018”, paper collage mounted on aluminium. Photo: Ingvild Melby