



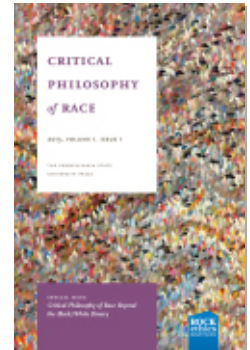
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*Postcolonial
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of Global Warming*

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Abstract

Paul Gilroy's subtle use of Theodor Adorno in *Postcolonial Melancholia* (2005) misses the opportunity to forge for the postcolonial world a sense of responsibility for the colonial cultures that this postcolonial world helped to create. Gilroy rightly emphasizes the naïveté often associated with attempts to "dwell convivially with difference" (5). His negatively dialectical reading of the deterministic logics of racial difference brings into view an already present demotic multiculturalism. He neglects, however, how Adorno's conception of negative dialectics can be understood as postcolonial in its understanding of difference. In other words, both Adorno and Gilroy focus on recuperating a conception of non-antagonistic difference, that is, an understanding of difference as heterogeneity. Yet, Gilroy maintains an a priori sense of cultural difference from Adorno in spite of *Postcolonial Melancholia's* trajectory of positing a negative dialectics of conviviality. This conviviality is the "fragile, emergent substance of vital planetary humanism" (79) that refuses to render postcoloniality synonymous with the maintenance of nation-state boundaries. Thus, Gilroy forfeits the prospect of conducting a radical postcolonial

reading of Adorno, which would demonstrate precisely *how* colonial history provides “an opening onto the multicultural promise of the postcolonial world” (143).

The logics of nature and culture have converged, and it is above all the power of race that ensures that they speak in the same deterministic tongue.

—PAUL GILROY, *Postcolonial Melancholia*, 6

The challenge of being in the same present, of synchronizing difference and articulating cosmopolitan hope upward from below rather than imposing it downward from on high provides some help in seeing how we might invent conceptions of humanity that allow for the presumption of equal value and go beyond the issue of tolerance into a more active engagement with the irreducible value of diversity within sameness.

—PAUL GILROY, *Postcolonial Melancholia*, 67

Introduction

In the following, I argue that Paul Gilroy’s subtle use of Theodor Adorno in *Postcolonial Melancholia* (2005) misses the opportunity to forge for the postcolonial world a sense of responsibility for the colonial cultures that this postcolonial world helped to create (141). Gilroy rightly emphasizes the naïveté often associated with attempts to “dwell convivially with difference” (5). His negatively dialectical reading of the deterministic logics of racial difference brings into view an already present demotic multiculturalism (99). He neglects, however, how Adorno’s conception of negative dialectics can be understood as postcolonial in its understanding of difference. In other words, both Adorno and Gilroy focus on recuperating a conception of non-antagonistic difference, that is, an understanding of difference as heterogeneity. Yet, Gilroy maintains an a priori sense of cultural difference from Adorno in spite of *Postcolonial Melancholia*’s trajectory of positing a negative dialectics of conviviality. This conviviality is the “fragile, emergent substance of vital planetary humanism” (79) that refuses to render postcoloniality synonymous with the maintenance of nation-state boundaries. Thus, Gilroy forfeits the prospect of conducting a radical postcolonial reading of

Adorno, which would demonstrate precisely *how* colonial history provides “an opening onto the multicultural promise of the postcolonial world” (143).

Gilroy fails to take seriously why a “vital planetary humanism” is critical at this juncture in history. Anthropogenic climate change, as the singular crisis putting at risk the very possibility of human culture, as we have known it, is the ground upon which a new understanding of global multicultural reality and postcolonial antiracist theory must be developed. I argue that this global multicultural reality must include the cultural reality of our lives as animals. Obviously, the sordid history of associating certain races with animality must not be forgotten. Yet, precisely because of this overdetermination, the reconciliation of human and animal allows global multicultural reality to be truly postcolonial. Adopting traditional humanism as universal neglects how such humanism has always been complicit with slavery, colonialism, and the conquest of nature. The idealized version of humanity that is thereby celebrated only makes sense on the basis of a denigrated, excluded animality. In light of the actually universal peril of climate change, such humanism constitutes an abstract rather than substantive negation of animality. As a result, our animal life may serve as the gateway to our planet’s heterogeneity that the cultural concept of the animal forecloses in order to privilege the exceptional human as the only possibility of being in the world.

Heterogeneity

Gilroy’s insistence on dismantling conceptions of race as an ingrained cultural biology, which condemns us to speak in the “same deterministic tongue” (6), nonetheless maintains the historic lore that renders nature the signifier of irreducible human difference. As a result, Gilroy undermines that power of race that can recuperate the reality of our lives as animals. Such recuperation can perhaps unwind the nature/culture dichotomy that holds us hostage to the “sham wisdom of incommensurable cultural difference” (143) from every other living being on our planet. I propose that this ground level reality of our historic being as animals is the paradoxically “cosmic sensibility” (74) that will enable us to radically revise our understanding of culture.¹

Far from being a facile internationalism premised on a calculable notion of sustainability, this cosmic sensibility cherishes planet Earth as

that which it is—a “pale blue dot” in the black void of space.² This sensibility may perhaps become the horizon toward which we must move in order to systematically denature “race.” In other words, a culturally constructed biology can no longer be one’s natural culture. Gilroy posits this denaturing of race as the postcolonial project *par excellence* (57). Thus, if hospitality, conviviality, tolerance, justice, and mutual care (99) are necessary for making rather than breaking our world, then this requires recognition of our complex interrelatedness at ground level. We can no longer rely on a delusional and ultimately palliative sense of the human as unique. While Gilroy turns to the urban setting (96) for the ordinary hope already present in our world, I turn our negatively dialectical and fundamentally convivial vision, once again, to the white cliffs of Dover (14) whose reimagining is the possibility for an alternative ecology of belonging.³

I argue, therefore, that the ultimate colonial fantasy is the conquest of nature in an ostensibly “clean war” (43). *This* world in fact denies its automatic consent to our historical demand for rather than natural entitlement to power and recognition. If the postcolonial project is to create an oppositional history of cultural relationship, then our timely interventions must also include a counter history of our cultural relationship to nature. The absolutism of our separation from nature, and the hubris embodied in our geo-piety (72), makes impossible the substantive rather than abstract politics that Gilroy seeks. This impossibility results from the anthropomorphic nature/culture dichotomy, which essentially recasts humanity as a mass of clones “sealed up inside our frozen cultural habits” (63). The irreducible identity of nature and culture renders nature the symbolic mechanism through which we signify irreducible national difference. Our ostensibly irreducible national difference is in turn rendered synonymous with culture, history, and humanity per se. Anthropogenic climate change, as the possible impossibility of the loss of nature and, hence, as the potential loss of our ability to signify at all, therefore, requires an essential gesture of negativity. This essential gesture of negativity, I argue, is a postcolonial secularization of suffering. Such an essential gesture negates rather than ameliorates the status quo. As opposed to a technocratic mentality, the promise of the postcolonial world appears as the heterogeneity already in our midst. The colonial/postcolonial dialectic gives way to a secularized understanding of our planet because we are all animals.

Both Adorno and Gilroy propose suffering as the negativity that *moves* us into dialectical thinking. A postcolonialism worthy of its proper name

depends upon a fundamental reimagining of our world. Such a reimagining must be as far-reaching and profound as the prior revolutionary transformations in the perception and representation of space and matter (75). According to Gilroy, a genuine planetary humanism requires recognition of the suffering of those who are perennially outside the insular indifference of post-scarcity and overdevelopment (75). I propose that a culture adequate to our historical predicament, where the very sustainability of our species is in doubt (75), ought to embody a paradoxically “hopeful despair”. Such an ironic and melancholic sense in this time of consequences acknowledges that the animal “inadvertently humanizes the condemned man” (77). Thus, although Gilroy places the planet at the heart of *Postcolonial Melancholia*, his overdetermined emphasis on race (he ignores gender for the most part) prevents him from following through on *how* nature imposes limits on our disproportional footsteps, as we seek to remake the world as if we are the only inhabitants of this planet. The planet does not simply allow us to recognize that farcical nature of empire that wantonly destroys what it neither knows nor sees. The planet is the limit imposed on fantasies of racial segregation because nature is our common endangered condition. Although Gilroy recognizes the unsustainability of modern culture, he nonetheless remains caught in the very mechanistic understanding of culture that he critiques. As a result, he neglects the negatively dialectical implications of the planetary consciousness he foregrounds as the “tragedy, fragility, and brevity of indivisible human existence” (75).

Gilroy argues against the biological determinacy of culture (5–6) that prohibits the day-to-day inculcation of planetary humanism. Such cultural biology is unable to countenance the universality of our fundamental vulnerability to each other (4). The exigencies of militarized globalization have created, in spite of the stupor of overdetermined consumerism, a fragmented but nonetheless increasingly convergent planet. In this context, Gilroy seeks a postcolonial ethos of dwelling at ease alongside what seems unfamiliar (3). A profound failure of the political imagination has led to proprietary relationships with colonial history. Instead, a postcolonial ethos ought to move beyond the naturalness of the nation-state as the essential basis of creating a political culture. Yet, a political culture fundamentally intertwined with a notion of planetary humanism is either scoffed at or automatically channeled into the conventional internationalism of human rights and medical and environmental catastrophes. Such failures rely on overtly simplistic, calculable, and trivial understandings of culture. Culture becomes the mechanism with which to dissimulate our essentially imperial (not postcolonial)

yet simultaneously precarious identities (4-5). Fixed in a Manichean fantasy, the logics of nature and culture order all bodies as either human or animal such that the logics of nature and culture become indistinguishable.

Because of the postcolonial moment at hand, Gilroy suggests an historical ontology of that understanding of race that affirms its own geopolitical power by naturalizing exceptionalism. Obviously drawing on Agamben, Gilroy posits the institutionalized exception of the camp as the embodiment of the rational irrationality (7) of simplistic prejudice. Instead, I suggest that the factory/farm ought to be acknowledged as the “primary political institution of our anxious age” (8). The factory/farm turns the earth—the heterogeneously inhabited planet is yet to be conjured—into the killing floor.⁴ On the ground beneath our feet, *most* living bodies are abject and are also very “easily . . . humiliated, imprisoned, starved, and destroyed” (10) through the innovative use of technology. Gilroy asks that we presuppose the potency of the notion of race because it provides a naturalized foundation for other forms of social and political exploitation (8). A truly *postcolonial* melancholia, however, promulgates the simple ideas of utopia and cosmopolitanism to call our own bluff. Are we in fact creating a truly postcolonial vision of our complex, interrelated world? We demand historical adequacy from the rational irrationalities that are simply systems of exclusion (which we *call* culture, nation, or history). In other words, theorizing ought to countenance our world’s breathtaking heterogeneity while also being up to the challenges of the historical moment at hand. However, such historical adequacy should *also* be demanded of postcolonial antiracist theorizing given the possible impossibility of self-preservation that is anthropogenic climate change.

Gilroy recognizes the genocidal and catastrophic fracturing of the human species that resulted from pathological, deep-seated investment in “race” (15). In this sense, he implies that we are all one planetary race. However, historical adequacy for postcolonial antiracist theorizing requires a far more radical unwinding of the logics of nature and culture than Gilroy’s sense of the political imagination seems to allow. A vital planetary humanism, which leads to a vital planetary postcoloniality, necessitates a secularization of suffering. As a result of such secularization, we can *see* how the “animal” is enacted ritually in the race thinking that lodges the distinction between the human and the animal in the first place. The pathological maintenance of ethnic absolutism—the “human”—subsists under the guise of an eminently calculable and technologically dependent

conception of sustainability. Such absolutism runs the risk of repeating the disproportional stranglehold we have on our planet such that *our* culture determines *their* lives. The anxious, melancholic mood (12) that Gilroy contests in post-imperial England, which like its imperial inheritor (the United States) pathetically requires war for a sense of national belonging (64, 88), ought also to extend beyond those white cliffs of Dover. This extension of postcolonial melancholia should not occur because nation is equivalent to nature as its ontologically fixed mirror image (14). Instead, Gilroy counters this naturalization by turning us to the urban setting in order to privilege the urban as the site/sight of demotic multiculturalism. In other words, the urban setting is the resource par excellence for vital planetary humanism. Such a vision of postcolonialism, however, foregoes the possibility of reimagining those white cliffs for an historically adequate political culture. Rather than being an historical anomaly by virtue of its illusory immovability, nature is the possibility of our right to be human (12).

In light of *this* incompleteness of global efforts for human rights (14), we become aware of the acute inability of the colonizer and colonized to account for this common genealogy. In their renditions of humanitarianism, the animal remains for the most part invisible. As the conjured object of our hatred and indifference, the animal is too often spoken about in an abstract or ultra-theoretical manner. Thus, if we are to find our way back to the “disreputable, angry places” where political struggle commences (17), then the possible impossibility of self-preservation may demand that deracinated essential gesture of negativity that proclaims that I am an animal. *This* postcolonial melancholia may undo the “mystified, alienated arrangement” for which our biologically deterministic accounts of culture have provided “indices of realness” (30). As Gilroy maintains, the nature/culture dichotomy that leads to the modern history of race can be radically reconstructed by undermining the biological determinacy of culture. Such efforts, however, must also include reimagining the human/animal distinction if the modern history of race is to be adequately reconciled to the historical moment at hand.

By requiring a fundamentally creative response, anthropogenic climate change becomes the historical opportunity to *see* the ethical and conceptual consequences of upholding racial difference. Yet, the accorded historic being of our lives as animals may break the spell of the utterly wretched and gratuitously destructive “virtual realities” (32) of race such that banal ground level human sympathy counters ataraxy. Such an approach, therefore, takes

Gilroy at his word. Gilroy states, only by accounting for the “whole, complex, *planetary* history of suffering” (36, emphasis added) can postcolonial antiracist theory seriously engage the question of humanity. This approach, therefore, does not perpetuate a species of exceptionalism that excludes all other life on the planet or present a planetary vision somehow bereft of animals.⁵

For Gilroy, race refers to an “impersonal, discursive arrangement” (39). As such, the mechanical conception of race that prejudicially categorizes is mirrored in the mechanical conception of the human/animal dichotomy. The latter like the former can no longer suppress the visceral anxiety and pre-political questions (42) at the forefront of global consciousness. Anthropogenic climate change is a postcolonial reality and yet remains remarkably unaccounted for in contemporary postcolonial antiracist theorizing. The postcolonial project privileges the upholding and carrying forward of a “concept of *relation*” (42) against the intensification of a culture of utter indifference (49). Yet, we have paradoxically segregated the human race in a condition of “social death and exclusionary inclusion” (50) from our fellow planetary inhabitants. If climate change is the wound of our dominance (to invoke Fanon), then our cultural predicament requires an historical innovativeness adequate to our postcolonial predicament. Thus, the attempt to render race truly historical (53), against its seeming natural power, requires restoring a moral credibility to our lives as animals. Given the possible impossibility of self-preservation, such moral credibility includes our paucity of empathy, mutual respect, and fellow feeling toward animals. In this affective ecology of belonging, the history of suffering and refusal is truly not our “experiential copyright” (56). Instead, the colonial worlds that we helped to fashion can become a valuable resource for the imagining of a different political morality. By thinking in planetary terms, a postcolonial political morality counters the belief that only militarism, cruelty, and compulsion (56) are able to make a world—in order to return to *this* world in which we already live.

I push Gilroy’s analysis toward a postcolonial antiracist critique that can countenance the “telling blockage” (57) of the human/animal dichotomy. An authentic planetary humanism does not merely render a critique of yet another dissimulation of ethnic absolutism. A systematic denaturing of race must counter the alienated condition of overdevelopment that silences suffering because the cries sound less than human (57). Hearing those cries and seeing those who suffer requires acknowledging that our civilization is not a completed culture simply needing preservation. In fact,

the imperial history to be examined by postcolonial culture *ought* to include the ostensible conquest of nature.⁶ Thus, racial difference and the human/animal dichotomy nullify the possibility for substantive (not abstract) politics. In other words, mere preservation of human uniqueness condemns us all to being clones (64). This identity reinforces the pathology and psychological debasement of a version of humanity that can only identify itself in cultural terms by pretending that we are not animals. This essay, therefore, builds on Gilroy's own concern with promulgating a decidedly cosmopolitan humanism "upward from below" (67). This ground level knowledge can refuse the dominance of nation/state paradigms in order to create the possibility for a principled, historically adequate recognition of the intrinsic value of heterogeneity. Such estrangement from our culture and history may create conceptions of humanity that move beyond facile tolerance toward a truly postcolonial planet.

This form of vulgar or demotic multiculturalism does not privilege the urban setting because such an evolutionary schema presupposes ersatz vertical secession from nature. By calling on nature to signify its incontestability, we may see *as if for the first time* [all] those other inhabitants who are close "but kept out of sight behind the veils of cultural and political segregation" (71).⁷ Such a reorientation recognizes how nature's curtailment of the human ability to drastically destroy the world is the characteristic feature of postcolonial life. Thus, I perceive what Gilroy terms the cosmic angle to be the fundamentally utopian ethos grounding the contemporary moment of postcolonial political critique. This utopian ethos emerges from the non-antagonistic presence of difference that is already in our midst, that is, from heterogeneity, and undermines mutually reinforcing and oppositional identity-based categories. As a different kind of ordinary cosmopolitanism, Gilroy's postcolonial vision of planetary humanism nonetheless emerges as a reactive cultural project because it fails to adequately negate human exceptionalism.

The Elephant in the Room

Although Gilroy uses Adorno's conception of negative dialectics to posit a postcolonial, antiracist planetary humanism, I extend Gilroy's philosophical project by emphasizing Adorno's privileging of heterogeneity. In other words, postcolonial criticism emerges from *that* sense of place where

difference is not essentially oppositional, antagonistic, and perpetually *ex post facto*. Difference, instead, is the heterogeneity necessary for meaning and hopefulness. Gilroy's engagement with Adorno ought to include an account of the nature/culture dichotomy, which is central to his work, in order to take postcolonial theory's critical and hard won interventions to their historical conclusions. Such an approach, I argue, would render postcoloniality emphatic as both an historical era and a distinct conceptual achievement that provides new opportunities for understanding subjectivity and agency. I shift the terms of engagement between Gilroy and Adorno due to their common emphasis on a sense of anachronistic humanity. As a result, postcoloniality emerges from beyond the dominant frame as a gateway to that heterogeneity that allows us to see our historical co-implication: we are (all) here, right now, together, attempting to understand the world in which we live.

Similarly to Adorno, Gilroy objects to totalizing or universal critique. Both uphold the proportional footstep entailed by invoking commonplace experiences of sickness and suffering. Gilroy refers to the "'bestial floor' of human being in the body" (78) as the impetus for planetary humanism. Carrying these experiences forward in antiracist theory becomes that postcolonial essential gesture of negativity that transforms ataraxy into a "vital humanity" (78). Yet, given Adorno's own emphasis on the animal, Gilroy's privileging of active witnessing (79) should include *all* suffering. In the postcolonial moment at hand, the force of this kind of gesture emerges from a changed "somatic economy" (81) in which all lives are viewed as worthwhile—even when we eat them. A vital humanity knows that in spite of our pretensions we simply cannot recreate the ecosystem. While such an alternative economy and, hence, ecology of belonging, is often easily disregarded, such naiveté can become the basis of what Gilroy terms a global multicultural (80).

This reformulation of Gilroy's view of the postcolonial world articulates a new way of understanding our dependency on nature and, hence, on each other. We are able to think in planetary terms because preserving our heterogeneity, that is, truly seeing how the ground below embodies "openness and undifferentiated love" (80) is the basis for our survival. Only in monolithic cultures does difference become essentially antagonistic because overdevelopment and destroying nature seem like the only way of being human. Thus, the "unsettling history" (90) that is our cultural constitution cannot be deflected yet again by considering war (even against

nature) to be the mechanism that manufactures camaraderie as opposed to ataraxy. Instead of forgetfulness and silence (90), our political culture must adapt in order to understand the “catalogue of horror” (93) that is the conquest of nature. Such horror and its stench, as Adorno also argues, can only be denied, at great moral and psychological expense (94). Gilroy is right that our planet’s multicultural future depends upon what we do with this unsettling history that is our cultural constitution qua conquest of nature. We have become habituated to the “squeamish equivocation” (94) that enables our unquestioning occupation of a cultural niche. Yet, we must invert Gilroy’s emphasis on the urban setting as the displaced place of a cosmopolitan obligation (97) because Gilroy conflates the urban with the planetary. As result of this inversion, we may be able to promulgate a “vernacular dissidence” (99) that can account for the severe loss of our moral legitimacy as a species due to the possible impossibility of self-preservation that is anthropogenic climate change.

The nature/culture dichotomy is the memento of our “broken narcissism” (99) and can serve as the springboard to undermine fear of what is marked essentially, antagonistically different. This reading of Gilroy, therefore, also forges a tentative historical approach that similarly recognizes the power of the landscape, but does not do so in order to rectify perceived exclusion of urban, metropolitan space (115). Instead, what Gilroy terms our morbid culture (107) in fact demonstrates the ubiquitous illusoriness of our uniqueness. The only thing that keeps our separation from the animal in place is the seemingly natural power of a culture of stupidity (113). This stupidity is the “antihistory” (108) of traditional humanism that pretends that we are the only inhabitants of this planet that matter. Such stupidity precludes *nature* from the kinds of moral, aesthetic, and physical rearmaments critical for *culture* to be “reinvigorated and restored” (115). Gilroy promulgates demotic multiculturalism by reducing fantastical and overdetermined aspects of racial difference to a “liberating ordinariness” (119). Similarly, I propose a paradoxically postcolonial vision as that form of thinking that can take up the challenges of catering to a truly multicultural polity.

In this postcolonial understanding of animality, we rely on everyday, spontaneous, and organic forms of conviviality and intermixture (124) because they are already our ground level reality. We are then able to inculcate relationships with otherness not mutilated by the fear, anxiety, and violence of our fragile but alienated humanity (135, 136). The playful cosmopolitan energy and democratic possibilities apparent to Gilroy in the

metropolis (140) are also found in the accorded historic being of our animal life. As postcolonial philosophers of the future, we contend with our disavowed animal being (not just our denied blackness) over and over again in order for our suffering to hopefully be heard. We might also gain the courage to step back into the imperial history of the conquest of nature that we have sustained. Only then can we become transmitters of a truly global multiculture that contests human life as somehow a “politically fortified space” (141).

Culture Talk

Gilroy challenges what he terms the culture talk (141) that reinforces our “bio-logic” (142) such that culture is biological destiny. A postcolonial understanding of animality inculcates denial, guilt, and shame (141) for our brutally imposed (rather than biological) status as an exceptional species. What Gilroy terms the feral beauty of postcolonial culture (142) may reconstitute our culturally conditioned forms of differentiation and self-identification. Although seemingly based on common sense, these forms no longer provide the ethical resources necessary for a culture adequate to the postcolonial predicament. Such a negatively dialectical, postcolonial counter-history also considers race to be a “process of relation, imaginary kinship, and real narration” (148). But, this counter-history also posits that coming into (going back to?) our lives as animals is our “redemptive movement” (148) as a species. Far from being a betrayal of utopia, we actually find complexity, history, and heterogeneity at ground level. Given that animality is our heterogeneity, such postcolonialism abhors the illusion of solidarity seemingly forthcoming from “cultural unanimity” (146) against a debased and discredited nature.

Yet, we have not yet evolved to the point where we can think *as* a species even though our actions have the effect of a force of nature on the planet itself. As animals, our culture-building project (146) welcomes the profanation of conventional understandings of the human that consolidate “clanging, self-evident sameness” (151). If culture is nature, or the principle of self-preservation, and self-preservation is history, then the “*telos* of such an organization of society would be [or *should* be] to negate the suffering of even the least of its members, and to negate the internal reflexive forms of that suffering” (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 204). Given the possible impossibility of

self-preservation, this negation of suffering that is “in the interest of all” can be achieved only through a solidarity that seems “transparent to itself and all the living” (204). I suggest that this transparency is the postcolonial fact that I am an animal.

Postcoloniality as that ironic and melancholic *sense*—that this is the time for theory—may enable a passage to that future where anthropocentrism is not irreducibly a form of mastery.⁸ Given the impossibility, ultimately, of *knowing* our ecology, could anthropocentrism yield that power of race that accepts what is singular about the *human* relationship to nature/other species: cruelty? Cruelty is the mark of the human, not the animal. Cruelty is not extractive; it is gratuitous. It is the greed of a “humanity whose control of nature as control of men far exceeds in horror anything men ever had to fear from nature” (Adorno, *Minima Moralia* 239).

Our culture enshrines cruelty as the mechanism that convinces us of our separation from the animal, even as we use the animal to signify our irreducible difference from those whose lives are expendable. As Adorno states,

Indignation over cruelty diminishes in proportion as the victims are . . . swarthy, “dirty,” dago-like. . . . The constantly encountered assertion that savages, blacks, Japanese are like animals . . . is the key to the pogrom . . . decided in the moment when the gaze of a fatally wounded animal falls on a human being. The defiance with which he repels this gaze—“after all, it’s only an animal”—reappears irresistibly in cruelties done to human beings, the perpetrators having again and again to reassure themselves that it is “only an animal,” *because they could never fully believe this even of animals* (*Minima Moralia*, 105, emphases added).

The mark of cruelty is a superabundance predicated on unnecessary consumption *and* deprivation. Thus, cruelty at the individual scale becomes unsustainability at the planetary scale. Emphasizing cruelty paradoxically renders the animal central *and* irrelevant to postcolonial melancholia at this historical moment when we require an alternative ecology of belonging. What about the human *animal*, in its disavowal of its radical dependence on the ecosystem, renders it fundamentally unconcerned with self-preservation? Given the mass extinction event currently taking place, the consequences of which we cannot imagine or predict, could anthropocentrism yield not mastery but a practical philosophy? Is the

figure/image of the “animal” precluding the heterogeneous possibility that is the “animal,” a utopia that is (as) reality right here, right now?⁹

As tribalists, we believe that our life *depends* on the sacrifice/consumption of what is outside/excluded. Such stupidity is totalitarian in its impunity and forecloses the negativity of suffering.¹⁰ In postcoloniality, we should seek a proportional rather than exceptional (and, hence, usurping) footstep so that the earth is not a gated community where the animals are kept out. A negatively dialectical culture of conviviality, which makes room for others, asks if we can respect life in somebody else when we deprive ourselves of all yearning for life—in order to live. Our interest in non-Eurocentric ecological justice¹¹ notices how using nature to signify irreducible human difference is perhaps one tradition we have all had in ourselves and, hence, we can *all* hate it properly (Adorno, *Minima Moralia* 52).

Conclusion

This essay brings the intricate nexus of nature, culture, and history to bear on Paul Gilroy’s examination of what might be termed a living postcoloniality. A living postcoloniality requires acknowledging that the world *as it is* (and as it should be) disallows the entrenchment of rigid identity categories. Our fundamental entanglement¹² with each other, that is, our life at ground level, lends the lie to the virtual realities of our gratuitously devastating culture (*Postcolonial Melancholia* 32). A living postcoloniality, therefore, in this time of consequences, dismantles the genesis machine that renders nature the signifier of irreducible human difference. Nature, in fact, as “all on planet Earth that has no need of us and can stand alone” (Wilson, *The Creation* 15), refuses our historic demand for planetary exceptionalism. Although ostensibly left behind because of our cultural exceptionalism, nature is coming back for us and staking its claim. Given the possible impossibility of self-preservation that is anthropogenic climate change, the postcolonial cultural project is to forgo human exceptionalism in order to privilege our (only possible) lives as animals. Thus, historical responsibility for our colonial culture, and a radical reimagining of colonialism, requires recuperating an alternative history of our cultural relationship to nature.

Anthropogenic climate change demands rejection of the cultural prejudice that renders nature a façade to be maintained through our unquestioning occupation of a cultural niche. Instead, postcolonial melancholia faces up

to the very real consequences of not acknowledging that we are animals. This paradoxical postcoloniality naïvely interrupts the repetition of nature in culture as nothing, even as animality overdetermined the maligned worlds signified by the power of race. Such a shift in perspective—nature is culturally constituted so that culture can *seem* natural—allows for a postcolonial reimagining of the inexorable logics of the nature/culture dichotomy. This simplistic dichotomy evacuates our *historical* nature as animals to render separation from nature as the only possibility of being in a world. Acknowledging this animal life, which lives beyond yet remains intrinsic to our overdetermined cultural formation, enables us to gain a meaningful, hopeful, and fundamentally proportional presence in our world.

Thinking the threshold of this age, lest we who are the historical other of nature are left out/side of history, means going even further (back) than the history of violence justified by the power of race to an/other time frame: where it “all” began, in the beginning. A living postcoloniality renders this history meaningful by refusing our reified consumption of an increasingly inhospitable planet, which functions as an alibi for further mutilation in the name of postcolonial antiracist progress. This living perspective affirms the potency of culture by reminding us to *see* the heterogeneity of nature and, hence, the heterogeneous possibilities of culture. This heterogeneity has been boxed “in” and “cut off” from culture by the concept/category of “nature.” Given that a rendering of the vanquished as indistinguishable from nature justified colonialism and slavery, *we* are the memory of *how* culture appears as a “self-evident force of nature” (8). This postcolonial native informancy of what the loss of nature means at ground level is the negativity that emerges from behind the convergent logics of nature and culture.¹³ Thus, by refusing to stop short at the rupture with an ill-understood and stereotypically posited nature, living postcoloniality can *flesh* out that power of race that upholds the nature/culture dichotomy to reveal the *bloody* brutality that makes it real. I end with a respectful note to Professor Gilroy, therefore, that the elephant in the room is the (an) animal.

NOTES

1. See Spivak's discussion of “grasp[ing] life and ground-level history” (*Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 38, 50–56).
2. On 14 Feb. 1990, NASA granted the request of astronomer Carl Sagan to turn the Voyager 1 spacecraft's camera back toward the earth. What resulted was the iconic

photo known as the “pale blue dot,” an image of planet Earth taken from a distance of 6.4 billion kilometers. Sagan writes: “That’s us.... Our posturings, our imagined self-importance, the delusion that we have some privileged position in the Universe, are challenged by this ... lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark. In our obscurity, in all this vastness, there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves ... To me, [this distant image] underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly with one another, and to preserve and cherish . . . the only home we’ve ever known” (Sagan, *Pale Blue Dot*, 6–7).

3. In Matthew Arnold’s famous 1867 poem “Dover Beach,” the speaker ruminates on his view of the Dover cliffs, the English Channel, and on the “tremulous cadence slow” of the waves interminably striking the stony beach and then being drawn back out to sea. Within this familiar rhythm, the poet hears other patterns subsumed within what he calls “the eternal note of sadness” at the varieties of human loss, “the turbid ebb and flow/Of human misery.” Concluding, the poem emphasizes the exquisite vulnerability of the human community and positioned ominously at the edge of time and space perceived as “a darkling plain/Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,/Where ignorant armies clash by night.” With, quite literally, everything at stake, this melancholic and anxious position might be re imagined not through the antagonistic rendering of an “us” opposed to a hostile world writ large but rather through a sense of identification with the deep time strikingly figured in those fossil-filled limestone cliffs.
4. Dr. Rajendra Pachauri, chair of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, highlighted that, according to the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization, global meat production is responsible for 18 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions, when deforestation for silage crops and rangeland, and petroleum use for pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers, and machinery operation are factored. See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2008/sep/07/food.foodanddrink>, and <http://www.fao.org/ag/magazine/o6i2sp1.htm>.
5. Animal life is only present in Gilroy’s discussion of George Orwell’s essays “Shooting an Elephant,” “Some Thoughts on the Common Toad,” and “The Hanging” (*Postcolonial Melancholia*, 76–78).
6. Alternative ecological frameworks are reduced to lifestyle choices rather than essential or radical transformation.
7. The BBC series *Planet Earth* introduces us to our planet as if for the first time.
8. The “way out of this hellish circle” is to “think the last extreme of horror” (Adorno, *Metaphysics*, 125). The “compulsion to do something here and now” brings “thought to a standstill precisely where it ought to go further” (126). In catastrophe, the “ironic and melancholy sense—that this is the time for theory”—a rethinking of who we are—contains a “moment of liberation” and our “humanity” (126).
9. Adorno states, “Utopia [ought not] to be positively pictured; this is the substance of its negativity” (*Negative Dialectics*, 207).
10. “Overall, humanity has altered this planet as profoundly as our considerable powers permit” (E. O. Wilson, *The Creation*, 16–17).

11. Spivak contrasts “sustainability” and the “practical philosophy of living in the rhythm of the eco-biome”—the former calculated, appropriative, and Eurocentric and the latter cosmic yet simultaneously (like Adorno) ground level in its mirroring movement (*Critique of Postcolonial Reason* ix).
12. Adorno states, “There is no way out of entanglement. The only responsible course is to deny oneself the ideological misuse of one’s existence, and for the rest to conduct oneself in private as modestly, unobtrusively and unpretentiously as is required, no longer by good upbringing, but by the shame of still having air to breathe, in hell . . . There is no remedy but steadfast diagnosis of oneself and others, the attempt, through awareness, if not to escape doom, at least to rob it of its dreadful violence, that of blindness” (*Minima Moralia*, 27–33).
13. The native informant “in ethnography, can only provide data” or “can only be read, by definition, for the production of definitive descriptions” (Spivak, *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 49). Creating an interruptive *reader’s* perspective (33, 67) requires a sustained *un*-reading that tracks what the foreclosure of heterogeneity *means* for our lives at ground level. This ground level knowledge is the heterogeneity we *already* know to be the world.

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