

*Faciality in the Landscape of Dunbar's Sport of the Gods:  
When Forces are Captured the Affects are Becomings*

The face is a central metaphor in Paul Laurence Dunbar's 1902 novel *Sport of the Gods* (*SOTG*); the face dominates the landscape of the novel with almost totem devotion. Characters face the world, find joy, or despair, in the faces of others, are buoyed up in life and dragged down in the gutter by faces. Using the Deleuzian concept of *facialization*, this paper will demonstrate how the facialized landscape unmasks Foucauldian power relations, the process by which characters facialize an unknown world and why endurance is sometimes the only remedy when one is but a participant in the arena of the sport of the gods.

Deleuze (with Guattari, of course) theorizes about *faciality* in *A Thousand Plateaus* (*ATP*). Scholar Tom Conley says of faciality: it "stands at the crossroads of subjectivation and signifiante" (qtd. in Parr 96). Explaining his understanding of faciality, Conley goes on to assert that

subjectivation and signifiante are correlated, respectively, with the *black hole* or unknown area of the face in which the subject invests his or her affective energies (that can range from fear to passion) and with the "white wall," a surface on which signs are projected and from which they rebound or are reflected. Faciality is thus constituted by a system of surfaces and holes. (96)

Deleuze calls the face "a surface: traits, lines, wrinkles; a long, square, triangular face; the face is a map" (*ATP* 170). In essence, the face is a plane, abstracted from the plane of immanence;

a series of layers or strata, the face becomes a landscape when it is abstracted from the world at large and understood as a deterritorialized space or topography. It is a displacement of what a perceiver makes of the milieu and the faces he or she discerns. (Conley qtd. in Parr 97)

The face functions as a percept, a facialized landscape, on which houses are constructed with the affect of becoming recognizable faces with traits, lines, wrinkles, etc.

In *SOTG*, the social relationships of characters are dominated by facialization. When the reader is first introduced to Berry Hamilton, the reader learns that Berry "was one of the many slaves who upon their accession to freedom had not left the South, but had wandered from place to place in their own beloved section, waiting, working, and struggling to rise with its rehabilitated fortunes" (2). On one hand, Berry functions as a surveyor, a seer, of invented facialized landscapes upon his accession to freedom, wandering from town to town in his *own* beloved section of the South. Yes, indeed Berry creates his own world. But, on the other hand, Berry himself is a facialized landscape, at least socially and economically speaking, open and ready for the process of facialization that will further his social and economic rise with the rise of the South. In the effort to ensure the rise in his own fortune, Berry returns to his once master of twenty years, Maurice Oakley, in the role of a servant. And, "when the final upward tendency of [Maurice Oakley] began [Berry's] fortunes had increased in like manner" (2). Facializing the landscape that is Berry, Maurice sees a great deal of himself in Berry's make-up: he even provides a cottage for Berry to live in when Berry marries, for after Maurice marries

he knows Berry “will be following [his] example and taking a wife unto himself” (3). Maurice Oakley aids greatly in ensuring that Berry Hamilton *becomes* black-Maurice Oakley - Oakley provides Berry’s “little servant’s cottage” (2), Berry’s wife is Oakley’s “housekeeper” (1), the trappings of the Hamilton home are “replenished with things handed down from “the house” (3). With regards to most things reflective of one’s inmost thoughts and feeling, - the domestic sphere, occupation, spouse - Maurice Oakley is author, or at least co-author, in writing on the landscape that is Berry Hamilton. Oakley’s facialization of Berry Hamilton results in the affect of Berry becoming “the glorious,” “stern and dignified” servant-reflection of Maurice Oakley. And, rightly so: for the Oakleys are one of the great families of the postbellum South, deserving of servants whose characters reflect that of the family name Oakley.

Oakley’s powerful ability to control forces which so affect the landscape of Berry’s life are of great benefit to Berry as long as Oakley’s intensions are benevolent. But, when money is thought to be robbed from “the house,” a situation of an unknown quality arises. After contemplating who could have stolen the money from the house, an answer regarding whom to suspect as the criminal culprit is unknown- for all of the people that Oakley believes have had access to the money are too steeped in Southern honor to commit theft. Confronting such an unknown landscape - the landscape of the criminal - Oakley first facializes the criminal landscape; then, according to an enmeshment in Southern honor, itself a “strange, ridiculous” (192) thing, Oakley affects Berry becoming criminal. Although loyal to Oakley for years, in the presence of an unsolved crime Oakley quickly deterritorializes Berry as loyalty, as fidelity and reterritorializes Berry as criminality. Onto the facialized landscape that is Berry, Oakley constructs a house affecting Berry becoming criminal.

Swift Rumor, spurred on by hearts filled with “anger” and determined on “revenge” (32) - the Oakleys - and souls “indignantly” jealous of the Berrys - the African American community - and the technology to quickly disseminate information through “the evening papers” (48), facilitated the facialization of the entire Hamilton household - Berry, Fannie, Joe and Kit - as criminal and the offspring of criminal to be “turned away” by the *socius* of the small Virginia town made up of those who would ostracize the newly *encriminaled* from homes both black and white. I suppose that in the world of the Virginia facialized by Dunbar, the curse of Noah is visited upon the children and wife of Ham’s descendants, for while Berry is jailed and sentenced to ten years of hard labor after becoming criminal, Fannie is eventually fired as the Oakley’s housekeeper, Joe loses his job as a barber and Kit’s social interactions with other girls of the African American community of the small Virginia town are enveloped in an air of condescension rarely overtly expressed to members of the black aristocracy. In the effort to escape the terrain where the concept of the family-Hamilton has become something Other (like “some of ‘em” (75) - inferior Negroes of the South), the family seeks to “face the world” (64) and facialize the great unknown world with the affect of becoming New Yorkers. For the free Hamiltons, New York represents a terrain to be facialized as “Heaven,” a place where no one knows their story and swift Rumor has not already facialized the clan as the family of a criminal and inmate of a state penitentiary (75).

Although the Hamiltons will in time discover that “N’ Yawk...ain’t nobody’s old Sunday-school picnic” (177), their initial desire for New York is initiated by strangeness, the unknown: “an arrangement [which] had this advantage, -...no one knew them or

could taunt them with their past trouble” (86). Swift Rumor, vengeful hearts, jealous souls, modern technology - conspiring “circumstances had forced” (88) the Hamiltons to seek out the unknown. An unknown place of relief had to “exist on faith alone,” for they knew of no place of solace in Virginia (77); for the Hamiltons, Virginia had become the “damned hole” (77) that Ellison’s most famous protagonist so very cleverly uses covertly for later overt actions in *Invisible Man*. In the facialized landscape of the world that is family-Hamilton (Fannie, Joe, Kit), New York becomes “the only town on the face of the Earth” (90).

I would like to take a moment to speak on Swift Rumor. In Greek and Roman mythology, there exists a figure Fame (sometimes known as Rumor). This mythological being is the personification of fame and renown; she is most acclaimed for her notability, and feared for the spreading of scandalous rumors. Fame initiates and furthers communication. A tremendous gossip, Fame pries into the affairs of mortals and gods, repeats what she has learned, starting off at first with just a dull whisper, but repeating it louder each time, until everyone knows. In art, she is usually depicted with wings and a trumpet. Fame is described as having multiple tongues, eyes, ears and feathers by Virgil in the *Aeneid*. He describes Fame as moving quickly, especially when alerting those abroad of the abdication of the throne by Idomeneus: “Fame flies abroad that King Idomeneus has been driven to quit his paternal realm” (bk. 3.4). Interestingly, this sounds reminiscent of Berry Hamilton. Geoffrey Chaucer paints a picture of Rumor, complete with blasting trumpets, in *House of Fame*. He describes Fame as “wikke,” “for ther nis/ Nothing so swift, lo, as she is!/ O, sooth is, every thing is wist/ Though hit be covered with mist” (*House of Fame* bk. 3.349-352). Chaucer goes on, writing Fame

Tok out his blakke trumpe of bras,  
That fouler than the devil was,  
And gan this trumpe for to blowe,  
As al the world shulde overthrowe;  
That throughout every regioun,  
Went this foule trumpes soun,  
As swift as pelet out of gone. (3.1636-1643)

Chaucer also mentions Fame in *Troilus and Criseyde*, with perhaps the greatest clarity of Fame’s function in the world: “The swifte Fame, which that false thynges/ Egal reported lik thynges trewe” (*Troilus and Criseyde* bk. 4.659-660). [Swift Rumor, which reports things false and true equally].

Rumor is thought, swift thought, which can deterritorialize a body and reterritorialize it as something Other. In Virgil’s time, Rumor works to affect King Idomeneus becoming exile; In Chaucer’s time, Rumor works to affect things becoming seen through a mist; and, in Dunbar’s time, Rumor works to affect Hamilton-aristocratic becoming Hamilton-criminality. Just as the terrain of bodies are deterritorialized and reterritorialized, so too is thought. Rumor territorializes thought. As do theories on race reflecting the concept of double consciousness, the veil, Southern honor, the one-drop rule and God...yes God. In *SOTG*, Dunbar deterritorializes Du Bois’s concept of double consciousness and substitutes criminality for race before reterritorializing the concept. At a time in American history when slavery has been recently abolished, yet state penitentiaries have arisen to serve such a similar function, I would argue that Dunbar asserts - with such a facialization of Du Bois’s concept - that becoming criminal

functions to work to underdevelop one's inmost thoughts and feelings in a manner similar, if not equal, to the affects of living behind the veil (consider the construction of Parchman Farm). But, more on this later. Let us follow the Hamilton family as they face the landscape of New York.

New York affects the family-Hamilton instantaneously; the process of facialization begins before they even leave Virginia. When envisioning a place to live after the family-Hamilton is evicted by the Oakleys, Kitty asks, "Oh where are we going to live, ma" (*SOTG* 73)? Fannie's response is "Gawd knows...Gawd knows" (73). God does know. Any and all possibilities exist on the surface of His hidden plane of immanence. After God (the infinite, cosmos, universe, unknown Omnipotence) deterritorializes Fannie's thoughts of home-Virginia, home-Virginia is then reterritorialized as a landscape to be mapped out, or discovered, in New York. The move to New York will work to actualize ideas that the family-Hamilton once only held on faith (thought) alone. The journey to New York could also be considered the continuation of the family's journey initially began by Berry Hamilton upon his accession to freedom. He is the first of the Hamilton clan who Dunbar describes as a surveyor of landscapes, a seer.

As soon as the family-Hamilton touches the physical ground of New York City and are housed under a schema, they begin the process of becoming-*real*New York. After securing a place to call home at Mrs. Jones's, under the roof of Mrs. Jones, the schema of Mrs. Jones, Fannie becomes "Mrs. Hamilton" (84). Dunbar writes, in New York she is "Mrs. Hamilton now, almost to the exclusion of Fannie" (84). For the family-Hamilton, New York is a city aflame; while offering to present the landscape of Heaven which they seek, the city can also affect becomings very much undesired when the city collides with souls unsure, unaware and open to the city's most unscrupulous intensities and forces. For the easily to assimilate, "the town [New York] becomes all in all to him" (83). This is very dangerous, for the body in contact with the city comes to understand itself as reflected through the eyes of the city - I guess one could say the gaze of the city. For those, like Joe Hamilton, who will chase the city's seedier elements, "the town becomes...him; until the very streets are his chums and certain buildings and corners are his best friends" (84). Joe is "wild with enthusiasm and with a desire to be a part of all that the metropolis meant" (86-87). And, rightfully so. In Virginia, the results of facialization are demoralizing and damaging to Joe's inmost thoughts and feelings. Joe's "horizon had been very narrow, and he felt angry that it was so" (87). So, Joe is very eager to facialize the terrain of New York; yet, he seems unaware, even after the affects of Swift Rumor, that the city desires to facialize him as well. And the city affects Joe as a "greenhorn," fresh from the fields of the South, ripe for the picking (87). For such a becoming, Joe is ill prepared.

Kit faces New York and *overcodes* the landscape of the city with home-Virginia, with the morality as developed upon the traditions of aristocratic blacks. "There was a sound quality in the girl's make-up that helped her to see through the glamour of mere place and recognize worth for itself" (89); the schema of New York affects Kit with a lesser (read less personally negative) intensity than Joe. Kit seems to understand what Du Bois calls intrinsic value to a degree of more depth than Joe.

Kit will eventually facialize the landscape of New York's Broadway show circuit and eventually towns and cities all over the earth's surface. Her choice of occupation

upon the stage will work to bring down her mother, Mrs. Hamilton, and destroy the woman's conception of her own territory (Mrs. Hamilton's own self-facialized landscape). Mrs. Hamilton "wept and prayed over the change in [Kitty]," the "child of her heart" (130). By becoming "down lak [her] brothah Joe" in the eyes of Mrs. Hamilton, Kit works to destroy the facialized landscape that her mother once surveyed with all her "mother's intuition" (129). After losing her husband to the penitentiary, her son to the streets of New York, and her daughter to the stage, "Dey ain't nothing' lef" for Mrs. Hamilton (141). Kit represents her last hope of continuing the traditions that Mrs. Hamilton once knew, as a member of the family-Hamilton in home-Virginia. Once Kit strikes out for the landscape of the stage, Kit's actions dash such hopes. Mrs. Hamilton "drifted farther away from her children and husband and all the traditions of her life" (131). She will eventually marry Tom Gibson and totally obliterate the landscape of wife-Berry and mother-Kit-mother-Joe. New York rewrites the landscape of the family-Hamilton affecting the family-Hamilton to becoming: Mrs.Hamilton-Mrs. Gibson-bigamy, Joe Hamilton-New York streets and Kit-New York stage.

While characters' facialization of other characters, capturing the reflection of such facialization in the furtherance of surveying their own self-facialized landscape, is a continuous process constantly in flux on the surface of the novel *Sport of the Gods*, no example so vividly paints this process than does Joe Hamilton's relationship with Hattie Sterling.

Both Joe and Hattie seemingly recognize the intrinsic value of the other: although Joe is a member of the black aristocracy, he intuitively discerns worth in Hattie; and, although Joe is a greenhorn to New York, completely foreign to the landscape of Hattie's world, and a member of a society that frequently looks down upon persons like Hattie, Hattie intuitively discerns worth in Joe. Of course, the power dynamic - in a Foucauldian fashion - between the two is wholly out of balance. While Joe is important to Hattie in his function to reflect facialized traits of Hattie onto the "white wall" for all to see that Conley speaks of in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, the intensity of the forces that Hattie captures in the projection of facialized traits of Joe onto the white wall for all to see is much more powerful. Hattie functions in a more powerful manner than does Joe and, as such has a power greater than does Joe with regards to their social interactions (relationship). Nevertheless, Hattie views Joe as someone worth, as a woman, giving "up all [her] chances for" (199). And, Joe finds himself so proud of the reflection that having Hattie on his arm envisions that he "strut[s] around...showing off" (199). However, Hattie eventually facializes Joe as a "miserable, drunken jay, without a jay's decency...[someone] no one had ever looked at until [she] picked [him] up" (199). Hattie created the landscape of Joe "to be put under a glass case and placed on exhibition" (199). No one in New York is interested in Joe, not romantically anyway, until Hattie authorizes him as someone worth the while of the women of the Banner Club and the likes. And, in Hattie's view, Joe repays her for such a facialization by being "[d]runk half the time and half drunk the rest... "loaded"" all the time (199). Ultimately, Hattie's facialization of Joe deterritorializes him as the shining star in Hattie's life; she tells Joe quite plainly, "You're not the only star in sight, see" (199)?

Hattie's deterritorialization of Joe's landscape as shining star and reterritorialization as just one of many stars in the sky affects Joe becoming-"whipped dog...faced...drunken dog" (201). This becoming of Joe is reinforced at the police

station where Joe finds himself after murdering Hattie (a scene Gothic in nature and very similar to Wright's rendition of the murder of Mary Dalton by Bigger in *Native Son*). In the scene Joe is described as despondent, aloof and seeming self-*unaware* - regarding the murder of Hattie, Joe "made no effort to exonerate or to vindicate himself" (210). The only thing that seems to snap him out of his trance is the sight of Hattie's "little pet dog" (211). Dunbar writes,

there was a mute sorrow in the eyes of both man and dog, and they seemed to take comfort in each other's presence. There was no need of any sign between them. They had both loved her [Hattie], had they not? So they understood. (211)

When Joe visualizes the little pet dog, the image of himself as a dog is *rhizometrically* connected in his mental landscape. Hattie comes to mind, as it is her act of facializing Joe, which results in Joe becoming dog. The characteristics, which Hattie writes upon Joe as dog, are characteristics associated with the Banner Club and the seedier side of New York life, the world, which Joe has become. So, in essence, when Joe *sees* the dog, he creates a landscape that is Hattie, which ultimately *becomes* the city of New York in the mind of Joe. I find it interesting that the name of the chapter in which the "little pet dog" scene occurs is "Dear, Damned, Delightful Town," for to Joe, Hattie represents the dear, damned, delightful town of New York.

Just another point on the scene. When the dog looks into Joe's eyes, Dunbar writes, "there was no need of any sign between them" (211). I would argue that there is no need for any sign between the two because they are one and the same becoming through the love of Hattie. The little pet dog is affected in becoming dog because of the love shown the dog by Hattie; Joe is affected in becoming dog because of the love, delivered in the form of the "kick" needed to jumpstart the idle soul, shown him by Hattie. As both are dog, one and the same, there is no need for any sign between them. They are the sign of love as expressed through the medium of thought within the landscape of thought that is Hattie Sterling.

I earlier argue that Swift Rumor is an example of the facialization of thought. The creation of two of the major concepts associated with facialization - landscapes and becomings - have an association with *fabulation* according to Ronald Bogue in *Image and Text* (21). Fabulators are creators, seers, of a world and people to come. W.E.B. Du Bois is such a fabulator, seer, surveyor of the black soul. In developing the theorized position of double consciousness and life behind the veil, Du Bois creates a landscape through which the souls of black folk wander in pursuit of life on the surface of the landscape of early twentieth century America; he creates a world of a people to come. After reuniting as husband and wife as a solution to their trials in the penitentiary and New York, respectively, Berry and Fannie return to the facialized landscape of Virginia complete with its recognizable faces. The attempt to combat Swift Rumor by facializing New York is unsuccessful. Berry and Fannie inherently understand that there exists a "Will (landscape) infinitely stronger than their own" (255) that affects them becoming facialized landscapes functioning behind the veil of: race, greenhornedness, gender, thought, etc. Watching one's attempt at combating, resisting or escaping the landscape resulting in life behind the veil is nothing but *the sport of the gods*. Within the infinitely stronger powers of a Will greater than theirs, there is nothing to do but take up life "without complaint" and endure (255). Dilsey's final remark in *The Sound and the Fury*

carries prominence in a certain kind of way when acknowledged with relevance to the Hamiltons: yes, “they endured” (Faulkner 469). Man’s only recourse when in the arena of the sport of the gods is patient endurance!

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