



Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human

By Alexander G. Weheliye



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Habeas Viscus focuses attention on the centrality of race to notions of the human. Alexander G. Weheliye develops a theory of "racializing assemblages," taking race as a set of sociopolitical processes that discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans. This disciplining, while not biological per se, frequently depends on anchoring political hierarchies in human flesh. The work of the black feminist scholars Hortense Spillers and Sylvia Wynter is vital to Weheliye's argument. Particularly significant are their contributions to the intellectual project of black studies vis-à-vis racialization and the category of the human in western modernity. Wynter and Spillers configure black studies as an endeavor to disrupt the governing conception of humanity as synonymous with white, western man. Weheliye posits black feminist theories of modern humanity as useful correctives to the "bare life and biopolitics discourse" exemplified by the works of Giorgio Agamben and Michel Foucault, which, Weheliye contends, vastly underestimate the conceptual and political significance of race in constructions of the human. *Habeas Viscus* reveals the pressing need to make the insights of black studies and black feminism foundational to the study of modern humanity.



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Editorial Review

Review

"*Habeas Viscus* is a major contribution to the discourses of race and modern politics. Alexander G. Weheliye intervenes in contemporary engagement with Agamben's and Foucault's scholarship on biopolitics by opening new lines of inquiry for thinking through the problem of the human. Weheliye turns to the work of two major scholars and theorists of black studies, Hortense Spillers and Sylvia Wynter, revealing their thinking about the material and discursive existence of black bodies as vital analytical rubrics for conceptualizing the human."

(Wahneema Lubiano, editor of *The House that Race Built: Black Americans, U.S. Terrain*)

"Alexander Weheliye's *Habeas Viscus* is the latest iteration in the current reinvigoration of black diasporic thought.... *Habeas Viscus* feeds into this furiously complex joyful noise."

(Dhanveer Singh Brar *New Formations*)

"It is a book that offers us a meditation for imagining a world where the categorization and organization that produces race, and racist distinction and hierarchy — where human life — might be organized *otherwise* than it is."

(Ashon Crawley *Los Angeles Review of Books*)

"*Habeas Viscus* is a work with vast implications for the rereading of canonical works of biopolitics, as well as the reframing of biopolitics from the 'other' side. The arguments and techniques provided in the book will not only be of interest to scholars of race, feminism, and biopolitics, but also to those engaged with disability studies, affect theory, and even animal/ity studies. For this last group in particular, *Habeas Viscus* will be a haunting incantation for reconsidering the meanings and boundaries of human and nonhuman life, where 'flesh' is proved liminal, belonging neither to the realm of Man nor beast."

(Megan H. Glick *Hypatia*)

"Weheliye's dual theoretical-political aim of clarifying the operating force of racializing assemblages as well as voicing the necessity and potentiality of alternate political futures is an urgently needed intervention in conversations about the human and humanity. Not satisfied with critiquing the perils of our contemporary condition, he orients us towards new futures. In doing so, Weheliye's *Habeas Viscus* offers intellectual victuals not only for the project of black studies, but for all those who study non-white being-in-the-world and are relegated to the conceptual ghetto of ethnographic specificity."

(Aditi Surie von Czechowski *Borderlines (CSSAAME blog)* 2015-07-29)

"*Habeas Viscus* is a long-awaited contribution in the slowly awakening critical debates on the place of the concepts of race and racialization within the discourses on biopolitics and bare life underpinning many scholarly debates concerned with political violence, neoliberal capitalism and converging systems of oppression in Western critical theory. More importantly, coming from the standpoint of black studies and drawing largely from black feminist thought, this critical account of poststructuralist take on the category of the human, promises not only to redraw the blueprints of this prominent theoretical formation, but also to deterritorialise minority discourses, so far relegated to academic peripheries."

(Marianna Szczygielska *Parallax* 2015-11-01)

"In the age of the Anthropocene, *Habeas Viscus* helps us hear, feel, and imagine humanities that persist beyond Man's catastrophic horizons."

(Annie Menzel *Theory & Event* 2016-01-01)

"Weheliye's book is a major philosophical accomplishment. It expertly dispatches with the fantasy of the liberal subject by making racialization the central problem of the human. It broadens the agenda and intellectual reach of black studies into the realm of humanity. In these endeavors, it makes gender and black feminism central to these investigations, and it brings us back to the all-important question of the body and how to think with and through it. That Weheliye stays attentive to all of these questions while articulating damning critiques about biopolitics, bare life, and racism, is an important feat to behold."

(Amber Jamilla Musser *philoSOPHIA* 2016-01-01)

About the Author

Alexander G. Weheliye is Professor of African American Studies and English at Northwestern University. He is the author of *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity*, also published by Duke University Press.

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