

# A Psychoanalytic Biography of Ye



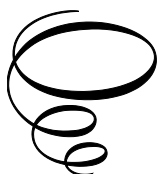
# A Psychoanalytic Biography of Ye:

*The Legacy of Unconditional Love*

By

Robert K. Beshara

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This book is dedicated to the living memories of Raouf Beshara,  
Mahmoud El Lozy, and Thích Nhất Hạnh.

I wrote this tome specifically for Ye, his real friends, and his true fans; and generally for oppressed peoples around the world, who continue—in the spirit of their ancestors—the collective struggle for liberation.

*The nature of my mind is pure  
I wish all beings to be free from suffering  
and all the causes of suffering  
I wish all beings happiness and all the causes of happiness*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments .....	viii
Foreword by Tommy J. Curry .....	ix
Preface .....	xix
The F Word, or Fascism as False Being	
Chapter 1 .....	1
Introduction	
Chapter 2 .....	108
The Aesthetics of Double-Consciousness: A La-Kanyan Analysis of Oppression Through Artivism	
Chapter 3 .....	128
The Pathologization of Black Subjectivity: The Public Misconstruction of Ye's Bipolarity and His Radical Reconstruction	
Chapter 4 .....	142
Make America Great: Ye's Cultural Appropriation of MAGA as an Act of Cultural Resistance	
Chapter 5 .....	155
Conclusion	

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# FOREWORD

## BY TOMMY J. CURRY

### **Mediating Genius: Conceptualizing Kanye West Beyond the Dilemmas of Theory**

Over the last decade, academic scholarship and Hip-Hop Studies have produced a not-insignificant amount of research concerning the impact and aesthetic processes of Kanye West. Julius Bailey's *The Cultural Impact of Kanye West* (2014) and Kirk Graves's *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy* (2014) are perhaps the most authoritative texts on Kanye West's discography as well as the aesthetic and existential impacts his music and activism entail. Despite this research, Ye is far too often, and far too easily, depicted as a man in crisis. His genius is often diminished because of his political outlook and brazen engagement with public ridicule. Because he stands against public opinion, pop culture commentators, academics, and celebrity pundits alike often degrade him.

America has entered an epoch of consciousness where one's ability to think has been suppressed by one's willingness to believe as others do. Perhaps dogma would be the most appropriate way to characterize the abandoning of material reality for mischaracterizations of people, opinions, and politics. The result of the present worldview is that there is little regard for truth, nuance, or even the beauty of the tragedies unfolding within our realities. Our primary mode of social consciousness primarily asserts that it is through the excoriation of others, particularly the excoriation of Black men as a spectacle, which is the apex of popular commentary in the United States.

### **Theorizing Projections**

Ye is a subject of study for intellectuals and laypersons alike. Despite the popular commentators situating Ye as a person in crisis—a crazy person—who is a threat to others in his life and his children, Ye constantly displays himself to the world without regard or fear of these castigating thoughts. He acts in the world as he perceives himself to be regardless of popular opinion or consensus surrounding who he is and

what he is in the mind of others. Kanye West is hated for the audacity he has to act—and project—in the world the kind of being he takes himself to be. Whereas the world and popular media continue to assert that he is crazy and violent, West owns his mental illness and love for his children as primary characteristics of his identity. Trevor Noah, largely projecting onto Kanye West his trauma of having an abusive father, said: “What she’s [Kim Kardashian] going through is terrifying to watch, and it shines a spotlight on what so many women go through when they choose to leave” (D’Zurilla 2022). “What we’re seeing ... is one of the most powerful, one of the richest women in the world, unable to get her ex to stop texting her, to stop chasing after her, to stop harassing her,” according to Noah (D’Zurilla 2022).

West has not been violent, but the world *sees* him as violent, so he *is* violent. His displays of love towards his family and for his children seem to make no impression on the world that is permitted to hate him (Simonds and Wright 2022). Despite the fear Ye allegedly strikes in the heart of Kim Kardashian, she called him crying to explain the hurt and embarrassment she felt when her son Saint saw an ad for her sex tape (Bailey 2022). The man she is afraid of, the man harassing her, the man who is crazy that she cannot escape is also the person she cries to for help and sympathy.

Kanye West is a Black man the world is permitted to publicly hate and intellectually castigate. His bipolarity, rather than garnering sympathy, is used as a way to deem his opinions and activism irrelevant. While I and many other Black scholars disagree with his support for Donald Trump, he is nonetheless correct that the Democratic Party and white liberalism have delivered very few actual benefits to Black Americans. Kanye West became infamous for his criticism of George W. Bush Jr. in 2005 over his inaction toward Black families suffering and dying in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina (Thomas 2015). When West proclaimed, “I hate the way they portray us in the media...If you see a black family, it says they’re looting. If you see a white family, it says they’re searching for food. Those are my people down there ... they’ve [the U.S. military] given permission to go down and shoot us” (Thomas 2015), he was adored by Black academics and white liberals for his criticism of a Republican president.

When West’s opinion was reflective of the liberal democratic consensus expressing dissatisfaction and animus against George Bush, West was accepted as a radical and free thinker, but when he demanded that Black Americans abandon the Democratic Party for its plantation mentality (Parry 2019), he was labeled a sell-out and crazy. The relationship

between public acceptance and critique often mirrors the power white liberals have in directing Black academic and public discourses. West holds extreme and polemical views of social organization. While some of West's ideas are certainly self-serving, his views about Black subjugation and racism are not. West is not a liberal and he is willing to join any political platform that helps Black people.

In short, West does not reflect the academic political schema, which is primarily developed as a strategy for aspiring middle-class Blacks to form partnerships and alliances with the white liberals who are the majority of U.S. universities and colleges. I have previously discussed how "West completely disregards the morality that sustains the academic's loyalty to the pre-approved disciplinary rhetoric used to convey disdain, and the bourgeois lexicon of academic pretense created to criticize oppression and social inequity (Curry 2014a, 127), but Ye poses another set of questions now that not only undermines the political posture and performance of the Black academic class but demands suspicion of their peculiar worldview. The question before us does not become apparent through exegesis of West's artistic production, rather we see the problem of aesthetics (what can be deemed good, beautiful, and true) emerge through a reflection on the crisis produced in how the world struggles to understand Kanye West.

West does not make sense to the world. As a Black man suffering from mental illness and rejecting liberal politics, he is often cast as a monster. West dares to offend Americans and to defy—in the era of cancel culture—the censoring of ideas and perspectives. He is brave enough to be hated and he dares to demand that one love the genius of his artistry while simultaneously despising the artist. It is in this unfathomable position that Kanye West occupies that he generates philosophically and conceptually interesting questions for the American public and the U.S. academic to posit alike. Why is he such a reprehensible figure?

## **On the Internalization of Anti-Black Misandry**

West offends us because he does not need us. His pursuits are egoistic and the external world is merely a medium, a canvas, that he uses for his voice and music to impress himself upon the reality of others. Ye dares to assert that his ideas and artistic creations express genius. Many people inside and outside the academy despise this arrogance. But it is in the proclamations of academics that this personal resentment towards Kanye West is presented to the world as *theory*. Because Ye is not a figure

that is easily assimilated into the minds of many academics, he is often attacked for the caricatures projected upon Black men more generally.

In “Pessimistic Themes in Kanye West’s Necrophobic Aesthetics,” I explained that Kanye West’s “humanity, like his various moments of profundity and ambiguity, are contested categorically as mere pathologies of his Black masculinity. He is castigated as a profit-driven Black man and, as such, condemned for any capitalist pursuits since his desire of wealth is a moral error—the unjustifiable growth of patriarchy” (Curry 2014b, 22). To be a subject worthy of a theoretical standpoint, West is demanded to be less male, less rich, and less successful. Somehow he must be transformed into a poor Black man, part of the working and suffering poor, for bourgeois and middle-class aspiring academics to take him seriously. This demand allows West to be disparaged as a Black man simply because the groups deemed to be progressive (liberals, feminists, Black progressives) reject the kind of figure he is and more importantly the kind of figure these classes are willing to valorize.

As racism modernized in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, there was an ideological evolution from the genetic idea of Black inferiority towards the identification of Black men and boys with the super-predator ideation that sustained much of the Clinton administration’s crime bill. The mid-1990s saw the birth of a symbological relationship between the super-predator and the everyday Black male occupying urban cities and walking among us. This creation, the Black Frankenstein, created in the bowels of urban poverty and de facto segregation was anti-social and rageful.

In *The Condemnation of Little B*, Elaine Brown (2002) explains the idea of the super-predator was the accumulation of the presumed savagery and deviance of the Black race deposited into Black men and boys. The Black intelligentsia also adopted this representation of the Black male as a social menace. This new racism, as Brown calls it, became *theory*—a well-accepted trope among middle-class aspiring Blacks who considered themselves experts on the Black American condition and allies to the liberal social order that needed to capture and punish urban Black men to keep America safe. Sylvia Wynter (1992) identifies a similar dynamic in her essay, “No Humans Involved.” As the dominant societal ethos of American life, anti-Black racism involves both the targeting of poor Black males who have been criminalized by white society and the abandonment of those young Black men and boys by the Black middle-class, who seek distance from their wretchedness and separation from the kind of Blackness Black males inhabit.

Throughout Black philosophy and various phenomenological and existential accounts of Black subjectivity, there has been an appeal to the

now-famous quotation of W. E. B. Du Bois concerning the problem of double consciousness that plagues the Negro. This double consciousness is thought to be an endemic feature of Black life in America, yet in the 21<sup>st</sup> century we are not dealing solely with the exclusive experience of a Black American denigrated by the segregationist logic of a white/Black world. Today, Black people are confronted by a unified imposition by the white world, and a Black bourgeoisie class, that insists that:

My duality of consciousness is the psycho-physical dynamic spanning the socio-physical gap between my own sense of me and the culturally contrived ignominy surrounding my body. This spanning of the social gap is achieved by internalizing that contradiction and suffering it as an integral structure of my own character. (Slaughter 1977, 304)

This double consciousness is a product of the social world that asserts the negation of one's character to be axiomatic, a necessary principle of social life. Consequently, the Black male is forced to internalize the negativity of his being as the requisite for his social self. This internalization of anti-Black misogyny—or the negating categories imposed on Black males to justify their murder, social isolation, and sanctioning—manifests itself as a persistent struggle against the force the white world exerts on Black people, dictating to them how they ought to think about themselves. Slaughter (1977) adds:

Between me and the surrounding world there exists a split of which by lopsided social contract, my body is the symbol. Blackness embodies the ostracised. Under the duress of racial domination, I undergo the now familiar two-pronged process of externally imposed inferiorization and subsequent internalization of that inferiority. It is thus probable that in my routine state, I carry White hatred of me within me as my own property. (304)

This duality is not only expressed as the irreconcilable tension between the world that hates the Black self and the Black self which strives to find love in-itself and for-itself, but also in how the Black self must struggle to overcome the consciousness of itself as wretched, which the white world constantly seeks to impose. This sociogenic reality (Fanon 2008), or the sociogenetic principle as Sylvia Wynter (2001) names it, corrupts the Black mind because the consciousness one develops is based in the assimilation of the consciousness the white world constructs for itself to the detriment of Black people. The external white world intends to be interiorized throughout the Black mind. For Kanye West, this is articulated as the demand for him to reject himself as a Black man and to

retreat into a posture aimed at arresting the fear and hatred the outside world has of him. His rejection of the world is simultaneously a rejection of the consciousness the world has of him and asks him to internalize as the basis of his reality.

## **A Deeply Meaningful Reflection on a Black Man's Life as Complex and Tragic, but Full of Love**

Beshara's *A Psychoanalytic Biography of Ye: The Legacy of Unconditional Love* is a daring investigation into the life events that have come to shape the worldview of Ye. Beshara's reflection on the life and symbolic world of West is done with exceptional care and attention to detail. It reads as a careful testament to the nuance and complexities of a human being that is too often denied and over-determined by the misandric misrepresentations of his life, lyrics, and love. The radicality of Beshara's text is that it dares to confront academics with the hypocrisy of their constructs and lens. By insisting that one understand Kanye West, not through the provocation of his politics or corporatist dreams, but an ever-expanding purview of love, Beshara disarms the primary polemic of academic critics.

It is intellectually lazy to dismiss Kanye West as a heretic or conservative because he does not align with the liberal political orientation of the academic. Kanye West is a flawed human being. He has been incorrect and can be fallible on any number of the issues of our day. But being wrong does not make one unsuitable for study or detestable as many intellectual projects insist. Beshara argues that West is more than his misrepresentations or his misapprehensions. In Beshara's reading, West is the product of love and is driven by Christian humanism to care for others and the world writ large. Contrary to the depiction of West as a detached capitalist who is driven primarily by fame and profit, Beshara insists that "Ye's charitable efforts, such as donating two million dollars to the families of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor, outweigh his character flaws and this is precisely my point about his subjectification of the legacy of unconditional love." Throughout Beshara's reading, love becomes a form of consciousness and a way to understand and interpret the world before him. Beshara writes: "The discourse of unconditional love, became so central for him as a singular being, especially while navigating the worlds of music, fame, money, relationships, fashion, and manic depression."

Perhaps one of the most courageous aspects of Beshara's reading of West is in his careful interpretation and analysis of the reality—as it is

experienced by—the manic-depressive. Rather than seeing mental illness as a deficit, Beshara explores the inner dimensions of West’s personality and the consciousness he utilizes to interpret reality. Beshara offers an elaborate account of the manic-depressive schema. He details how the manic-depressive experiences the world, and in the case of Kanye West, how this schema affects how values and relationships hold different meanings. West is not psychotic or detached from reality; he merely experiences the world differently. Beshara explains that

Ye is an alchemist of sorts, for he launched his career by turning a feeling of inadequacy (i.e., being a college dropout) into an artistic masterpiece. This alchemical principle is a central feature of his entire discography. In a sense, Ye’s manic artistic expression overcompensates for any depressive experience of inferiority he may have concerning lack or loss, such as lacking a college degree, losing his mother, being abandoned by his father and his wife, etc.

The affective relationality West has with people and objects, dreams and aspirations, or even how he experiences loss requires a different cognitive map to understand. Beshara shows how the presumptions of normality infect our disciplinary schemes with the presumption that ideas are obvious and causally tied to specific moods or states of mind. A capitalist is selfish and misanthropic, so they must be egoistic or narcissistic. These moods and states of mind are constantly projected upon individuals under investigation, especially individuals that liberal academics hyper-criticize. The mob mentality permitting the crucifixion of West, as little more than a capitalist-aspiring deviant, conveniently ignores that many—if not most—academics are capitalist. Yet these classes of people are exempt from scrutiny. Consequently, academic critique is rooted in the person—the body of the person made into an abstract detestable object—rather than the theory or the problems one should investigate. As a Black man, West is distorted by *theory*. Assembled and disassembled to fit the expectations and narratives of pathology imposed on Black males and conveniently packaged as analysis or *theory* (Curry 2017; 2021).

*A Psychoanalytic Biography of Ye* interrogates the mythological origins of *theory*. Beshara’s text delinks the presumed and almost intuitive interpretations of figures, especially Black men, as deficient and dangerous without regard for their lived experiences or how they come to formulate values and precepts about the world. Academic *theory* is cold; it is detached from the people and figures claimed through theorization. Instead of providing insights about the subject under inquiry, *theory* operates

through an intuitive rendering of most subjects as predetermined rather than as explored. In this sense, an academic *theory* is an apparatus of ideological coherence rather than a tool of study or inquiry. Throughout the text, Beshara motivates the reader to re-evaluate their assumptions about mental illness, Black manhood, and West's relationship with his mother; and to then suspend what is presumed to be the outcome of critique.

Unlike other engagements with Kanye West—by authors such as Jeffrey McCune (2019), who simply links his music to archetypes like the Black church or his collaborations with gospel singers while dislocating the role that Black manhood, mental illness, and death have on how West engages reality—Beshara approaches Kanye West with seriousness and care that tries to understand both how West sees the world and how the world sees him. West's bipolarity is not reduced to a trope for understanding the miscomprehension West has of reality, but rather how reality appears anew and is corrected without the biases of popular ideology and the limitation of public acceptance.

Instead of locating the crux of West's proclamations around "negating craziness" or with the provocation asking listeners to name one genius that is not crazy (Dorn 2017), Beshara delineates the various moods of consciousness and how these temperamental aspects of West's work are reflected in his music, his activism, and his love for others. One's disagreement with Kanye West, or his unlikability, does not mean he should not be properly understood. On the contrary, asserts Beshara, our dislike of Kanye West should not permit him to be used for caricature and deliberate misunderstanding. Beshara's text is a welcome contribution to Hip-Hop Studies, Black Male Studies, philosophy, and aesthetics and a daring assault on the biases and presumptions of the academy that masquerade as *theory*. We have much to learn about our world and time through a study of what our society attempts to impose upon Kanye West.



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## PREFACE

### THE F WORD, OR FASCISM AS FALSE BEING

If *Donda* symbolizes the climax of a tragedy then *Donda 2* signals the beginning of a farce. This book is about the third and final act of the Kanye West tragedy, a five-year period that I call the *Shaky-Ass Years* (2016 - 2021). Kanye West (or Ye)—a difference that I explore—manically called himself “Shakespeare in the flesh” in 2013 during an infamous interview with Sway. Perhaps, he meant Hamlet? In any case, Ye was—but no longer seems to be—aware of the tragic vis-à-vis both his being and his aesthetics. In truth, Ye is both Shakespeare and Hamlet, for he is a tragic character within his own play—more on this theme later. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx (1852/1926) credits Hegel for the idea that history repeats itself, but “the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce.”

Repetition is certainly a central concept throughout my analysis because it has to do with two other ideas: *jouissance* (enjoyment) and trauma. *Jouissance*, as Freud (1920/1961) shows, is paradoxically traumatic because it is beyond the pleasure principle; in other words, it entails pain. But *jouissance* also signifies a symptomatic formation in response to both trauma and anxiety. The artist formerly known as Kanye West is in the business of sublimation. Tragic sublimation, according to Aristotle, is cathartic, or we can say therapeutic, for it involves working through trauma and anxiety in order to transform them alchemically into art. Ye operated in this aesthetic realm of tragic sublimation from 2003 (or 1996, if we are charitable) until 2021. However, in 2022, with the farcical repetition of *Donda* with *Donda 2*, Ye fell from the cathartic paradise of tragedy to the repressive hell of fascism—his purgatory, or particular form of distress, being his struggle with manic depression, which crystallized publicly in 2016 with his nervous breakdown during the Saint Pablo Tour, after Kim Kardashian was kidnapped and robbed in Paris.

It appears that Ye losing the two most important women in his life—Donda and Kim—to death and divorce, respectively, along with being the richest Black American in 2021 had the derealizing effect of undoing his fragile tragic self, which was then replaced with its farcical

equivalent: fascism as false being. This fall from grace highlights the farcical nature of racial capitalism itself, which upended Ye from his Black radical roots and swallowed him inside the black hole of bourgeois culture with its infinite gravity of white supremacy. As an antifascist, who is dedicated to psychoanalysis and who recognizes the therapeutic value of tragic aesthetics, my wager is on the unconscious thought of Ye as a manic-depressive subject working through the final act of a tragedy known as Kanye West via what I call the legacy of unconditional love—an ancestral dimension, which can be qualified as the Other of the Other.

To put it differently, the legacy of unconditional love (the negation of the negation) signifies a non-European, specifically Black Otherness frequently negated by the unconditional hate of the European Other—any Symbolic representative of the modernity/coloniality system, another name for the apparatus of racial capitalism. Therefore, before addressing the final act in the Kanye West tragedy, which is the substance of my analysis, I first must attend to—albeit briefly—a more pressing matter, the elephant in the room (i.e., the F word), or the first act in an unfolding farce tentatively titled *Fascism as False Being*.

In the documentary *Jeen-yuhs*, we see footage of Donda West telling Ye at the beginning of his music career: “The giant looks in the mirror and sees nothing.” Ye is speechless. Donda’s riddle was a lesson on *méconnaissance*, or Imaginary misrecognition. Being a giant, in other words, entails not thinking that one is a giant; conversely, thinking that one is a giant means that one is, in fact, not a giant. To rephrase Lacan, a giant who thinks he is a giant is mad. The mirror reflection is alienating, for it reminds us of our division as subjects between ego and unconscious, and this division will never be resolved through a narcissistic identification with our own image, but resolving contradiction is the fascistic promise of any ideological fantasy of organic wholeness. Is it not curious that in 2018 Ye said that the MAGA hat made him “feel like Superman”? The nothingness, which Donda referred to, is the unconscious potential of solidarity. Ye’s genius, his giantness, is nothing without the support system, his mom and comrades, which facilitated his success. It takes a village to raise a hip-hop superstar, after all. Ye directly acknowledged this proverbial fact when in 2018 he said, “The downfall of Kanye West is directly related to Don C [his former manager] not being around.”

Like Nietzsche, Ye can be framed as a “solitary rebel” or “radical aristocrat” (Losurdo 2002/2021), a “genius” (jeen-yuhs) consumed by the *Übermensch* ideal, which is a protofascist ideological fantasy within the apparatus of racial capitalism. According to Georg Lukács (1952/2021), protofascism is exemplified by irrationalism—a reactionary bourgeois

tendency within modern German philosophy, most represented by Nietzsche's approach, which is opposed to dialectical materialism and historical reason. As a psychoanalytic theorist, I must add that irrationalism does not reside on the side of unconscious reason, which deploys learned ignorance or not-knowing as an ethical position of listening. Rather, irrationalism is a feature of the European modern/colonial ego—an anti-scientific attitude cloaked in the form of rebellious (or paranoiac) knowledge, such as conspiracy 'theories.'

How did Ye go from wearing a "Say no to Nazis new America" t-shirt in 1994 to a "White Lives Matter" long-sleeved shirt in 2022? How can one explain this face-heel turn, to use a phrase from professional wrestling? In other words, why was Ye susceptible to fascism given his radical roots? His susceptibility to fascism is a function of a variety of intersecting factors, the two most significant ones being his bourgeois class position as a capitalist and his psychotic psychical structure as a manic-depressive subject. His growing embrace of conservative values over time correlates with the intensification of his paranoid and delusional symptoms, which are exacerbated by the schizophrenic nature of capitalism itself (Deleuze & Guattari 1972/1983). Perhaps, many of us were not paying attention to the clues all along, such as when Ye said the following in 2008: "I'm Christopher Columbus, y'all just Pilgrims." Why would Ye—a descendant of enslaved Africans—identify with someone whose name is associated with colonization and genocide? If Columbus is Ye's ideal ego (or one of many ideal egos, for the list includes other bourgeois white men, such as Steve Jobs, Walt Disney, Pablo Picasso, etc.), then it is fair to assume that his message is directed at a largely white audience (ego ideal), which is also invested in the capitalist ideal of the *Übermensch* *qua* solitary rebel. Representatives of this capitalist ideal today include megalomaniac figures, such as Donald Trump and Elon Musk, who are associates of Ye.

Being a victim of his own success, the price Ye had to pay in exchange for hip-hop superstardom within the racial capitalist apparatus is negating his true being or his giantness/nothingness: his Black radicalism (i.e., the legacy of unconditional love). In other words, the reactionary price for being bourgeois is both anti-Blackness and anti-radicalism, for these contradictions are baked into the apparatus; however, we must also consider the amplifying effect of becoming bourgeois while being manic-depressive: Ye has been accumulating wealth as his depressed ego is being hyper-inflated and in the context of his internalization of racist stereotypes in U.S. culture about working-class and distressed Black subjects, which

eventually led to his reactionary (and regressive) turn to white supremacy, anti-Semitism, Christian nationalism, conservatism, etc.

Robert Prince (2023) asserts that there is indeed a correlation between fascism and psychosis, particularly delusional and paranoid symptoms. For instance, “up to 20% of Republicans believe QAnon conspiracy theories, even though they were likely fabricated by an Internet pornographer and a right-winger blogger” (80). Prince adds, “It is the paranoid style of thinking that is most pathognomonic of fascism.” He continues, “Paranoid thinking is replete with fixed and preoccupying expectations; it results in the repeated search for confirmation and cannot be persuaded to abandon entrenched suspicions” (80). The fascist paranoically projects his/her thoughts by imposing their internal reality on outer reality, which is “catastrophic” on a large group scale, such as when Ye tweeted: “I’m going death con 3 On JEWISH PEOPLE” (emphasis in original). Ye, of course, meant to write DEFCON 3 (an alert state used by the U.S. Armed Forces), but instead performed a parapraxis, which reveals a death-driven unconscious desire to “burn everything” including himself because he “just can’t change,” as he says on his feature with Sean Leon. However, we must not minimize the significance of the anti-Semitic form of Ye’s paranoid tweet, even if its substance says more about his unconscious desire for self-destruction. In conclusion, Prince writes, “the paranoid style is the template for fascist thinking, and given that projection is an interpersonal process, the location of the fascist mind-set is located somewhere in the in-between space” (81).

This is the Faustian bargain of racial capitalism: in exchange for fame and wealth, Ye had to give up his radical soul, his unconscious reason—the false being, which remains is farcical, irrational, delusional, and paranoid, that is, fascist. In sum, Ye’s foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father through dropping part of his given name and his entire last name does not signify parricide or the murder of the father, for if we think of Ray West as a former Black Panther, then what is, in fact, being foreclosed is antifascist potentiality: the band of brothers’ revolutionary solidarity.

## **What is Fascism?**

Mark Neocleous (1997) writes:

Fascism is first and foremost an ideology generated by modern industrial capitalism. As a system it is the negative potential—that is, the potential for human destruction—implicit in the nature of modernity and capitalism, and which confronts head-on the positive potential for human

emancipation. The crux of this confrontation...is the politics of mass society. (xi)

Neocleous continues that fascism “is a politics implicit in modern capitalism, involving mass mobilization for nationalist and counter-revolutionary aims, militarized activism and a drive for an elitist, authoritarian and repressive state apparatus, articulated through a nebulous vitalist philosophy of nature and the will” (xi). In other words, fascism mobilizes the masses in reactionary opposition to internationalism and socialist revolution—that is, against the workers of the world. The force of fascism is the death drive, which, as I argue throughout the book following Freud, is on the side of the ego; hence, the fascist fantasy of domination: the triumph of the will.

Desire is the will’s opponent and operates according to unconscious reason—that is, the reason of the Other. Therefore, the enemy of fascism is the Other, who is often encountered as the Unconscious. The dimension of the Other is Eros, which implies *a politics of Real difference*, for it involves comradeship around utopian projects (e.g., the commons) that would be collectively desired and enjoyed regardless of one’s identity or class position. Fascism, on the other hand, is premised on *a politics of Imaginary sameness*; hence, the centrality of group identification around some form of bourgeois nationalism, such as Christian nationalism.

The difference between *the fascist mass* and *the antifascist collective* is between *group identification*, which is on the line of the Imaginary (e.g., we are all Christians; therefore, we are the same, and our harmony depends on the annihilation of our non-Christian enemy), and *solidarity*, which is an intersection on the lines of the Symbolic and the Real (e.g., we are not all Christians, but we may desire and enjoy common things). In sum, antifascism is essentially life-driven and radically humanistic in orientation.

Fascism is a reactionary politics of Imaginary sameness because it is premised on condensing difference into hierarchy, which is unrealistic (i.e., ideologically fantasmatic) as a function of being non-dialectical. Fascist strategy is:

a desperate attempt to construct a purely differential hierarchical system of Society by condensing all negativity, all antagonistic tension, in the external figure of the Jew. And the Real cannot be signified not because it is outside, external to the symbolic order, but precisely because it is inherent to it, its internal limit: the Real is the internal stumbling block on account of which the symbolic system can never ‘become itself’, achieve its self-identity. Because of its absolute *immanence* to the symbolic, the Real cannot be positively *signified*; it can only be *shown*,

in a negative gesture, as the inherent failure of symbolization. (Žižek 1997, 278-79, emphasis in original)

Consequently, a radical politics of Real difference, which accounts for the inherent failure of symbolization, is dialectical and non-hierarchical. Fantasy will still play a role in such politics since it is foundational for any social link; however, the problem arises when our fantasies sustain violent and oppressive ideologies (e.g., racial capitalism) as opposed to nonviolent and liberationist praxis.

Neocleous (1997) asserts that fascism is “a form of reactionary modernism” (xi), for it is committed to both modernity (cf. Ben-Ghiat 2001) and “a mythicized [harmonious] past” (60). Fascism is modernist because it embraces technological modernization and relies philosophically on the theories of modernist writers, such as Ernest Jünger, Gottfried Benn, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Ezra Pound, and Wyndham Lewis, who all argue in different ways for the triumph of the will over unconscious reason (i.e., desire). Fascism is reactionary “because it is clearly a movement of the political right” (61). I would add that fascism is also regressive, which accounts for the political significance of psychosexual development; in other words, being reactionary is often a function of regressive fixations, which are sublimated in the death-driven form of fascism through an aestheticization of politics. Whereas all fascists have fixations, not all fixations lead to fascism.

Antifascism, in my view, is a radical form of revolutionary transmodernity, which employs historical reason toward liberationist ends (i.e., an anticapitalist and internationalist utopia) and politicizes aesthetics through a dialectical account of Real difference that is grounded in a mundialized libidinal economy. Fascism is ahistorical or uses instrumental reason: “Obliterating history from all political and social questions, fascism fills the vacuum left with a sanctification of nature and thus that which it takes to be natural: war and the nation” (Neocleous 1997, xi).

Antifascism is revolutionary, as in radical (or libertarian socialist); therefore, anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian. Antifascism is transmodern, as in the best of modernity and its alterity; the collective evaluation of what is ‘best’ in modernity or its alterity is determined based on historical reason, which is progressive and yet nonlinear, for it mirrors the cyclical logic of psychosexual development. As such, the cyclicity of the drives is central to any future progressive politics.

Given our death-driven potential for destruction, we must be mindful of “the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us” (Foucault, as cited in Deleuze & Guattari



1972/1983, xiii). In other words, fascism is not only a socio-historical phenomenon; its danger lies in its psychosomatic possibility within each and every one of us. The superego, as the psychic mechanism that internalizes the functions of external authority, is often fascistic in its aggressive domination over the ego, which, in extreme cases, results in self-destruction: from addictive behaviors to suicide. There is undoubtedly an important place for morality in any culture; however, excessive guilt fuels the death drive.

Ye is a manic-depressive subject in crisis, and fascism (like capitalism) runs on crisis. In my view, psychoanalysis, as a discourse of the unconscious or Otherness, is inherently antifascist. While psychoanalysis can manifest in a conservative or liberal form depending on the interpretation of a given analyst or theorist, the radical potential of the discourse is something that can never be negated. As such, while it is ethical to reflect on the political implications of Ye's associations with fascism, a psychoanalytic reading of his subjectivity opens up antifascist possibilities on the side of his life drive. These antifascist possibilities, for example, are there throughout his aesthetic productions and continue to be a source of divine enjoyment for his shrinking fanbase.

Having said that, as a survivor of child abuse, I take seriously the charges leveled against Ye from a former Yeezy employee, who characterized his "intimidation tactics" (e.g., showing pornographic videos at work) as "reminiscent of an emotional abuser" (as cited in Sullivan & Roundtree 2022). It is also important to bear in mind, when it comes to manic depressive subjects, the documented correlation between a history of childhood trauma and a pattern of abuse (Lee et al. 2014), which can be summed up in the aphorism: *hurt people hurt people*.

Yet a psychoanalytic interpretation does not excuse unethical behavior, it explains it. In other words, Ye's emotional abuse is symptomatic of him being the victim of emotional abuse, and breaking this vicious cycle necessitates interpretation. Without interpretation, we are left with traumatic repetition and death-driven enjoyment—both at the personal and collective levels. The humanistic approach of psychoanalytic interpretation is a delicate methodology, particularly given Ye's fascist turn in 2022 and his influential position as a capitalist. This ethical dilemma speaks to the limitation of psychoanalytic methodology, which is ultimately grounded in the Hippocratic oath. Consequently, some critics may argue that publishing a book about Ye in the aftermath of 2022 is harmful. However, I consciously began this project from the perspective of his mOther—Donda West. If she were still alive today, she would certainly be extremely disappointed at Ye's anti-Semitism and his overall

Christian fascism. Nevertheless, she would not lose sight of his humanity or his radical potential for antifascism. In other words, this text is less about *the death-driven actuality of fascism* and more about *the life-driven potentiality of antifascism*. Therefore, I conceive of my dialectical analysis as a *pharmakon*—the antifascist cure within the poison of fascism.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1980/1987) caution Leftists about the *microfascisms* that plague liberation movements from within: “It’s too easy to be antifascist on the molar level, and not even see the fascist inside you, the fascist you yourself sustain and nourish and cherish with molecules both personal and collective” (215). Paulo Freire (1970/2005) theorized this political aporia as *sub-oppression*, which is the internalization of oppression by the oppressed. In other words, while it is easy to morally condemn Ye on a molar level, it is actually hard to be antifascist on a molecular level, and this is precisely the problem of microfascisms as identified by Deleuze and Guattari, and then Freire.

To put it differently, there is the oppressive ideology of fascism as embraced by many conservatives, but then there is the sub-oppressive materiality of microfascisms that affects liberals and radicals, too. Perhaps, a Derridean may interpret my effort throughout the book as a *deconstruction of Ye’s molar fascism by way of highlighting liberatory aesthetic moments, in the oeuvre of Kanye West, that exemplify a radical potential for molecular antifascism*, which I have theorized in terms of the legacy of unconditional love, since it is an unconscious archaic heritage—a meaning that transcends the singularity of Ye’s being but then results in the non-meaning of his manic-depressive symptoms (e.g., porn addiction). It is difficult to foretell what is to come, Ye may egotistically double down on his molar fascism in a regressive manner, or he may redeem himself by aligning his unconscious with the legacy of unconditional love and forgiveness. While I hope for the latter, I also expect a pendular swing between both positions, particularly if Ye’s bipolar psychic structure continues to intensify and destabilize as a function of a heightened sense of distress. I regard Ye’s psychic bipolarity as a holographic projection of an ever-increasing polarized society. The (w)hole, the Other, is encoded within each part of the holographic unconscious. Or in Lacan’s words: the unconscious is the discourse of the Other.

The U.S. public is not simply polarized, along ideological lines, between Democrats and Republicans; rather, political polarization today revolves around the affirmation or negation of scientific truths and historical knowledge. The Conservative campaign to censor the teaching of Critical Race Theory in public schools, for example, is nothing but a foreclosure of the history of slavery. In other words, the affective

polarization we are witnessing today exhibits psychotic features. Another example is January 6, which was motivated by the delusion that Trump won the 2020 presidential election, or even the anti-vax response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Even so, is there a limit to humanization? Can we, for instance, humanize genocide perpetrators? The quick answer is, of course, an emphatic: no! Ye currently exists in an ambivalent Symbolic space characterized by the failure of symbolization. In other words, we can position him at the Real limit between ethics and law, because while he has not physically hurt anyone, he has caused psychological harm to numerous individuals through various instances of hateful speech and unethical behavior. To put it differently, while he has not committed a crime, he has irresponsibly abused the power of free speech and was reckless with his own authority as both an employer and an influential member of society. Therefore, I perceive his humanization as a theoretical gesture against the path of criminalization with its history and ongoing reality of dehumanization vis-à-vis Black folk. Furthermore, this preface serves as an ethical reminder of holding Ye accountable for his reactionary politics while simultaneously humanizing his subjectivity through an emphasis on his liberatory aesthetics of suffering. This theoretical gesture aligns with the theme of forgiveness at the heart of the book—a theme inspired by the life of Donda West.

The critic's task is to distinguish between *death-driven aestheticized politics* (i.e., the mythic enjoyment of fascism) and *life-driven politicized aesthetics* (i.e., the divine enjoyment of antifascism). In a sense, Ye's singularity (his bipolarity) is a psychic microcosm, or a fractal, of the social world, struggling between two polarities: the death drive (i.e., the negation of the Other) and the life drive (i.e., the negation of the negation). Ye's psychic pendulum is currently tending toward the fascist side of things, but we must be curious as to why a gifted Black man from the South Side of Chicago ended up there. Indeed, we must ethically refuse his ego-driven fascist politics while critiquing the antifascistic potential of his liberatory aesthetics at the unconscious level. The holographic unconscious encodes both the legacy of unconditional hate (i.e., slavery, genocide, colonization, etc.) and the legacy of unconditional love (i.e., freedom, coexistence, decolonization, etc.). However, it is the subject's ethical responsibility to traverse the fundamental fantasy of hate, the death-driven negation of the Other, by subjectifying the cause of their existence: the mOther's desire. As such, this tome is about the desire of the mOther—the potential of liberation theology as opposed to the actuality of Christian fascism.

Fascism relies on Imaginary identification, an ideological realm of smoke and mirrors that screens the Other. When Ye aligns with his unconscious and Otherness (or what I have termed the legacy of unconditional love), he is typically compassionate and creative. This is the Ye who was loved by many for his transgressive liberatory aesthetics and his radical ethics of difference. The Ye, who is now hated by many, is operating from an isolated and paranoid place: the depressed ego. The fascistic impulse is intensified in his case because of how psychically polarizing manic-depression is. Ye's symptoms worsened after losing the two most influential women in his life: Donda West (2007) and Kim Kardashian (2022). As a psychoanalytic theorist, I wish to see a path forward for Ye beyond fascism, but that will require work (or analysis) on his part. We all must wrestle with the fact that in any modern society today, there will always be a mass desire for fascism. Antifascist critics must carefully analyze this mass desire given the molecular nature of microfascisms.

Wilhelm Reich (1933/2013) was the first to theorize this mass desire when he wrote that "fascism is the supreme expression of religious mysticism" (19-20) or that fascism "*is the basic emotional attitude of the suppressed man of our authoritarian machine civilization and its mechanistic-mystical conception of life*" (15, emphasis in original). For Reich, "the mechanistic-mystical character of modern man" produces fascism (15-16). This modern man—and we can keep the sexist language since most fascist icons are men—is a "little man," according to Reich, "who is enslaved and craves authority and is at the same time rebellious" (20). In this sense, fascism is an illusory wish for, or will to, power; illusory because power requires legitimacy (i.e., the Other), hence the authoritarian dimension of fascism (cf. Adorno et al. 1950/2019), which has no place for the Other. Reich's analysis of the suppressed little man sheds light on the melancholia of today's fascists, who often feel 'marginalized' by the proliferation of feminist, socialist, and/or postcolonial discourses critical of 'western' culture, particularly of patriarchy, Christianity, the family, and capitalism.

The mysticism of the fascist ideology is grounded in a mythic fantasy: a return to a harmonious or natural 'greatness.' This mythic fantasy is essentially a regression to the fundamental Oedipal fantasy of being one with the mOther. For Reich, fascist mysticism entails the repression of Eros; hence, why fascist projects tend to be death-driven and premised on the extermination of the Other—of difference. For Christian nationalists, the Other is any non-Christian, but the fantasmatic figure of the conceptual Jew tends to condense Otherness in general, which is how

the antisemite positions the figure of the Jew as the divisive enemy of fascist 'greatness' (read: oneness). Fascism will always fail because the extermination of the Other (or of difference) will never eliminate Otherness (or the unconscious) *per se*.

Hannah Arendt (1951/1973) folds fascism under totalitarianism and thus conflates Nazism with Stalinism. Indeed, both are forms of authoritarianism; however, Slavoj Žižek (2001) argues that fascism and totalitarianism are distinct political phenomena that necessitate different theoretical analyses. Their conflation, according to Žižek, is a liberal error. Žižek writes that the violent purges under Stalinism were more irrational and excessive than Fascism, which signifies "a perverted *authentic* revolution" (128, emphasis in original). In other words, whereas Stalinism is perverse, fascism is paranoiac. This interpretation confirms my earlier point on the psychotic features of the ongoing political polarization of U.S. society. Žižek adds, "the 'irrationality' of Nazism was 'condensed' in anti-Semitism, in its belief in the Jewish Plot; while Stalinist 'irrationality' pervaded the entire social body" (128).

To put it differently, whereas fascism is reactionary in a straightforward manner, totalitarianism is paradoxical, for it signifies "not simply the betrayal of the Revolution" (128). Instead, Stalinism "bears witness to a kind of 'imp of perversity' which compels the post-revolutionary new order to (re)inscribe its betrayal of the Revolution within itself, to 're-mark' it in the guise of arbitrary arrests and killings which threatened all members of the *nomenklatura*" (128-29, emphasis in original). Following Alain Badiou, Žižek (1997) asserts, "Stalinist Communism was inherently related to a truth-event (of the October Revolution), while Fascism was a pseudo-event, a lie in the guise of authenticity" (74).

## What are the Features of a Fascist?

In his essay on "Ur-Fascism," Umberto Eco (1995), reflecting on his experience of growing up in Mussolini's fascist Italy, identifies the central features of fascism, among which are: (1) the cult of tradition, (2) the rejection of modernism, (3) the cult of action for action's sake, (4) disagreement is treason, (5) fear of difference, (6) appeal to social frustration, (7) the obsession with a plot, (8) the enemy is both strong and weak, (9) pacifism is trafficking with the enemy, (10) contempt for the weak, etc.

For Žižek (2001), "Fascism is not characterized simply by a series of features (economic corporatism, populism, xenophobic racism,

militarism, etc.)” (243). What makes these features fascist, according to him, “is their specific articulation into the global Fascist ideological project” (243). But what is this fascist ideological project? In *The Plagues of Fantasies*, Žižek (1997) reveals “the inherent contradiction of the Fascist ideological project which simultaneously advocates a return to pre-modern organicist corporatism and the unheard-of mobilization of all social forces in the service of rapid modernization” (1). According to him, the fundamental fascist fantasy is “the notion of reinscribing scientific drive into the constraints of life-world” (51), which speaks to the reactionary modernism of fascism: its embrace of technology as the instrumental tool for realizing a mythicized harmonious past through death-driven domination.

What of the form of fascism, especially in Christian nationalism? For Žižek, fascism refers directly to the “formal emptiness of the gesture of belonging, to the satisfaction provided by the attachment to the form as such: the message is to obey, to sacrifice oneself for the Cause, without asking why—the content of the Cause is secondary, and ultimately irrelevant” (192). As such, there may be more than two hundred Christian denominations in the world; however, the Christian nationalist is satisfied with the empty forms of Christ, Christian, or Christianity as master-signifiers, for they function as quilting points in the fascist ideology. The outcome of this group identification is mass narcissism and aggressivity, which was acted out recently in the January 6 Capitol attack.

## Is Ye a Fascist?

In my treatise, I situate Ye’s manic-depressive subjectivity within the legacy of unconditional love—an ancestral dimension of psychic inheritance, which Freud (1939) labeled “archaic heritage.” This legacy of revolutionary love (James 2022) transcends Ye, and he can unconsciously desire to align with it or not, which is also a question of what is driving him (life or death?). Ye spoke on InfoWars of his ‘love’ for Hitler, which was even too excessive for right-wing host Alex Jones. Is Ye’s ‘love’ for Hitler an act of unconditional (or revolutionary) love, or is it a reactionary form of “love-bombing”?

In his analysis of Christian nationalism, Chris Hedges (2008) writes about love-bombing as a technique employed by cults, which entails “flattery and feigned affection” (53). Margaret Thaler Singer defines love-bombing, or reactionary love, as “a coordinated effort...that involves...flattery, verbal seduction, affectionate but usually nonsexual touching” (as cited in Hedges 2008, 54). The function of love-bombing is recruitment. But who is the target of this recruitment? Antisemites?