

HIP HOP, THE WHITE ENTHUSIAST AND THE POETICS OF THE MIXBOARD IN ADAM MANSBACH'S *ANGRY BLACK WHITE BOY* (2005)

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Take it to the people (Take it to the stage). Funkadelic,
1976.

1. Adam Mansbach's fiction often portrays Jewish artists or art lovers who raised themselves as avid consumers of jazz or hip hop culture. His 2008 novel, *The End of the Jews*, intertwines the biographies of several white enthusiasts who work and bond with black artists. The novel evokes both the passionate quality of their artistic pursuit and the ethical and political uneasiness caused by their appropriation of a cultural style which they identify as "black". In *The End of the Jews* the lives of these enthusiasts are evoked in the lyrical style of a melancholy *Kunstlerroman* and family saga. One of Mansbach's earlier works, *Angry Black White Boy*¹ portrays another of these fan[atic]s in the wholly different style of a fierce, extravagant satire. Its protagonist and main focalizer, Macon Detornay, is a Jewish middle-class youth, a hip hop fan, a former writer of graffiti, a now-and-again backpack rapper; the young man's inexhaustible rage against enduring racial inequalities in the US, his own racist ancestors and the bland color-blindness of white liberals in the post-civil rights era, fuel the character's furious determination not only to "act black" and "talk black" but to become a heroic "*white nigger in the universe*" (ABWB 1); later on, his righteous rage prompts him to become the charismatic leader of the "Race Traitor" movement, the initiator of a national "Day of Apology" designed to harness the guilt of white liberals and channel it through a cathartic ceremony of atonement.
2. *Angry Black White Boy* is a relentless satire of the protagonist's megalomania and of the ill-regulated, misdirected religious emotion which is aroused in his "Day of Apology". Yet the satirical treatment of enthusiasm as a political passion does not preclude the celebration of enthusiasm as an infectious form of poetic frenzy. I wish to show that *Angry Black White Boy* deserves to be regarded

1 A. Mansbach, *Angry Black White Boy*, 2005.

as a formally ambitious novel in which a poetics of enthusiasm is articulated. A disruptive passion and a dynamic force, the "white nigger's" enthusiasm for hip hop translates into a shifting portrait of the artist as a young fanatic; the art of "going over" or "crossing out", writing graffiti over another one, becomes a paragon which the lyrical prose of the portrait constantly strives to emulate. Another paragon, as this study will argue, is the DJ's art of "sampling". In its attempts to revive the real, charismatic presence of African American artists and political leaders of the 1960s et 1970s by the sampling of their lines, the novel turns into a novelistic mixboard, half-mocking and half-celebrating the relation of hip hop artists to the powerful voices of Civil Rights leaders ghosting their own voices². The final section of the article will explore the influence of canonical literary works such as George Schuyler's *Black No More*³ and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*⁴ in Mansbach's version of "literary hip hop": Ellison's reflections on the inherent theatricality of racial politics, or Schuyler's insistence on the economic forces defining them, have a powerful echo in Mansbach's half-mocking, half-celebratory rendition of "b-boy theatrics".

Enthusiasm and Hero Worship

3. The structure of *Angry Black White Boy* is a contrapuntal one: three textual fragments, written in a credible, autobiographical style are woven into the fabric of an extravagant satire flouting the rules of verisimilitude in every possible way. The three fragments are supposedly taken from Moses Fleetwood Walker's autobiography; they are italicized, which enhances their status as a foreign, or distinct, type of discourse in the novelistic text. The first fragment appears in an introductory position, between the "Prologue" and the beginning of "Book I" (ABWB 7-11); the second one is found at the beginning of "Book II" (115-19) while the third and last one appears at the outset of "Book III" (273-75). The three excerpts record three sequences in an 1889 baseball match in Atlanta; they also tell a tale of racial injustice and paroxysmic violence. The historical Moses Fleetwood Walker was one of the last black players remaining in the national baseball league after

2 The metaphor of the mixboard is explicitly used in Adam Mansbach's manifesto of "lit hop" or "hip hop literature": I like to think of a novel in terms of a mix board. Harry Allen once claimed that Public Enemy's seminal 1988 album *It Takes A Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* was the first rap record to make use of all forty-eight channels: on any given song, layers of musical and vocal samples overlap and abutt each other, swirling in and out of the mix at the glide of a fader. The listener's degree of appreciation for the collage is related (probably directly, possibly inversely, and maybe in some other way) to his or her degree of familiarity with the elements of the collage (Mansbach, "On Lit hop")

3 G. Schuyler, *Black No More*, 1931.

4 R. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 1952.

the Reconstruction period: as baseball became segregated, Walker was forced to put an end to his career in 1889⁵. Emily Ruth Rutter remarks that the historical Walker was submitted to harsh but slow and invisible violence whereas Mansbach's fictive autobiography creates a theatricalized and spectacular version of that formerly invisible, or invisibilized, violence: "[w]hereas Mansbach attributes Walker's exile from the national pastime to an Anson-orchestrated lynch mob, the historical Walker was pushed out by the slow violence of segregationist policies, and Red Donner also seems to be a figment of the novelist's imagination⁶". In the first and second fragments of the autobiography, the Southern spectators of the match are a highly menacing crowd and the character of Cap Anson, a white supremacist who advocated segregationist policies in baseball, is cast in the role of a demonic persecutor who seems to have orchestrated the lynching of the black player. In the final fragment, the crowd of spectators become a lynching mob; Fleet Walker runs for his life and manages to leave Atlanta on a train, thanks to the diversion created by the fictive character of Red Donner, a member of Walker's team who smeared his face with greasepaint and lured the lynch mob into following him:

Eventually, the mob rounded all the Giants up and figured out the truth, and no one had the stomach to kill a white man, even if it was for helping the nigger Fleet Walker escape. The Giants left two bruised and badly beaten but intact, on the next train that came along. Except Red Donner. The mob caught him first of all and didn't check too hard to make sure he was the man they wanted, or maybe they just didn't care. Somebody had a knife, and plenty of others had their fists and work boots, and they stomped him to the ground and sliced him up and left him there to die, leaking blood and greasepaint into the parched Georgia soil. (275)

4. While the first fragment of the "autobiography" sounded like an excerpt from an authentic memoir and even seemed to perform the function of a solemn epigraph conferring authority and credibility on a realistic "race novel", the second and third fragments veer away from the autobiographical style by including scenes that the author could not possibly have witnessed, such as the final dismembering of Red Donner, the heroic white player who blackened up and gave his life for his black teammate. As the pseudo-autobiography unfolds, it increasingly exposes its own artificiality. The implied reader is invited to view it as a mythologization of the historical past,

5 As E. R. Rutter underlines, Moses Fleet Walker is mostly known as the author of a political tract, *Our Home Colony: A Treatise on the Past, Present and Future of the Negro Race in America* (1908) while his baseball history remains largely undocumented ("Reckoning with the Ghost of Fleet Walker In Adam Mansbach's *Angry Black White Boy or, The Miscegenation of Macon Detornay*", 2).

6 *Ibid.*

featuring a hero of tragic proportions whose death at the hands of a frenzied, darkly enthusiastic crowd, reenacts the dismembering of Dionysus by frantic Maenads as well as the sacrifice of a Christ-figure redeeming white America's sinfulness.

5. Inside the main narrative, Fleet Walker's fictive autobiography is referred to as a book which the protagonists have been reading and are passing on to their friends. In the diegesis, it has the status of an inspiring text, a text endowed with a form of illocutionary force, notably for the white descendant of Cap Anson, young Macon Detornay, a white hip hop fan. As the narrative of Red Donner's heroic action crops up at regular intervals in the narrative of Macon Detornay's hip hop "moves," a structural parallel is established between the heroic black face act of Red Donner and the comic blackface act of Macon Detornay: the almost allegorical onomastics of the novel imply that Red Donner "dons" the black mask of a noble tragic scapegoat, while Macon Detornay merely usurps and arguably misuses the black mask of the rapper's persona, as the pun on the French "détourner" suggests. The contrapuntal structure of the novel unveils the typology that is secretly at work in the young enthusiast's repudiation of his white self: "acting and talking black" is an attempted re-enactment of the mythical sacrifice enacted by the Christ-like, Dionysus-like hero.

A portrait of the artist as a young graffiti writer

6. The hip hop fan's enthusiasm is thus defined as the narcissistic elation caused by a self-aggrandizing mythology: interestingly, this particular myth, that of the virtuous white scapegoat, involves the symbolic erasure of the hero's white identity and the literal erasure of his very existence. Accordingly, the portrait of the white hip hop enthusiast conveys the ecstatic, masochistic bliss accompanying self-erasing gestures. Graffiti writing is imagined as the simultaneous inscription and scratching of one's name: "Tagged other graffiti writers' blackbooks and wondered what it would take to be scratched from the devil list for good" (17). Writing one's tag on a blackbook (a graffiti writer's sketchbook) and erasing it from the white book of white devils are imagined as two simultaneous acts of scriptural magic. Later, as Macon flaunts to his black friends a tattoo proving his fanatical dedication to the cause of racial justice, he unveils a script related to black history on his white skin:

He gave on speaking and pushed the left sleeve of his T-shirt to his shoulder. Tattooed on Macon's

biceps in small green characters was 4-29-92. It was the day the verdict had been handed down, the day Los Angeles had burned. Andre and Dominique peered in to read it, then looked up at Macon.

"A Jewish kid with numbers tatoed on his arm," said Andre blankly, taking the beer Nique passed on him. "Now I've seen it all." (48)

Andre's comically "blank" remark points out that tattooed numbers on a Jewish man's skin are expected to be reminders of the persecution of the Jews rather than reminders of the oppression of Black Americans: a script is conspicuously absent and another script is replacing it, "crossing it out". The trope of "going over" someone else's graffiti, or "crossing him out" is a structuring metaphor in the portrait of the young fanatic who crosses out pre-existing definitions of his racial identity and is perpetually writing himself into a black man. Like tagging, self-definition is an endlessly renewed process and an end in itself. Like "bombing", the act involves destructiveness as well as a beautifying process. Macon's chosen moniker, "EASEL", renames objects in a magical way: "'Why Easel? / 'Good letters for bombing. Plus, whatever you write Easel on becomes one" (150). Imagined as the perfect performative speech act, Macon's tag renames the objects upon which it is written, effectively erasing the former function of the object, just as the inscription "4-29-92" on Macon's skin effectively transformed the Jewish boy's skin into a page from a "black history book". The white enthusiast's identity is a process in which a sign is constantly being substituted for another sign: be it a written sign, when a signature is replaced by a tag, or an iconic sign, when video-clips are said to replace family pictures in Macon's rap poem:

when i reminisce
 it's video clips
 as baby pics (76)

7. Interestingly, although Macon's "black talk" and a "black act" are presented as imitations of characters featured in video-clips or films, the notion that Macon is nothing but the counterfeited version of a fictional model is not sufficient to make him a usurper figure. Indeed, Mansbach's novel is suffused with the postmodern notion that all identity, black and white alike, is shaped through the imitation of some pre-existing fiction and that the invention of a personal *style* is paradoxically bound up with the imitation of pre-existing fictional models, as Mansbach himself has underlined in his praise and illustration of literary hip hop:

Self-awareness—the oft-lamented paralyzing postmodern condition of *knowing* that one is producing art, *knowing* that it's all been said and done before, fearing that in forging ahead you risk redundancy, irrelevance, pretension—has not produced paralysis in hip hoppers. Perhaps our immunity from this generational malaise stems from hip hop's love of collaging, sampling, dislocating and reconfiguring: the more that's been said and done already, the more we have to play with. Where others see defeat, we find liberation, empowerment⁷.

For instance, the process of Macon's initiation into the doctrines and rules of the Five Percenters⁸ takes place through endless chaotic conversations with his black roommates, recalling the script of a "degenerate sitcom" (14). At first, the imitation by white Macon of models of black masculinity seems to be mocked as the counterfeited copy of a pre-existing fictional figure:

Macon had learned the most from Jihad, the big-entrance making uninvited drop-in neighbor the audience loved: a Newport-smoking, monologue-spitting herbologist with matching Nikes for every rugby shirt he owned and a penchant for talking the esoteric God Body Science of the Five Percenters from one mouth corner and hustle-ego-watch-me as unfiltered as New York tap water out of the other. (15)

8. When the drug-dealing teacher known as Jihad is ushered into the scene as the copy of a pre-existing sitcom stereotype, "the big-entrance making uninvited drop-in neighbour the audience loved," the doctrine of the Five Percenters seems to be viewed with considerable irony; the analogy between the profusion of branded items in his wardrobe and the profusion of recognizable phrases in his vocabulary is stressed by the parallel in the syntax: "with matching Nikes for every rugby shirt and a penchant for talking the esoteric God Body Science". Yet, the effect of this comedic portrayal is not *entirely* ironic: something of Macon's enthusiasm for the Five percenters' doctrine is even communicated to the reader through the textual imitation of a rapper's accumulative yet highly structured sentences. The characterization of the righteous teacher as an egomaniac does not entirely undermine his authority as a speaker and even suggests the charming energy with which his speech is suffused. The nominalised use of "watch me" in the hyphenated compound "hustle-ego-watch me" creates a *stylish* echo of the boastful character's speech and its penchant for word accumulation; the internal rhyme between "unfiltered" and "water," combined with the jaunty rhythm of the trochaic trimeter (**hust-le e-go watch** me), brings out the potential elegance of street

7 A. Mansbach, "On lit hop." <http://www.adammansbach.com/other/onlithop.html>. Accessed 12 December 2017.

8 A splinter group from the Nation of Islam, founded in 1964. Its theology is based on the deification of the black man as personified God and on the notion that 85% have no form of self-awareness, while 10% teach a lie for their own personal benefit, another 10% is composed of religious leaders teaching that God is an incorporeal being, while the remaining Five Percent are "Poor Righteous Teachers" defined by their own enlightenment and their desire to teach others, notably through their use of numerology.

talk, while the simile "as unfiltered as New York tap water" mimics its verbal inventivity. "Unfiltered" is a syllepsis referring both to the literally unfiltered New York tap water and to sentences that have not gone through the metaphorical filter of a sufficiently powerful superego: literary hip hop is playing an ambiguous game, simultaneously satirizing the Five Percenters' verbosity and celebrating their rhythm, rhymes and wordplay through a mimetic display of colloquial virtuosity. With respects to most elements in hip hop culture, Mansbach's literary hip hop remains ambiguously poised between a critical, ironic stance and an enthusiastic tribute to the formal inventivity of hip hop culture. In another passage, when the stream of consciousness technique reveals the character's childish fantasies of unrivaled virtuosity and absolute power, the text is both filled with ironic distance and suffused with the energy of a rapper's rhyme.

Hip hop's a superpower worn incognito by cats like me, who move with the venom of every rhyme ever spit, cleave courses with the cold-fusion speed-of-sound precision of every turntable cut scratch slice transform and crossfade, and think with the dexterity of every theatric unsolved b-boy battle tactic, from show-stop uprocks down to linoleum headspins and impossible whirling-dervish cardboard axis chiropractics. (103)

9. The long sentence sets up the memorable frame of an enumerative structure (who move..., cleave..., and think...) and in that simple frame, conjures up the dynamic pictures of complex, virtuosic moves, through its bold accumulation of noun phrases used in adjectival position ("cold-fusion speed-of-sound precision" (...) "whirling-dervish cardboard axis chiropractics") or through its equally daring accumulation of verbs used in nominal position ("every turntable scratch slice transform and crossfade). The continuous, hammering effect of alliteration (cleave, course, cold/ b-boy battle) is combined with the strong internal rhymes that make hip hop distinctive in contemporary poetry (fusion/precision, theatric/tactic). The metaphorical "venom" spit from the rapper's mouth, or the metaphor of the drug-induced hallucination ("cardboard" axis chiropractics likening the b-boy's headspin to a LSD induced vision), render the potentially dangerous state of intoxication, or poetic enthusiasm, that is being communicated to the audience.

"One Two Fifth and Lenox, right where Malcolm used to Preach"

10. In Book I, Macon commits several robberies which are wrongly attributed to an angry black man. In Book II, after being arrested and released, he becomes a media celebrity and seizes this

opportunity to impersonate another kind of angry black white boy on a larger, televised scale: he begins to pose as a race theorist, a spiritual and political leader. Significantly, the text becomes increasingly studded with unreferenced samples of political songs or speeches dating back to the 1960s and early 1970s. When Macon decides to emulate Malcom X and organize a rally at the corner of 125th street and Lenox Avenue, his sudden inspiration springs from an analogy between the power of "street bombing" (writing graffiti on street walls) and the power of "preaching" in the streets:

Street bombing, Macon mused, clouds drifting through his mind. The medium is the message...
Clouds massing, growing darker. Take it to the people. Flash. Thunderclap. Brainstorm.

He flipped open Nique's cell phone and called home. Andre picked up and Macon told him to get the word out: Nueva York's favorite alleged criminal slash race theorist slash now-and-again poet will be giving a free public reading tonight on some ol'grass roots rock the boulevard shit.

(...)

I'm feeling you, Moves. Some underground messiah shit. We'll hook it up so only the media and the truly down⁹ will be there. I'll do some real selective publicity, hold it to like a hundred heads. NYU, Columbia, a couple little hip hop activist chat room...

Hell yeah. Have cats standing in the pouring rain to hear you. Where you want to do this?'

'One Two Fifth and Lenox, right where Malcolm used to preach.'

'Perfect.' (155-56)

"Take it to the people", the sentence preceding Macon's sudden and brilliant idea (his "brainstorm") is a truncated quote from a 1975 Funkadelic song:

Everything is there when you're living in the city

Everything is there in a war

Everything is there in love

Everything is there on stage

Let's take it to the people

9 The truly down (with it): those who are truly part of the group, or the action.

Ah, let's take it to the people (let's take it to the stage!)¹⁰.

11. In fact, "Take it to the people" contains a twofold allusion: it alludes both to the Funkadelic song and to its sampling by A Tribe Called Quest in 1991. It can be argued that the novel revitalizes the stream of consciousness technique by making Macon Detornay's subjectivity a metaphorical mixboard: the flow of Detornay's thoughts is a mixture of sampling and rewriting. In this passage, his mind is sampling a song and then a text: "Let's take it to the people" ("Take it to the People") and Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media* ("The medium is the message."). Similarly in the dialogue, he samples the title of Gil Scott-Heron's 1970 revolutionary song-poem "Small Talk on 125th and Lenox" as so many rap songs did before him. This is an illustration of Mansbach's frequent use of sampling as a compositional and character-building device whose rapid accretion of very brief unsourced textual fragments is well-suited to the representation of quick decision-making, of sudden flights of inspiration, of rapid bifurcations in the character's arc. As Mansbach wrote in his manifesto essay,

Sampling is more than an authorial technique in [his] work. It is also a way to reveal character, and map a novel's worldview: because *ABWB* is populated by hip hoppers, conversations and actions are studded with a range of references and echoes, flips and homages¹¹.

12. Indeed, the sampled line, "Take it to the people", is not only an element in the flow of the protagonist's stream of consciousness, but also a triggering element pushing him into action: in that sense, the sampled line is evidence that pre-existing texts are not inert material for the mind to seize upon, but rather dynamic elements shaping the thought process, inspiring characters into action, taking possession of them. In "Clouds massing, growing darker. Take it to the people. Flash. Thunderclap. Brainstorm," the word "brainstorm" is a comic book paronomasia of "rainstorm", suggesting lightning-speed decision-making and the analogy between Macon's brilliant idea and an epileptic fit, a seizure, a version of poetic enthusiasm in which another person's line is taking control of your thoughts.
13. Another implication of the poetics of the mixboard is the twice-removed quality of the voices of charismatic leaders such as Malcom X, who seems to become more ghostly, without losing his authority or power. It is noteworthy that Macon is posing as a Malcom X figure when he calls for "reparations" on the part of white Americans, as Malcom X famously did. Yet Macon is not only quoting the "original" Malcolm X but also alluding to speeches that have already been

10 "Let's Take it to the People." *Tales of Kidd Funkadelic*, 1975.

11 A. Mansbach, "On lit hop." <http://www.adammansbach.com/other/onlithop.html>. Accessed 12 December 2017.

abundantly sampled in rap albums, such as his "Message to the Grassroots" speech¹², famously used in Public Enemy's "Bring the Noise"(1988). In selecting the intersection of "125th and Lenox" as the Harlem location where he is to launch his national "Day of Apology", Macon is not only walking in the steps of the original Malcom X but also sampling the 1970 song by Gil Scott-Heron song and thus alluding to the illocutionary force of Scott-Heron's revolutionary poem as well as to the illocutionary force of Malcolm X's own preaching. In this analysis of this particular passage, we have seen that the text is not merely a satire of the "white nigger's" hubris. It is also a playful imitation of the attempts made in hip hop songs at reviving the illocutionary force of political speeches or poems of the 1960s and 1970s by sampling them, in an almost magical attempt at transferring some of the enthusiastic energy of the Civil Rights movement to the Post-Civil Rights era.

The Ill-Guided Enthusiast

14. I would argue that the actual target of Mansbach's satire is not the kind of enthusiasm that leads to cultural appropriation and fantasies of reverse racial passing. The novel seems to target another type of enthusiasm: the misdirected religious fervour which is at play in Macon's "Day of Apology" once Macon begins to pose as a spiritual and political leader. Indeed, the second book in the novel follows Detornay's attempt at harnessing an essentially religious kind of enthusiasm, a yearning for a catharsis on the part of guilt-ridden white liberals, in order to redirect this yearning for cathartic closure toward political action, thus materializing another potential signified encapsulated in his name, since the French verb "détourner" can denote the act of re-directing, or mis-directing, a flow. The "Day of Apology" proves to be a mere travesty of political action and even degenerates into a race riot which reinscribes urban boundaries and reinforces inequalities already existing between Midtown and Harlem. The scene of the riot is haunted by the spectral figure of Cap Anson, Macon's racist great-grandfather, a grinning ghost gloating over the political and economic disaster which the white enthusiast has ironically brought upon the heads of African Americans:

The block became a sea of chaos, a human tsunami throwing flames and people.

Cap Anson smirked at Macon and squirted a blast of tobacco juice right at the camera, grinning hands-

12 Malcolm X, "Message to the Grassroots" (Nov. 10, 1963).

on-hips as brown dripped sickly down the lens. He knew who always won these things as well as anybody. (253)

15. As Rutter argues, "Macon's story is emblematic not of a righteous path to ending antiblack racism, but instead a flawed attempt at reparations and reconciliation¹³". Kimberly Chabot Davis stresses that this section of the novel points to some of the risks involved in white alliances with African Americans: "Mansbach suggests that the ideal white ally is not a self-aggrandizing leader who seeks glory in 'heroically' attacking whiteness but rather a foot soldier engaged in daily struggle alongside African American efforts for change, justice, freedom, and opportunity¹⁴".
16. Mansbach's satire of political enthusiasm stresses the rapid, almost whimsical way in which the enthusiastic protagonist moves from one stage to another, performing each one of his successive roles with the same passion and the same lack of long-term commitment. In Book one, Macon impersonates the stereotypical figure of a brutal black thug by robbing the white patrons of his cab and insulting them with racially charged epithets. Like Richard Wright's protagonist in *Native Son*, the protagonist is assimilated with the stereotypical figure of the black brute. But unlike Bigger Thomas who played the part and was sentenced to death, the protagonist plays the part and walks away free: "I was hoping someone would call me the white Bigger Thomas, but nobody had the nutsack even though it is an obvious comparison, what with Bigger being a chauffeur and me a cabbie. I talked a lot more shit than Bigger ever did, though. And I did what I did on purpose. And I got away" (ABWB 2-3). The final syllepsis ("I got away") reminds the reader that Macon is literally getting away from the urban stage where he committed his crime and is also "getting away" with it in the figurative sense. In Book two, Macon goes on to impersonate the figure of a charismatic leader who is reminiscent of Malcolm X. When the rally degenerates into a riot, Macon walks away from the scene again: "Like Malcolm, I expect to be dead before I see these words in print. Naw, let me stop bullshitting. That's a lie. I'm broadcasting live and direct from the getaway ride as the scene of the crime fades away into the speckled past and credit roll" (ABWB 1). In Book three, as Macon thinks that he has been abducted by white supremacists who have recognized him, he is threatened into brutalizing a black man, playing another stereotyped figure again, that of the hypermasculine, racist hillbilly, a role which seems handed down to Macon from the script of *Deliverance*. In the highly episodic structure of the narrative Macon dons a new mask as he is ushered onto a new stage and plays up to a new kind of audience. This type of character-building, predicated on a vision of

13 E. R. Rutter, "Reckoning with the Ghost of Fleet Walker In Adam Mansbach's *Angry Black White Boy or: The Miscegenation of Macon Detornay*", 14.

14 K. C. Davis, *Beyond the White Negro: Empathy and Anti-Racist Reading*, 64-65.

the self as performance, is characteristic of postmodernist writing and poststructuralist definitions of the subject: "The wigger goes poststructuralist. Could be his next term paper" (49). Yet, the episodic composition of *Angry Black White Boy* is a tribute to *Invisible Man* and to Ralph Ellison's staging of the successive encounters between the invisible man and the various social circumstances offering this angry, eloquent speaker a stage and an audience with specific expectations to play up to (clubs, unions, New York City street, the Brotherhood theatres in *Invisible Man*, or radio shows, television shows, printed articles, backpack hip hop scenes and again, New York City streets in *Angry Black White Boy*).

17. Yet whereas Ralph Ellison's invisible man eventually withdrew into a state of hibernation, biding his time and waiting for the right set of historical circumstances to take effective action to further racial justice, Mansbach's text strikes a more pessimistic note as his invisible man eventually performs a vanishing act, takes his leave and defects from the battlefield of race politics for good.
18. Mansbach's satirical vision of political enthusiasm is also indebted to George Schuyler's exposure of economic motives underpinning any form of political organisation. In *Angry Black White Boy*, the "Day of Apology" and its cathartic psychodrama are consistently described as a profitable business venture rather than a legitimate ideological proposition or a valid political strategy. Macon is pointedly nicknamed "The Franchise" by Dominique Lavar, the ex-drug dealer and self-appointed P.R. man of the "Day of Apology", which Lavar advertises and sells to the media as he would sell entertainment or a brand. When the atonement ceremony degenerates into a riot, Macon flees New York City on a bus to Georgia. In Georgia, Dr Conway Donner, noble Red Donner's ignoble descendant, offers Macon to become his associate on yet another business venture: Conway Donner is selling self-help programs based on psychodrama and meant to help solvent customers embrace a more comfortable version of their racial identity. Although the "Day of Apology" and Donner's self-help project are based on conflicting visions of race, they are presented as fundamentally similar in two respects: they are both based on the naive hope of achieving a complete cathartic resolution of racial tensions in the United States; besides, the two projects are both profitable businesses in which the versatile Dominique Lavar, a former drug-dealer, immediately offers to take a stake. All cathartic ceremonies are thus defined as psychotropic, mind-altering substances which Lavar is willing to commodify. It can be argued that the figure of Dr Conway Donner is contemporary counterpart of Dr Crookman, the medical doctor who launches a treatment turning dark-skinned customers into white-skinned citizens in George Schuyler's 1931 satire, *Black No More*. Mansbach's novel, like Schuyler's, tends to adopt a materialistic view of

ideology. From this perspective, any collective enterprise, even one that is advertised as a political or a religious organisation, is likely to be exposed as being primarily a “graft”, a business, a way of converting enthusiastic aspirations into a source of profit. *Angry Black White Boy* resonates with Schuyler's fierce exposure of economic moves masquerading as noble political motives or as spiritual aspirations.

19. Through its ambitious collage of fragments from academic and popular culture, *Angry Black White Boy* endeavours to emulate the creativity of the mixboard and the colloquial energy of rap and thus to preserve, within postmodern writing, the possibility of an im-passioned, lyrical, ecstatic mood, by emulating the supremely im-passioned rhyme of the backpack rap poets, while retaining a critical perspective on enthusiasm when the latter is understood as a political and religious passion.

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