



The American Optic: Psychoanalysis, Critical Race Theory, and Richard Wright (SUNY series in Psychoanalysis and Culture)

Mikko Tuhkanen

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Brings together critical race theory and psychoanalysis to examine African American and other diasporic African cultural texts.

The American Optic charts new territory in the relationship of psychoanalysis to critical race studies. Focusing on the work of Richard Wright and Jacques Lacan, it explores the political and ethical implications of psychoanalysis for African American and other diasporic African cultural texts. Mikko Tuhkanen develops a theory of “racialization” that recasts the genealogy of the Western concept of racial difference as outlined by critical race theory, through the theory of the real, which Lacan developed in his later work. By engaging a wide array of resources—including the work of W. E. B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, and Frantz Fanon, as well as nineteenth-century slave narratives and studies of blackface minstrelsy—Tuhkanen not only illuminates the unexpectedly rich connections between Lacanian psychoanalysis and black literary and cultural studies, but also demonstrates the ways in which the artistic and political traditions of the African diaspora allow us to reinvent the Lacanian ethics of becoming.

“...The American Optic is an impressive act of critical diplomacy ... Tuhkanen’s work seeks to acquaint two writers (Wright and Lacan) and two discourses (African American literature and psychoanalysis) not traditionally understood to be on speaking terms ... [it] is stunning in its sweep: in just under two hundred pages, it traverses an extraordinarily wide swath of literary and theoretical terrain, engaging along the way not only Lacan, but also Hegel, Fanon, and Foucault; not only Wright, but also Baldwin, Douglass, and Du Bois.” — African American Review

“The American Optic makes a very significant contribution to the discussion about the intersection of psychoanalysis and race. The author stages a provocative and illuminating dialogue between various psychoanalytic theories (primarily those of Lacan) and various African-American literary and cultural texts (particularly the novels of Richard Wright).” — Abdul R. JanMohamed, author of *The Death-Bound-Subject: Richard Wright’s Archaeology of Death*

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