



Feeling Brown, Feeling Down: Latina Affect, the Performativity of Race, and the Depressive Position

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Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Signs*, Vol. 31, No. 3, New Feminist Theories of Visual Culture (Spring 2006), pp. 675-688

Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/499080>

Accessed: 25/07/2012 02:42

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**Feeling Brown, Feeling Down: Latina Affect, the
Performativity of Race, and the
Depressive Position**

Depression has become one of the dominant affective positions addressed within the cultural field of contemporary global capitalism. However, such a blanket statement requires fine-tuning. While art and media that depict the affective contours of depression have certainly become more prevalent, it is nonetheless important to be attentive to the ways in which the current historical moment is able to mimetically render various depictions of the problem of depression that plagues the contemporary citizen subject with a crypto-universalist script. Certainly depression is gendered. Female depression and male depression resonate quite differently. While female depression is more squarely framed as a problem, the depression that plagues men is often described as a full-on condition, registering beyond the sphere of the individual, linked to a sort of angst and longing that are often described as endemic to post-modernism. However, that statement also requires some amending insofar as such a distinction reproduces a default white subject. The topic of depression has not often been discussed in relation to the question of racial formations in critical theory. This essay dwells on a particular depiction of depression that most certainly speaks to the general moment but resists the pull of crypto-universalism. The art project at the center of this essay considers how depression itself is formed and organized around various historical and material contingencies that include race, gender, and sex.

The work of Nao Bustamante does not conform to our associations of art practices that emerged at the moment of identity politics, nor does it represent an avoidance of the various antagonisms within the social that define our recognition and belonging as racialized, gendered, and sexed subjects. Bustamante's work tells us a story about the problems of belonging in alterity. I contend that her oeuvre meditates on our particularities, both shared and divergent, particularities that are central to the

choreography of self and other that organizes our reality.¹ This, as I will contend, is negotiated through a particular affective circuit. The version of depression I consider in this essay is marked by a depression that is not one. I am provisionally naming this affective site a feeling of brownness that transmits and is structured through a depressive stance, a kind of feeling down, thus my rhyming title, “Feeling Brown, Feeling Down.”

Bustamante’s video installation *Neopolitan* (2003) includes an eleven-minute-long loop tape. The tape shows the artist breaking out into seemingly spontaneous sobbing as she watches the end of a movie. As she cries, the viewer witnesses the somatic signs of depressive sadness: her eyes well up, her nose runs. The video is shown on a monitor that sits on an old-fashioned table, which sits on a sculpture block. The monitor is covered by a multicolored cozy that was crocheted by the artist. On top of the cozy sits a crocheted basket filled with crocheted flowers. Above the basket rests an artificial crow; the artificial bird wears a matching crocheted hat. A power plug, connected to the wall, is also snugly covered in a crocheted caddy. The movie being watched by the artist is Tomás Gutiérrez Alea’s *Fresa y chocolate*, a film set in the 1970s in Cuba and focused on a difficult and fragile friendship between a proper revolutionary subject and a gay bohemian. As the artist watches the film, it is lightly projected on her face, giving the sense that the glow of the screen she is watching is bouncing off her face. After the film is over, the artist rewinds it again and again, continuing to cry (see fig. 1).

In this essay I will suggest that this installation can be read as an illustration of the depressive position and its connection to minoritarian aesthetic and political practice. Toward this end I will draw from certain aspects of Kleinian object-relations theory. Thus, I will address a very particular mode of depression, not depression in its more general or clinical sense. Describing the depressive position in relation to what I am calling “brown feeling” chronicles a certain ethics of the self that is utilized and deployed by people of color and other minoritarian subjects who don’t feel quite right within the protocols of normative affect and comportment. While the work of Melanie Klein (1986) and her circle is not tailored to attend to the vicissitudes of racialization and ethnic particularity, I nonetheless find some of her formulations suggestive and helpful when trying to discuss what I’m calling “brown feelings.”

The larger project of this essay engages different psychological and phenomenological discourses in an effort to theorize affective particularity

¹ This word usage is calibrated to address a minoritarian subject. For more on this particular narrative of subjectivity, see Muñoz 1999.



Figure 1 *Neopolitan*. Nao Bustamante. The Lab, San Francisco (2003). Color version available as an online enhancement.

and belonging. Jonathan Flatley (2004) has recently described his own interest in affective particularity in relation to the social as affective mapping. Affective mapping is Flatley's amplification and amendment of Fredric Jameson's (1981) theory of cognitive mapping. To some degree such a description would hold sway with this analysis. My endeavor, more descriptively, is intended to enable a project that imagines a position or narrative of being and becoming that can resist the pull of identitarian models of relationality. Affect is not meant to be a simple placeholder for identity in my work. Indeed, it is supposed to be something altogether different; it is, instead, supposed to be descriptive of the receptors we use to hear each other and the frequencies on which certain subalterns speak and are heard or, more importantly, felt. This leaves us to amend Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's famous question, "Can the subaltern speak?" (1988, 1999) to ask How does the subaltern feel? How might subalterns feel each other? Toward this end, modified theories of object relations can potentially translate into productive ways in which to consider relationality within a larger social sphere.

Certain acts of translation must happen if we are to use Klein to consider feeling brown or any other modality of minoritarian being or becoming. This entails addressing what I have mentioned as the crypto-universal aspect of various aesthetic and hermeneutical projects. A touchstone for this aspect of my work is the writing of Hortense Spillers. In her powerful meditation on psychoanalysis and race, “All the Things You Could Be by Now if Sigmund Freud’s Wife Was Your Mother,” the literary theorist deuniversalizes psychoanalytic tools in generative ways:

Is it not, then, the task of a psychoanalytical protocol to effect a translation from the muteness of desire/wish—that which shames and baffles the subject, even if its origins are dim, not especially known—into an articulated syntactic particularity? This seems to me a passable psychoanalytic goal, but perhaps there is more to it than simply a nice thing to happen? At the very least I am suggesting that an aspect of the emancipatory project hinges on what would appear to be a simple self-attention, except that reaching the articulation requires a process, that of making one’s subjectness the object of a disciplined and potentially displaceable attentiveness. (2003, 400)

Her understatement here is poignant—it would indeed be much more than “simply a nice thing” for groups and circuits of belonging to leave the realm of muteness and attain a valuable “articulated syntactic particularity” that is tuned to group identification. Thus for Spillers, the psychoanalytical protocol is laden with an emancipatory potentiality in that it helps one combat a certain muteness that social logics like homophobia, racism, and sexism would project onto the minoritarian subject. This move to identify the radical impulse in developmental theories aims to recast the theories outside the parameters of positivism and enact their political performativity for circuits of belonging that do not conform to a crypto-universalism associated with the universal white subject. Spillers’s argument confirms that a hermeneutical approach that is indeed attentive to psychoanalytic questions may provide descriptions of our own recognition via the route of racial performativity. Racial performativity is the final key concept that this essay foregrounds. The meaning I am assigning to the term *racial performativity* is intended to get at an aspect of race that is “a doing.”² More precisely, I mean to describe a political doing, the effects

² This idea of performativity as “a doing” is indebted to a line of thought in the post-disciplinary field of performance studies that engages the work of the philosopher of everyday speech, J. L. Austin, and his book *How to Do Things with Words* (1962). See Parker and Sedgwick 1995 for a useful introduction to some of Austin’s postdisciplinary relevance.

that the recognition of racial belonging, coherence, and divergence present in the world. This turn to the performativity of race has to do with the fact that during this moment where the discourse of race is prone to the corrosive forces of corporate multiculturalism and other manifestations of globalization, it seems especially important to consider racial formations through a lens that is not hamstrung by positivism, insofar as the discourse of positivism is at best reductive and unresponsive to the particularities of racial formations. The epistemological core of what race is has become less and less accessible during these tumultuous times. It is therefore expedient to consider what race does. Furthermore, to look at race as a performative enterprise, one that can best be accessed by its effects, may lead us out of political and conceptual impasses that have dogged racial discourse. A critical project attuned to knowing the performativity of race is indeed better suited to decipher what work race does in the world.

What I am describing as “feeling brown, feeling down” is a modality of recognizing the racial performativity generated by an affective particularity that is coded to specific historical subjects who can provisionally be recognized by the term *Latina*. Feeling brown in my analysis is descriptive of the ways in which minoritarian affect is always, no matter what its register, partially illegible in relation to the normative affect performed by normative citizen subjects. The notion of brownness has been rendered differently by essayist Richard Rodriguez, who is also interested in describing brownness in relation to a certain antinormativity. In his most recent (2003) book, the Mexican American memoirist revisits the scene of his racialized upbringing in California and his feelings of nonbelonging to a majoritarian sphere. His narrative uses race (and to a much lesser degree queerness) as a springboard to discuss the particularity of being brown. Yet he leaps so far away from a racially situated notion of this affective phenomenon that brownness becomes the justification for Rodriguez’s identification with Richard Nixon over John F. Kennedy during their famous televised debate of 1960. My approach to brownness does not correspond with Rodriguez’s work on this ideological level. More nearly, thinking through brownness is akin to what Spillers describes as the “making of one’s subjectness the object of a disciplined and potentially displaceable attentiveness” (2003, 400). Brown feelings are not individualized affective particularity; they more nearly express this “displaceable attentiveness,” which is to say a larger collective mapping of self and other. Aesthetic practices enable these mapping protocols. In my current research project, I am interested in all sorts of antinormative feelings that correspond to minoritarian becoming. In some cases aesthetic practices and performances offer a particular theoretical lens to understand the ways in

which different circuits of belonging connect, which is to say that recognition flickers between minoritarian subjects. Brownness is not white, and it is not black either, yet it does not simply sit midway between them. Brownness, like all forms of racialized attentiveness in North America, is enabled by practices of self-knowing formatted by the nation's imaginary through the powerful spikes in the North American consciousness identified with the public life of blackness. At the same time, brownness is a mode of attentiveness to the self for others that is cognizant of the way in which it is not and can never be whiteness. Whiteness in my analysis is also very specific: I read it as a cultural logic that prescribes and regulates national feelings and comportment. White is thus an affective gauge that helps us understand some modes of emotional countenance and comportment as good or bad. It should go without saying that some modes of whiteness—for example, working-class whiteness—are stigmatized within the majoritarian public sphere. Modes of white womanhood or white ethnicities do not correspond with the affective ruler that measures and naturalizes white feelings as the norm.

Depression is not brown, but there are modalities of depression that seem quite brown. Psychoanalytic critic Antonio Viego (2003) has looked at how American ego psychology attempts to perform a certain kind of therapeutic work on Latino/a subjects. The telos of that project is to achieve a gradually realized whole and well-adjusted minority self. The majority of ego-psychological work explored by Viego attempts to translate notions of traditional Latino maladies—*los nervios* and *ataques*—into ethnically named translations of disorders analyzed as depression and anxiety disorder in English and North American institutional formats. Viego's critique dismantles this wish for an ego that is not shattered in Latino psychology. For Viego, such a desire would be an escape from the social. Thus, any social theory that posits happiness as its goal is a flawed theory. Viego's use of psychoanalytic protocols functions as a displaceable attentiveness that imagines a mode of brown politics not invested in the narrative of a whole and well-adjusted subject.

My notion of feeling down is meant to be a translation of the idea of a depressive position. Thus, down is a way to link position with feeling. The use of the concept of positions, rather than the more developmental discourses on stages, is one of Klein's (1986) amendments to Freud. Scholars interested in Klein or object-relations psychology view positions, as opposed to stages, as less turgid trajectories of emotional development. In this instance Klein's contribution resonates alongside one of Antonio Gramsci's most substantial contributions to social theory, namely, his

thinking about the war of positions as a mode of resistance that is different from the classical Marxian revolt described as a war of maneuvers ([1992] 1996). Positions in both theorists' lexicons are provisional and flexible demarcations, practices of being.

The depressive position for Klein is not a stage that must be moved beyond. There are ways in which such occupations of the depressive position lead to reparation, where love helps one surpass paranoid and schizoid feelings. In infancy the child splits the maternal other into two objects. One is a good breast that represents a continuous flow of fulfillment—a sense of being one with the mother. Yet the fact that such a flow is not continuous leads to feelings of resentment and hate toward what becomes the bad breast. For Klein these destructive feelings vector into a sort of cannibalistic or sadistic urge. The infant later feels considerable guilt about possessing such destructive feelings. At some point the split object becomes, once again, whole, and the child is able to once again introject it. The object, like the subject, is never whole, but the fiction or feeling of wholeness is crucial for survival within the social. In her 1946 paper "Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms" Klein explains that "the drive to make reparation, which comes to the fore at this stage, can be regarded as a consequence of a greater insight into psychic reality and of growing synthesis, for it shows a more realistic response to feelings of grief, guilt and fear of loss resulting from the loved object. Since the drive to repair or protect the injured object paves the way for more satisfactory object relations and sublimations, it in turn increases synthesis between inner and external situations" ([1946] 1986, 189).

The depressive position is, in Kleinian theory, associated with a kind of interjection, which is a stark opposite to the practice of projecting menace or threat as exterior to the self. The depressive position is not a linear or task-oriented sense of developmental closure. It is instead a position that we live in, and it describes the ways in which we attempt to enter psychic reality, where we can see objects as whole, both interior and exterior, not simply as something that hums outside our existence. To extend, or in Spillers's phraseology, "displace," this attentiveness of the self to others is to begin to understand one of the deep functions of brown feelings, to see the other in alterity as existing in a relational field to the self. In this sense I am proposing an ethics of brownness, one that attempts to incorporate understandings of the psychic in the service of understanding the social. The whole object that is interjected in the depressive position is not real, or more nearly, not firmly bound. One always feels its drive toward fragmentation, but taking up the depressive position is one

way in which, as subjects, we resist a disrepair within the social that would lead to a breakdown in one's ability to see and know the other. That would certainly be a mode of clinical depression.

In queer studies Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003) has recently turned to the divide between paranoia and reparation. Sedgwick has argued that paranoia has become a standardized posture taken in queer critique and that it thus has become routine rather than critical thinking. The paranoid move is always about a certain hermeneutic unveiling of an external threat. Such a move becomes routine, or numb repetition, and renders the paranoid subject unable to participate in what Spillers would call the intramural protocol of a displaceable self-attentiveness. Spillers (2003) wishes to turn away from a critique of "the man" and turn to a theory of the way in which relational skills are organized around "the one." The one, for Spillers, is interior to the life world of the black community, the lives we have among one another within racial formations. This is not to say that there are not multiple threats presented by an outsider, by the man, but Spillers want us to understand the ways in which our own sense of relationality and practices of belonging within communities of color are threatened from within. Spillers in this instance is once again insisting on repealing a certain paranoid sense of being in the world where menace is exterior to our world of intraracial or ethnic experience and instead wants to linger or dwell in the realm of this enabling fantasy of a whole object.

Sedgwick invites her readers and the field of queer critique to consider reparation. In this same intervention Sedgwick wishes to consider how certain strong theories of the social, theories that can be codified as prescriptive and totalizing, might not be as advantageous at this particular moment as weak theories that do not position themselves in the same masterful, totalizing fashion. I would align a Gramscian war of positions with this weak theory. I understand the theory-making impulse that propels my description of feeling brown as resisting the strong-theory model. The stitching I am doing between critical race theories, queer critique, and psychological object-relations theory is a provisional and heuristic approach that wishes to stave off the totalizing aspect of all those modes of critique.

I want to suggest that the ethics of "the one" that Spillers rehearses is a mode of intramural depressive positionality that gives us the ability to know and experience the other who shares a particular affective or emotional valence with us. The reparation staged in Spillers's theoretical work is informed by a desire to return to another place that she describes as "old-fashioned." *Old-fashioned* is associated with the nonsecular belonging that in turn is associated with the history of the black church

(2003). Spillers explicitly desires a secular space where such relationality is possible, but *old-fashioned* is not only deployed in its conventional usage, it is also written in a psychic sense—the desire for a moment before communities of color lapsed into functional impasse. This functional impasse is certainly relational to a well-founded sense of paranoia and also to the ways in which such continuous challenges within the social spur a disconnect from psychic reality where our relational potentiality is diminished. This turn to the old-fashioned in Spillers, this desire for “the one,” is a desire that is relational to a depressive position that does not succumb to a paranoid-schizoid position. The depressive position in Klein is the ethical position. Taking that point into account, I would argue that feeling brown, feeling down is an ethical position within the social for the minoritarian subject.

My stitching together of theories, my attempt at weaving together a provisional whole that is indeed not a whole but rather an enabling sense of wholeness that allows a certain level of social recognition, is a reparative performance. However, one should be cognizant of the three different modes of reparation that Klein distinguishes. It is useful to break these types down. One is a kind of manic reparation that carries a sense of triumph, since it essentially flips over the child-parent relationship at the parent’s expense. Another notion of the reparative is a mode of obsessive reparation that can be characterized as compulsive repetition, a sort of placating magical thinking. Finally, there is the type of reparation that I wish to promote for the fields of inquiry discussed in this essay. This modality is what I see at work in Bustamante’s installation. This would be a form of reparation that is grounded in love for the object. Klein argues that “one moment after we have seen the most sadistic impulses, we meet with performances showing the greatest capacity for love and the wish to make all possible sacrifices to be loved” ([1935] 1986, 124). Utilizing Klein as a theorist of relationality is advantageous because she is true to the facts of violence, division, and hierarchy that punctuate the social, yet she is, at another moment, a deeply idealistic thinker who understands the need to not simply cleanse negativity but instead to promote the desire that the subject has in the wake of the negative to reconstruct a relational field. Love for Klein is thus not just a romantic abstraction; it is indeed a kind of striving for belonging that does not ignore the various obstacles that the subject must overcome to achieve the most provisional belonging.

Neopolitan, Bustamante’s installation, is stitched together by a homey crocheted binding that seems elastic and permeable, its texture reminiscent of a nostalgia for a mode of domesticity associated with hobbyism, with

craft and domestic forms of belonging. The texture of the installation is meant to connote a sense of home and belonging that is perhaps squarely in the past, yet it nonetheless wishes to recirculate that sense of belonging in relation to our presentness and our futurity. While not a cynical assemblage, the object is not without a sense of humor. The sad crow of depression, a species that is quite apart from the bluebird of happiness, wears a snug little bonnet that links him to the odd object over which he sits watch. It is a construct as elaborate and provisional as the selves we perform within the social. The fact that a monitor is enshrouded by a homemade covering indexes the ways in which televisual reality is linked to real life and fantasy. The homey fabric enfolding the television set indicates that home is where the heart is, and at the center of this home we will find a television set.

The video on the loop and the performance of sobbing, rewinding, and sobbing again is a performance of repetition. Repetition is the piece's most obvious depressive quality. It describes the ways in which subjects occupy and dwell within the depressive position. The piece's play of light, the illumination bathing the artist's face, and the illumination that the object itself offers comment on a complicated choreography of interjection and projection. The sound track that washes over the artist and, in turn, the viewer is the familiar swelling associated with melodrama, the weepy, the woman's film, and this track, in relation to this installation, is the sound of brown feelings.

The film being screened in the video, the source of the sadness and somatic excess, is a Cuban film about homosexuality and revolution. Its tragedy has to do with the way in which queerness can finally not be held by the nation-state. This is the rip, the moment of breakdown in a revolutionary imaginary. In a similar fashion, this is a rip or break in the object-relation theories that I have been considering. In the bulk of this work, in Klein, D. W. Winnicott, and others who came after Freud, homosexuality is a primitive condition that needs to be contained, managed, or surpassed. Queerness is the site of emotional breakdown and the activation of the melodrama in the installation. I would thus position Bustamante's art object as a corrective in relation to the homophobic developmental plot. Queerness, the installation shows, never fully disappears; instead, it haunts the present. More nearly, it is something whose mourning is a condition of possibility for other modes of sexuality that are less problematic.

All of this mourning comes out of a specific time and place, which is to say that it is historically situated. To illustrate this point, I turn to a moment in London, during a question-and-answer session following an

artist's talk in which Bustamante discussed *Neopolitan*. When the artist fielded the question "How is your work different from that of Bas Jan Ader, another artist who represented his tears?" I wanted to answer the question for the artist, but, fulfilling my role as critic and onlooker, I could not. I nonetheless take this opportunity to do so in hope of explaining not only the difference between two art projects, spread apart by thirty years, but also to remark on the value of displaceable attentiveness in relation to aesthetics and psychoanalysis. Ader mysteriously disappeared at sea in 1975 as part of his performance project. Depression, sadness, and loss saturate his work. The three-minute black-and-white film *I Am Too Sad to Tell You* (1971) is reminiscent of Bustamante's crying tape. It portrays the artist driven to tears and crying for a prolonged time. The motivation behind his emotion is left even more ambiguous than the themes that constitute Bustamante's installation. Ader's performance rehearses something that is very much like the ethics of Klein's depressive position. Ader's work is beautiful and moving. It seduces us with the lure of the universal. These tears are not wrapped up in the kind of affective particularity that I associate with brownness and queerness in my reading of *Neopolitan*. I reference *I Am Too Sad to Tell You* in an effort to illustrate the ways in which some tears access a universal sadness or loss that offers us a generalized story of the world of affect, stopping short of linking affect to historical loss. What motivates these tears? Loss and history become untethered in Ader's film. While *Neopolitan* certainly speaks across particularities within the social, it addresses a historical particularity, one that I describe as a feeling, feeling down.

Jennifer Doyle (2005) skillfully compares Ader's work with that of feminist artist Marina Abramovic's video performance *The Onion* (1995) and Hayley Newman's *Crying Glasses (An Aid to Melancholia)* (1995). In Abramovic's piece the lauded performance artist lists complaints about her life, ones that are not very interesting, banalities like time spent in waiting rooms and the annoyances that accompany travel. Newman's performance is one of her artificial performances, fake performances that are documented as if they were real in a series she calls *Connotations Performance*. However, the distinction between the two women artists' works and Ader's, as described by Doyle, is instructive when thinking through the historicizing of affect and tears:

As the title reminds us (telling us that the artist won't tell us), we do not know why Ader is crying. As a male artist with a particular mythology (he disappeared while attempting to sail across the Atlantic in execution of a performance), Bas Jan Ader is closer to the

eighteenth-century ideal of the gentlemanly “man of feeling” than he is to the female melodrama cited by Abramovic. The portrait is an extension of his interest in the subject of his own vulnerability (as in a series of short films that document the artist falling over—riding a bicycle into a canal, falling from a tree, standing and swaying from side to side until he falls down). His film, when compared with Newman’s photograph or Abramovic’s performance, comes off as more purely seductive—and as somehow more private—in part because nothing in the film indicates that we must read it as “produced” for the camera. (2005, 48–49)

The man of feeling is a universal subject. The spectator cannot know what his tears are about because they are deeply private, as Doyle indicates, as is the very nature of the tear. However, they are also universal tears in the ways in which Newman’s are false tears (the tears of feminine deception) or Abramovic’s are onion-peeling kitchen tears (the tears that mark women’s work). Doyle, citing Jameson (1981), reminds readers that “history is what hurts” (Doyle 2005, 50). We are then left to contemplate which histories are marked by particular tears and which histories are elided. In the remainder of this essay, I will discuss an attempt to get at the performativity of brownness that marks Bustamante’s tears.

In a review for *Artweek*, Lindsay Westbrook discusses the installation in terms that help make visible what outside contingencies get projected onto Bustamante’s piece by its audience: “Nao Bustamante’s *Neopolitan* is also brand new and deals with several themes that recur in her work; emotionality, vulnerability and stereotypes of gender and Mexican-American culture; we watch her watching a scene from the Cuban film *Strawberries and Chocolate*. She is making herself cry, periodically rewinding the tape and wiping her eyes on a Mexican flag hanky. The work is profoundly self-conscious, of course, and, for that reason, cynical. But it is also genuinely sad, expressing sorrow and mourning, perhaps, for the current world situation” (2003, 14).

The dynamics of projection in this thumbnail sketch are worth looking at for a couple of reasons. The hanky that the reviewer identifies as the Mexican flag is no such thing. It is merely a colored dish towel. The fact that Bustamante’s Mexicanness was projected onto her installation does in fact make a case for the various ways in which brown paranoia is not something that can be wished away, no matter how much we would like to fully escape the regime of paranoia. Indeed, the brown depressive position I’m describing is called into being in relation to the various projections screened on the embodied self from the outside. The formulation,

in which self-consciousness equals cynicism, is odd. Yet the lines with which Westbrook closes her analysis do bear remembering. Indeed this mode of sadness has a great deal to do with the “world situation.” That is, the video represents and performs a political depression, which is neither a clinical depression nor a literal breakdown. This political recognition contains a reparative impulse that I want to describe as enabling and liberatory, in the same way that an attentiveness to those things mute within us, brought into language and given a syntax, can potentially lead to an insistence on change and political transformation.

In discussing the depressive position, Julia Kristeva (2004) reminds Klein’s readers that reparation is far from idyllic, since the purportedly whole object is tainted with despair. The object’s state of disintegration is never fully resolved. It is instead worked through. Certainly *Neopolitan* is nothing like an ideal aesthetic object, but it does represent a creative impulse, where grief is temporally conjoined to ideas. In this essay I’ve attempted to suggest the various ways in which the depressive position is a site of potentiality and not simply a breakdown of the self or the social fabric. Reparation is part of the depressive position; it signals a certain kind of hope. The depressive position is a tolerance of the loss and guilt that underlies the subject’s sense of self—which is to say that it does not avoid or wish away loss and guilt. It is a position in which the subject negotiates reality, resisting the instinct to fall into the delusional realm of the paranoid schizoid. I have also attempted to call attention to the ways in which minoritarian chains of recognition can benefit from avoiding paranoid positions that keep them from engaging the necessary project of being attentive to the self in an effort to know the other, but indeed my central goal has been one of enacting and performing a sort of reparative analysis that describes and bolsters the project of feeling brown. The depressive position, as described in the work of Klein and adjusted through Spillers’s questions, offers a useful insight into one dimension of what I am calling feeling brown. Feeling brown is a mode of racial performativity, a doing within the social that surpasses limitations of epistemological renderings of race.

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