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(EDS.)

# Puentes entre mundos

**NUEVAS REPRESENTACIONES  
DE LA FANTASÍA**





# PUENTES ENTRE MUNDOS



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*Nuevas representaciones de la fantasía*



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ANTONELLA DE SENA

## No Nation but the Imagination: The Afrosurreal Landscape of Donald Glover's *Atlanta*

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This essay examines the legacy of structural racism in the United States, particularly focusing on the way the African American community has been historically excluded from the American project. It explores how whiteness has been constructed as the defining characteristic of national presence, while racialized bodies — particularly black bodies — have been relegated to a position of subjugation. This racial dichotomy has shaped American society by making black existence synonymous with deracination and the non-human, positioning them outside of the realm of humanity.

The article links these historical dynamics to contemporary manifestations of racial oppression, showing how the legacy of slavery and its violence continues to pervade the lives of black Americans today and how it drives critical and cultural responses that challenge the enduring effects of systemic oppression. The persistence of racial violence, discriminatory laws, and institutionalized disenfranchisement form a backdrop against which African American life survives, enduring an erosion that is both physical and psychological. Through the lens of Afropessimism (Wilderson, 2020: 14), the essay questions the societal structure that emerged from slavery and highlights how systemic racism continues to render black life precarious, perpetually subject to the threat of dehumanization and exclusion.

The text connects these notions to the TV series *Atlanta* (2016-2022), directed by Donald Glover. The show is analyzed as a cultural artifact that exposes the lived experiences of black individuals navigating a society steeped in the traces of slavery and white supremacy. *Atlanta* acts as a critical exploration of black life under structural racism, embodying the tenets of Afropessimism and Afrosurrealism. The latter is presented as an artistic movement that uses surrealism to challenge the oppressive realities imposed by white supremacy and critiques contemporary American society's inability to sever the connections between past atrocities and present realities, calling for a confrontation with the violent history of the country in order to imagine a future

free from racial oppression. In this context, Afrosurrealism becomes both a form of resistance and a means of reimagining a world where black existence is not limited by the historical and structural violence of racial hierarchies.

### Blackness in the United States

In the United States, race has played a crucial role in defining the social strata. Race has historically been used as the device to discriminate and create differences between individuals based on biological qualities, like the color of a person's skin, but it is also an idea with a significant cultural and historical weight. As a weapon of oppression, race has also served its purpose, to establish an institutionalized system of destruction that is constructed artificially and that governed the realm of the social (DiAngelo, 2016: 98). This idea debunks discourses that have tried to find a biological explanation for racial discrimination: the truth is that there is no basis to justify the existence of a society based on racial prejudice.

The implementation of a racial hierarchy inevitably begets a notion of preferability and expels inadequate subjects from the space of humanity, creating room for certain bodies while erasing the ones considered inadequate, the Other(s) —who is always a priori excluded. Race touches on the political, it harbors the potential to work as a major force of repression. In racially-structured societies race becomes the ontological mirror, its implantation influences and shapes subjective identity (Hollinger, 2011: 174). The nefariousness of race is most visible —perhaps only— when it serves discriminative purposes. Therefore, it is crucial to take into consideration the racial question when it comes to analyzing social or cultural aspects unfolding within the territory of the United States, where the racial order has been dominated by and structured around whiteness.

Whiteness sits at the center of the American project. The rest of the *othered* peoples —of Native, African, Asian, or Latinx descent— are relegated to a life in the margins, made to exist as satellites that revolve around the white center of gravity. This idea conveys a very bleak significance and suggests that racialized subjects lack any inherent ontology, a common mistake incurred by colonial epistemologies, where the existence of the Other is construed as contingent, an appendix of the hegemonic presence, as if it did not exist for and by itself. However, othered bodies are inevitably shaped by the influx of hegemony. What does this mean? It means that blackness does not depend on whiteness to account for its existence, but rather that it has been framed and affected by racist structures that stunt their heritage and culture.

The African and Native presence allowed whiteness to fulfill the space of «an inside» figure with «its own subject status» (Spivak, 2015: 88). As a result, the American

identity became linked to the nation's existence. The exclusion of other races from the American project granted the country its identity as a white nation. Meanwhile, the racialized groups became discarded, and were devoid of ontological authority within the norms of a society dependent upon structural racism to exist. These ideas form the bedrock of the United States as a nation «being bonded by the shared biogenetic characteristic of “Whiteness”» (Wynter, 1992: 9) according to Sylvia Wynter, for whom the politics of racial oppression are quintessentially American:

This representation was made possible only on the basis of the systematic exclusion of the Red and Black constituent elements of the American reality and national identity, in as much as it was their mode of difference which alone enabled the selection of a shared biogenetic characteristic, that of Whiteness to serve as the unifying principle of the nation (1992: 9-10).

I will also recur to Affect Theory in order to carry out the task of dissecting the emotional impact of racism and understand how blackness became the emblem of Otherness, symbolizing an existence that was inherently subordinate in status. The black subject embodied an *Ersatz* ontology, it represented the idea of vicarious living and was relegated to the spaces of servitude in a territory where whiteness was the emblem of the «“Biological Body”» (Wynter, 1992: 10). Focusing on the affective implies focusing on the embodiment of emotion and the phenomenology of feeling. It refers to anything with which the individual comes into contact and which elicits a subjective response, as Sara Ahmed explains, «[t]o be affected by something is to evaluate that thing. Evaluations are expressed in how bodies turn toward things» (Ahmed, 2014: 23).

Racism is responsible for engendering «negative affects» (Ngai, 2005: 130) in the contexts where whiteness is construed as the archetype of humanity, like in the United States, while blackness as a result adheres to a peripheral ontology straddling the world of beings and non-beings. Blackness is absence, «an absence of privacy» and «an absence of sovereignty» that denies auto positioning (Moten, 2017: 72) and therefore confirms the malleability of black bodies, which are marked by their intrinsic non-white vulgarity (Roberts, 1999: 22-25). The African American population bears the brunt of centuries of oppressive policies: «The long durée of slavery» (Wilderson, 2020: 166) illustrates «the ways in which Black life is beset by violence at every level of existence» (Palmer, 2017: 39). American history includes a long compendium of racial terrors that include the Jim Crow laws, urban segregation, and mass incarceration —as part of its sinister legacy. Its racist scaffolding is a disease that plagues society still.

Racism in the United States resembles what Foucault called endemics, a dysfunction, a disorder that «pervades a population» (2003: 244). Structural racism has an eroding effect on black communities, for whom death becomes «something perma-

ment, something that slips into life, perpetually gnaws at it, diminishes it, and weakens it» (2003: 244). Black life in America means to survive the deluge of «everyday quotidian racisms» (Palmer, 2017: 39), it means to live in fear and pain, in a state of heightened vulnerability and at the mercy of forces that escape individual control. This is how the dilapidation of existence, what Lauren Berlant describes as «slow death» (Berlant, 2007: 754) —a prolonged process of physical and psychological degradation that takes place gradually and relentlessly— occurs:

The phrase *slow death* (emphasis original) refers to the physical wearing out of a population and the deterioration of people in that population that is very nearly a defining condition of their experience and historical existence. The general emphasis of the phrase is on the phenomenon of mass physical attenuation under global/national regimes of capitalist structural subordination and governmentality (2007: 754).

The TV series *Atlanta* (2016-2022), directed by Donald Glover, explores how this erosive process happens and how African Americans deal with the violent fact of their lives as they are exposed to a relentless culture that breeds genealogies of dispossession (Spillers, 1987: 67). In Glover's depiction of black life in the United States we become familiar with the consequences of living under structural racism. *Atlanta* intends to illustrate how black Americans have to confront the endless threats of white violence and its many manifestations.

This show draws from a long tradition of black radical thought that scrutinizes the world critically and foregrounds «the presence of a historical or political consciousness or a social tradition among blacks» (Robinson, 1983: 72), something that Western thought has always denied to black people as it has tried to «obliterate the African» (Robinson, 1983: 72). This tradition of critical thinking is «inspired by historical experience and a social ideology» (Robinson, 1983: 72). *Atlanta*, therefore, belongs to a culture of Black Radicalism and it can be linked to one of its most recent evolutions: Afropessimism.

Afropessimism denounces the everlasting trace of the nation's history in our present, or how the terrible past of the transatlantic slave trade impregnates everything and makes black individuals vulnerable to the same brand of structural threats that plagues the past, as «repression always leaves its trace in the present —hence “what sticks” is bound up with the “absent presence” of historicity» (Ahmed, 2004: 45). The show is precisely trying to make this idea clear, highlighting the permanence of slavery, its enduring hold, issuing a hard critique of contemporary American society, denouncing the cynicism of whiteness and exploring the hostility —and stupidity— of antiblack ideology while imagining possible futures and a different world where black people don't have to come up with preposterous ways of justifying their existence, where black life is not foreclosed from birth.

## Afropessimism and Afrosurrealism

Afrosurrealism works as a self-affirming artistic movement that insists on a black ontology liberated from the violent constraints imposed by white supremacy. It is a terminology that serves to designate the works of black artists that engage with themes of race and oppression in present times, but also strive to revise the past from a critical perspective and instead of imagining a different reality as its main purpose, aim to change the current one. The goal of Afrosurrealism is more revolutionary than fantastic, it denounces the surreal —understood as preposterous and inhumane— qualities of our society.

Afrosurrealists probe and question the foundations of reality, adding layers of imagination, hallucination, and/or dream landscapes into their works. This movement portrays the multifaceted and complex dimensions of black life *from the perspective of black individuals*, while engaging with the «historical-racial schema» (Fanon, 1986: 91) that governs society. The aim is to influence the present and create space to transform the world. Afrosurrealism is not interested in imagining utopias but rather in *real* change. It is about the «“RIGHT NOW”», according to D. Scot Miller who published the *Afrosurreal Manifesto* in the San Francisco Bay Guardian in 2009 and says that Afro-Surrealism asks «what is the future?» (Miller, 2009), because the promise of «a future» based on the apparatuses of white oppression is insufficient for black individuals.

African Americans coexist with the legacy of slavery, so the promise of a future predicated upon the same history and hierarchies does not represent an actual alternative. It is more of the same, a new iteration of the traumatic past, a reopening of an unattended wound. However, there is hope for Afrosurrealists in imagining a different world, one we have not arrived at yet but strive for, and whose availability is only possible beyond the constraints of time (history) and space (the material world). This sentiment is best expressed in the words of the Canadian writer Dionne Brand: «I have absolutely no nostalgia for any time past, no time passed is good enough for my living. I can only think of the future» (Brand and Naimon, 2022), says the poet. This idea aims to denounce the precarious living conditions of the «colonized subaltern subjects» (Spivak, 2015: 38), which are still insufficient and depressive. Therefore, the future becomes the only «place where we might live, which would refute all that we are living, negate and tear up all that we are living» (Brand and Naimon, 2022). Or, in other words, it is necessary to think and build the world anew for blackness to thrive, this is what Kevin Quashie calls «to imagine a black world», a necessary action «so as to surpass the everywhere and everyway of black death, of blackness that is understood only through such a vocabulary» (Quashie, 2021: 2).

I am not suggesting that Dionne Brand is an Afrosurrealist, nor that Quashie endorses an idea of a world where only black people will fit, but rather that Afrosurreal-

ism is a mode of thinking and perceiving that is as revolutionary —for it demands the collapse of the oppressive structures of white supremacy— as it is inherent to black existence. Afrosurrealism, in this instance, emerges as unavoidable, as constitutive of black living; it is what arises after being here, in constant *friction* with the (white) world.

The added value of Afrosurrealism, not only as an artistic movement but as a political cause, is that it attempts to examine and debunk narratives of historical domination and exploitation. It was the poet Amiri Baraka who first coined the term «Afro-Surreal Expressionism» in the introduction to a book by the African American writer Henry Dumas, who died a victim of police brutality in 1968. Baraka was referring to the kind of art that black artists in the diaspora were making, and Baraka drew a clear distinction between the two surreal brands: European (Western) Surrealism and Afro-Surreal Expressionism, explaining that the latter instead of being abstract, diffuse, and incongruous was more of a sample of “lived life” and history.

It is easy, even tempting, to conflate Afro-Surreal Expressionism and Afrosurrealism with the Western tradition of Surrealism, but they are not analogous, nor interchangeable. The latter appeared in Europe in the first half of the twentieth century and was established when the French poet André Breton published the first *Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924). European Surrealism was concerned with the subconscious and psychoanalysis and eschewed all forms of rationalism (Hoffmann, 1948: 150) in favor of «the taste for things extravagant» (Breton, 1924: 16). Surrealism protested conventions and traditionalism (Gauss, 1943: 37), blending reality and dreams to give birth to an «absolute reality, a *surreality*» (Breton, 1924: 14 emphasis in original). The surrealists were overly critical of injustice and scorned colonization.

Afro-Surreal Expressionism was rooted in experience and emerged as an offshoot of black artistic production. It was concerned with the history of blackness, the legacy of slavery, with «our real lives in actual society, as unbelievably complex and dialectical as they are» (Baraka, 1988: 165). Baraka was speaking of the kind of art being made in the diaspora and particularly in America, but before him, the Senegalese poet Léopold Sédar Senghor (1906-2001) outlined the key differences between African Surrealism and its European equivalent. According to Senghor, European Surrealism was «empirical», whereas the African branch was «mystical and metaphysical (Bâ, 1973: 65), reliant on the sensible world and the «powers of observation» (Bâ, 1973: 150). Likewise, Afrosurrealism has often been conflated with Afrofuturism, an artistic genre that shares similar ideas and goals. However, Afrofuturism is less concerned with the possibilities in the present of our world. Afrofuturistic art is akin to works of what has traditionally been called sci-fi. It is fantastic, «tech-heavy» (Womack, 2013: 171), and less occupied with reality. Nevertheless, both genres, as components of an artistic production of revolutionary characteristics, aspire to dismantle the structures of white supremacy.

Afrosurrealism shares similarities with Afropessimism, Fran B. Wilderson's «metatheory» (2020, 14), which hints at the conflicting ontology of blackness and its problematic construction as both opposed and elemental to humanity. Afropessimism details the shameful paradox of a world where «black death is necessary for the material and psychic life of the human species (Williams, 2020). Wilderson suggests that «Black people are integral to human society but at all times and in all places excluded from it» (Cunningham, 2020). This theory works as an intellectual device to know the past and better understand the present circumstances of black existence. It is in this same sense that it shares the purposes of Afrosurrealism, but the latter relies on the power of the fantastic and the unthought to neutralize the nefarious devices of racial oppression.

Both ideas represent an alternative to the mechanisms of a world that has systematically denied the possibility of black existence (Wilderson, 2020: 49). This is the source of anti-blackness, which in its negation of black life implicitly begets its opposite: the *human*, the *person* (in other words: the non-black). Afrosurrealism defies the logic of anti-blackness by creating a «subplot» (2017: 68), to borrow from Fred Moten. It is an answer to having been «thrown into the story of another's development; and to be thrown into that story as both an interruption of it and its condition of possibility» (Moten, 2017: 68). Afrosurrealism imagines a different reality, one that is relieved of the impediments of «this *visible* world» (Miller, 2009, emphasis mine) and «where struggle is not singularly defined as a condition of oppression» (Quashie, 2021: 5). Afrosurrealists acknowledge the hostility of the past and call out the violence of present times, and then exploit the potential of the absurd to challenge it (qt in Womack, 2013: 169). The same world that Afropessimism forecloses, is the one that Afrosurrealism is tasked with imagining, conceiving «alternate portraits of blackness (Spencer, 2017: 220) and clearing the way for the flourishing of the «*invisible* world striving to manifest» (Miller, 2009, emphasis mine).

### The Afro-surreal universe of *Atlanta*

Donald Glover's *Atlanta* (2016-2022) is a great example of Afrosurrealistic art produced with an Afropessimistic outlook. My work will identify the affective impact of racism on the show, for it treats race as a phenomenon with the capacity to «affect and be affected» (Masumi, ix: 2015) —which means to be resisted. This is exactly what I believe the show intends, to become a device for resistance and critical thought making the presence of the surreal element quite evident —if not constitutive— of said critique.

*Atlanta* is a response to the forces of racist and capitalist oppression and its aim is twofold, it intends to explore the impact of racism from the perspective of the victims

while interrogating the actual meaning of slavery and white supremacy. Slavery refers to the institution. Racism is the ideological apparatus that enabled it in the first place—and survived in its aftermath—. Whiteness, on the other hand, represents the curse, the poisonous residue.

*Atlanta* follows a cast of four main characters: Earn (Donald Glover himself), Alfred (Bryan Tyree Henry), Darius (Lakeith Stanfield), and Van (Zazie Beetz) as they live in the Capital of the State of Georgia. My analysis will concentrate especially, yet not exclusively, on the third season of a total of four, when I think that the plunge into the surreal is more evident and intentional.

The show does not have a specific plot, but rather it follows the everyday life of Earn and his cousin Alfred, the rapper ‘Paper Boy’, as they try to sell his music. Earn has been expelled from Princeton University and is unemployed in the beginning of the show. He also maintains an on-and-off relationship and shares a daughter—Lottie—with Van. The first chapter of the series is very telling of what the show portends. Glover portrays the nation as an absurd milieu where the surreal keeps erupting in the lives of the characters, either through the presence of invisible cars (S1 EP 8), or fantastical creatures (S4 EP 7), but especially in the regular circumstances of the everyday. It is during perfectly normal-looking situations (S1 EP1) when the aura of surrealism transpires.

The show issues a harsh critique of police brutality, picturing it as a systemic and unaddressed problem. Violence seems to be able to find black people anywhere and everywhere because antiblackness is pervasive, so ineludible, and affects and transpires all aspects of the characters’ lives, who as a result subsist in a state of «heightened vulnerability» (Butler, 2004: XI) and endure the conditions of a prolonged crisis. It is their social positioning as black subjects in the sharp white background of American society that intensifies these vulnerabilities. The violence portrayed is not always visible, in fact, it appears to be almost subliminally. It is present in the most mundane things, like in an advertisement for children’s cereal (S1 EP 7), in the seemingly harmless streets of a quiet suburban neighborhood (S1 EP10), and obviously during police custody.

The second episode of the show takes place entirely in a police station where Alfred and Earn are sent after being involved in a shooting. The rest of the detainees there are mostly, if not entirely, black and men. While in custody, Earn has to witness the beating of a man with mental health problems that, according to one of the officers, is «up in here every week», pointing towards the deficiencies of both the American Police and Healthcare systems and to the brutal treatment of minorities by law enforcement. The scene is a stark reference to the preposterous rates of African American detentions. «In 2020 at five times the rate for White adults», according to the Pew Research Center, and speaks to the differences between «“white time in

jail, and colored time”» (qt Sexton, 2011: 4). Earn spends the whole episode in the station. We don't know how much time elapses between his arrival and his release after Van pays for his bail, but the situation of apparent «indefinite detention» he finds himself in accomplishes its dehumanizing purposes (Butler, 2004: 36). This episode denounces the fragility of black existence in America, which unfolds «in desperation» and resembles «interminable, perhaps even incalculable, stalled time» (Sexton, 2011: 4). This is what Christina Sharpe calls «the carceral continuum of black life» (2016: 838). The critique of American law enforcement is made starker when Alfred is detained in Amsterdam during the European tour of 'Paper Boy' (S3 EP 2), and the treatment received during his stay at the Dutch police station resembles what one would expect to get in a hotel.

Glover tinkers with the subliminality of language in this episode, rich in symbolism and meaning. I think it is a subtle, yet telling detail, the fact that the officers at the Dutch police station wear written the word «Politie» on their backs, which means police in Dutch, but bears an uncanny grammatical similarity with the word «polite» in English. This is perhaps one of the scenes that best condenses the Afrosurreal, as well as the Afropessimistic, ethos of the show and bespeaks its political intentions.

However, this does not condone the fact that the characters experience racism in Europe as well. The black subject lives under constant scrutiny, no matter where it goes. In Europe, the type of discrimination they are exposed to is a much more indirect brand of racism than in the United States. The show is adamant in trying to debunk racial stereotypes. *Atlanta* opposes racist categorizations and aims for the dismantling of the white apparatus that wields the «powers of distortion» (Spillers, 1987: 69). Additionally, it acknowledges that these tendencies can be reproduced within the African American community. Patterns of sexist behavior or colorism are issues that pervade and govern all types of human relationships and communities indistinctly.

In *Atlanta* themes of race, class, and gender-identity intersect and are addressed directly as the show makes an effort to interrogate the neoliberal narrative of individual success that is so pervasive in the American imagination, and which, in the end, is only available —and accessible— to a certain segment of the population, that is: to male-identified individuals who are socially and culturally exonerated of the responsibilities and duties that entail ordinary existence.

This form of domestic inequality is enacted in various instances of the show. In episode three of season one, for example, Van and Earn argue about his getting a security job in an office building, which he declines right away, arguing that he has other aspirations; what he means is *higher* aspirations. When Van inquires him directly about it —casting doubt over his dreams of becoming a famous rapper— aware as she is of the constrictions that the world imposes on people, especially on black people, Earn

snaps and retorts by mocking her, creating a space for conflict that, in the end, does not belong to any of them, but that results from the conditions of their environment.

Earn and Van's personal and economic troubles are a minute representation of what Laurent Berlant calls «systemic crisis or “crisis ordinariness”» (2007: 10), an unrelenting and protracted situation of unremitting duress and strain that is coupled with «the persistence of anti-black violence, abuse, inveterate neglect, and routinized humiliation» (Warren, 2016: 36). As a result of these factors, they are forced to live in what Fred Moten has described as «the natural habitat of the hustle» (2017: 38). Glover addresses the co-optation of blackness by external actors and entities too; its usage as a consumer's product, the reification of black culture and identity, and its reconfiguration into something available, to be purchased or traded, as if blackness was like any other product of corporate America. This is what Saidiya Hartman calls the «fungibility of the commodity» (1997: 7), which blackness represents.

Blackness is given the treatment of object as if it were a product to be exploited and used with nefarious purposes; the new cool thing that the same companies and institutions that perpetrated the colonial plundering try to exploit once again. A good example of this is when Van and Earn attend a Juneteenth celebration hosted by a prominent interracial couple. At the party black history has been deformed and reduced to its most ridiculous parameters, making it seem preposterous and a caricature. The behavior of one of the two hosts, the white one, is particularly unnerving for he tries to demonstrate and educate the characters with his knowledge of black culture, culminating the commodification of black experience, and making Earn (and the spectator) quite uncomfortable.

This scene can be coupled with an episode entirely dedicated to the subject of transracialism, where Glover issues a critique of American racial dynamics via the character of a black man who affirms to be white and having been born in the wrong race, hence deciding to submit to a surgical procedure that will allow him not only «to be a white man, but whatever race he chooses». The act of race-choosing, of dressing up, is precisely what the party's host does: he accommodates his persona to the ways associated with the archetypes of black masculinity; and his conduct, his language, and even his demeanor resemble that of the stereotypical image of a black man.

The show refers to instances when race is treated as a costume, a performative act, something achievable: another asset. This performance of blackness suggests the appropriation by neoliberal elites of black identity and culture, which is a repetitive theme of the show, especially when it comes to cultural industries like music and fashion.

At the end of the episode, Earn tells Van that the thing they are experiencing «isn't real life», making the spectator ponder, for the first time, about the authenticity of the reality on display, which is a constitutive feature of Afrosurrealism, and suggesting

that reality, for black people, is somewhere else but not here, in the world. At the same time, this is one of the most direct and blatant affective responses to racist behavior that appears in the show, perhaps it is more glaring due to the fact that it unfolds in what appears to be slow motion, after a slow trickle of microaggressions to which the subject (Earn) reacts with rage and indignation, a kind of negative affective response that classifies as a bad feeling, which are «the negative affects that read the predicaments posed by a general state of obstructed agency with respect to other human actors or to the social as such» (Ngai, 2005: 3). Earn has time to study the situation and analyze how his cultural identity as a whole is being used for ornate purposes. Hence, the affective (and logical) reaction to it.

However, this is not the only moment where we see the negative emotional impact of racism throughout the show. Racism is a white noise always percolating in the background. The affective dimension of race is borne in Earn's character and personality. All that we know about his previous life is that he had to leave Princeton, but it is not until the end of season four that we discover that he was expelled based on a false accusation rooted in racial bigotry when he is falsely accused of harassing a fellow student that depicts him as a violent black man.

One of Earn's main features is his constant spite for everything around him. The apathy that he conveys. His relentless resignation, as if the effort of living was too much to bear. Earn suffers from an acute case of slow death caused by the trickle of «slow violence» (Nixon, 2011: 2) stemming from the toxic fluids of systemic discrimination. Racism is «a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales» (Nixon, 2011: 2). Racial slow violence is constant and causes the physical and emotional erosion of a population exposed to long-term stressors. In Earn's particular case, it results from the conditions of his living as a black man in America.

### The Affective Dimension of Racism: Absurdity and Sustenance

The absurd is a potent tool against injustice, and Afropessimism exploits it as a way of confronting racism. In the particular case of this TV show, absurdity is persistently present and captured as a result of the all-encompassing climate of antiblackness in The United States (Sharpe, 2016: 104), where black life comes across as ridiculous for its mere impossibility and the power and privileged position of whiteness become risible.

Even though *Atlanta's* climate is generally antiblack, the show tries to imagine alternative environments, or a micro-climate, so to speak, where black people can

exist. One of the many ways the show achieves this is by trying to appropriate white symbology and white spaces; even white bodies. In chapter seven of season one, the fictional black TV channel called *Black American Network* runs the above mentioned news segment on transracialism, mirroring in this manner the historical dispossession and appropriation of black bodies by white bodies, but also dismantling the construct of race. In season three we see the contrary phenomenon happening: it is the identity of a white kid that is seized by the customs and behavior of his Trinidadian babysitter. In this case, the appropriation reads as a revenge, as some form of poetic justice where the historically dispossessed get to subvert the impact of the crimes perpetrated against them by infiltrating white culture, and in this particular case the white nuclear family, changing it from within.

One of the goals of the show is to «interrogate “the curse of whiteness”» (Muhammad, 2022) by emphasizing the vicious nature of racism as a form of violence that goes both ways, affecting both victim and perpetrator. The first episode of season three is perhaps the best example of this phenomenon, it opens with an eerie conversation between a white and a black man and the scene ends with the former metamorphosing into a monster. It is the specter of white supremacy and its presence in the everyday that makes life unbearable.

Apart from Earn, the rest of the characters are emotionally and psychologically injured too. Van, for example, suffers from frequent panic attacks (S3 EP 2) and Darius has a chronic propensity for conspiracy-thinking and paranoia (S1 EP 4), which works both with narrative purposes and as a depiction of the many diseases plaguing the American psyche, so prone to baseless hallucination.

However, Darius's paranoia is all but arbitrary, in fact several historical reasons explain his demeanor and distrust—from the persecutions, lynchings, and massacres the African American population has endured, to the medical experiments that they were subjected to in the name of advancing scientific research (Roberts, 1999: 244). Darius's and Van's responses are manifestations of «accumulated generations of physic damage» (Hull and Smith, 1982: xxx) or, in other words, it is the toll of being black in America: a fear and anxiety that stems from the knowledge that «they are small subjects caught in larger systems extending beyond their comprehension and control» (Ngai, 2005: 299). Perhaps the biggest fallacy is the narrative that claims the overcoming of racism in the United States. Despite the proclamation of the Emancipation Act nearly two centuries ago, on January 1st, 1863, the legacy of slavery and its mechanisms are still alive and well, defining the daily existence of African-Americans. This is what W.E.B Du bois called «the problem of the color line» (2007: 15), a problem that still perdures since it was never addressed in the first place, making emancipation anything but a ruse, «a point of transition between modes of servitude and racial subjection (Hartman, 1997: 6).

*Atlanta* is an Afro-pessimistic show in the way that it intends to highlight the still unfolding trauma that African Americans endure and how they deal with the consequences of racism daily, demonstrating that the dark past of their nation defines their ways of living even today. *Atlanta* adds to the «collective recognition that the time and space of chattel slavery shares essential aspects with the time and space, the violence, of our modern lives» (Wilderson, 2020: 205). Saydiya Hartman compares the historical weight of slavery to a festering wound, and calls it «the history that hurts —the still-unfolding narrative of captivity, dispossession, and domination that engenders the black subject in the Americas (1997: 51). Glover echoes this pain and aims to debunk the fantasy of post-racism which, since the early 2000s, has been promoted in liberal circles and which seemed to reach its peak with the election of Barack Obama as President of the United States in 2008.

The legacy of slavery can't be relegated, it is not a part of the past because it was never really addressed in the first place and, as a result, it is portrayed as the ghost always lurking in the backdrop of any daily activity, it is the poison tainting every interaction; but more important, Glover sees it as the monster that will haunt white people forever.

Season three of *Atlanta* dedicates an entire episode to the theme of reparations, where white people are held accountable by their ancestors' actions, showing how toxic and dangerous racism is for the non-racialized subject and portraying it as a double-edged sword. Reparations is a fraught subject in our present times, and *Atlanta* gives it the treatment of an impossibility due to the hurdles presented by the system, where redress is a complete lunacy, something purely surreal. In the show, justice finally arrives in the form of economic compensation to the black families, but not as ontological recognition for the descendants of the slaves.

## Conclusion

Finally, *Atlanta* confronts the traditional narratives that position black people as the non-human by making whites into the actual monsters of the story. Through the inhuman(e) demeanor of whiteness, blackness is positioned as its polar opposite: the paragon of humanity, a locus of civilization, common sense, and hope. The show is eminently afrosurreal: it ends with an overt allusion to dreams where the fabric of reality is openly questioned, suggesting that the existence of the characters lacks a foundation grounded in material existence. This means that black life needs to be imagined, simulated, and conceived in a realm separate from the one we already know in order to prosper.

*Atlanta's* whole purpose is to remind us that black people have «no nation now but the imagination», to quote a stanza from the poem *The Schooner 'Flight'* by the Saint

Lucian poet Derek Walcott. By contesting its future in this world, *Atlanta's* Afropessimism lays the groundwork to conceive new, alternative realities. This is why Jared Sexton suggests that Afropessimism is in reality black optimism (2011: 37). The show's modern revision of history aims to affect our present positively. It is in *THE RIGHT NOW* where the foundations for the future will be laid, hoping that, in the words of Dionne Brand, «some other time might happen» (Brand and Naimon, 2022).

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*Puentes entre mundos: Nuevas representaciones de la fantasía* es una monografía colectiva acerca de un género que, desde sus orígenes clásicos, y a través de su reinención en el Romanticismo y su canonización en el siglo xx, se ha convertido en uno de los fenómenos culturales más vivos y dinámicos del xxi: la narrativa fantástica. Los autores son una docena de investigadores universitarios del ámbito de los estudios literarios y culturales. El libro está estructurado en un amplio capítulo introductorio y una serie de estudios de caso que profundizan, desde diversas perspectivas teóricas, en aspectos y ejemplos concretos de la fantasía contemporánea. Esta se aborda tanto en su forma estrictamente literaria —sin olvidar sus antecedentes mitológicos— como en otros medios de expresión —cómic, cine, teleseries o videojuegos—. Este enfoque poliédrico permite establecer una visión, si no exhaustiva, sí bastante ajustada del estado actual de un género multiforme cuyos límites no cesan de ensancharse. La amplia curiosidad que la fantasía contemporánea suscita hace que el libro, aun cumpliendo los estándares de rigor de una publicación académica, pueda aportar nuevos puntos de vista a cualquier interesado en la materia.