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Introductory comments to the issue devoted to images and imageries of race, racism, and blackness from a historical perspective.

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To Imagine History

Four years after the official end of World War II, and six years after the destruction of the Jewish ghetto in the center of Warsaw, the African-American scholar and activist W. E. B. Du Bois arrived in Poland to see the image of devastation motivated by racist hatred. He stood in the district of Muranów to look at the ruins that overlaid signs of life and death alike, histories of struggle and despair. It is a very thought-provoking exercise to imagine him standing there, to see him seeing and imagine him reflecting on race, violence, identity, and struggle – questions that would later materialize in a powerful essay entitled "The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto."[1] Du Bois's visit to Warsaw would mark the end of what the historian of genocide Dirk Moses called the "racial century" (1850–1950),[2] a period of coherent racial imagery in politics domestically and internationally. This process of modernization was at the same time the process of accelerating racialized violence. The politics of exclusion inherent to nation-building, which could be observed in the colonies of major European countries, turned into the genocide brought home – the Nazi extermination of European Jewry. What followed was the human rights revolution, the introduction of the genocide convention, the refugee convention, the Geneva convention, the foundation of the United Nations, etc.[3] At the time Moses was writing his essay "Conceptual blockages and definitional dilemmas in the 'racial century': genocides of indigenous peoples and the Holocaust," that is, in the atmosphere of the late 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century, as he himself admitted,[4] the world seemed to be moving into a post-racial moment, whereby post-war was replaced by post-Cold War, with multiculturalism in the cultural mainstream. Yet, it very quickly transpired that racialization continued to frame politics, which was especially explicit in the aftermath of 9/11. The racist

political imagination persisted and continued to be articulated in manifold ways.

Thinking images and imaginaries of race from historical and geographical perspectives here and now asks for a return to the encounter of W. E. B. Du Bois with the ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto, in order to reframe collective memories and identities, and to challenge the hegemonic narratives of the past, as well as alliances and identity formations based on those narratives. What did the Polish female writer Zofia Nałkowska actually have in mind in 1946 when she decided to choose as an epigraph for her *Medallions*[5] – a collection of short reportage-like war stories – the following phrase: "People doomed people to this fate"?[6] It seems the sentiment behind her decision was the same as the one that motivated "the human rights revolution" mentioned above. She might have given in to the seduction of Western universalism – that, in Françoise Vergès's words, "united we stand." But the idea of humanism, which originated in the European Enlightenment, kept putting people outside of humanity: non-whites, indigenous people, women, etc. All of this and more that is associated with our "fabricated consent"[7] needs to be questioned. It is never the right time to do this, but the idea of the human seems yet to be accomplished with new possible connections and new theories of living together, whereby we would seriously approach the questions of what has made us not include others and what has made us include ourselves. Once these questions have been laid on the table, we will be able to hear the dissident voices, to see different bodies, various means of kinship and family, nonbinary gender constructions, and to listen to history in all its complexity and dissonance. In the process of dismembering universalism, we might be able to include new members, and recognize them for what they are and have been. We will be able to see how the idea of liberty has preceded, in the minds of numerous liberals, that of equality, thus making it possible for them to be

against slavery but not in favor of the equality of blacks and whites, men and women. It was racism, patriarchalism, and classism that stopped enlightened Europe from the realization of the French Revolution's ideals, and it was capitalism enabled by racism that enabled the transformation of people into objects. Here is why the unthinkable history of the Haitian Revolution, the only anti-slavery, anti-colonial, and anti-racist (though not yet feminist) Enlightenment revolution, has in recent years found a number of powerful interpretations, both theoretical and artistic.[8] And isn't the history of European unity rendered unthinkable now that we have heard the fascist, Islamophobic, and Antisemitic undertones becoming increasingly pronounced for a while? As many have pointed out, it seems that Europe has not yet decolonized fully, or has not followed the introspective path far enough; enough to discover that racism did not come from outside, but that pogroms arrive with slavery, concentration camps follow plantations, lynching comes from colonial torture.

European critical introspection could consider including certain images and tentative analogies; it could rethink the relationship between the Nazi genocide in Europe and the indigenous genocides that preceded it outside Europe, and the one between fascism and settler colonialism. And then the images: the infamous lynching photographs and the pictures from Abu Ghraib; the settlers' barbed wire fences in North America; the barbed wire of the Nazi camps in Poland and the Jewish settlements in Mandatory Palestine. Whose histories do these visual constellations illustrate? Whose heritage?

In her *Whites, Jews, and Us: Toward a Politics of Revolutionary Love*, the French-Algerian political activist and writer Houria Bouteldja attempts to offer an answer to the questions of troubled universalism and the possibility of living together. She celebrates Jean Genet, "a radical friend," as she calls him, "to the two great historical victims of the white order: the Jews and the colonized."[9] This "friend" famously asked a question we might

reiterate today: "How could one cheerfully rejoice at the end of Nazism all the while accommodating the genesis of colonialism and the pursuit of the imperialist project by other means? Could one recklessly isolate the Nazi moment from all other Western crimes and genocides?"[10] And if one could not or should not, then what is to be done? Genet, as Bouteldja reminds us, knew "that any indigenous person who rises up against the white man grants him, in the same movement, the chance to save himself."[11] Could we say that this is something we can take for granted today? The author calls for a "real encounter" between whites and non-whites, a meeting which could take place "at the crossroads of our mutual interests – the fear of civil war and chaos – the site where races could annihilate each other and where it is possible to imagine our equal dignity."[12] Some impossible things might no longer be so, once we recognize the crisis and are ready to detach ourselves from our exclusive wounds and stories, one-sided images, and zero-sum games. "Why not rewrite history, denationalize it, deracialize it?" asks Bouteldja. And then she makes an offer, or rather quotes one made some years ago by the Trinidadian historian, journalist, and Marxist C. L. R. James:

> These are my ancestors, these are my people.
> They are yours too if you want them.[13]

Once we take them in, we include them in our history; not only will history change, but so will its subjects and narrators. So, if James offers us the memory of his black ancestors and their revolt, we have to see ourselves as revolted against, and review the values that made us claim the position of dominance in the first place.

With this detour, let us return to W. E. B. Du Bois looking at the ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto. As Michael Rothberg claimed in his *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, "the lesson of Du Bois in Warsaw is in the end

equally crucial for Holocaust studies, postcolonial studies, and ethnic studies in general: the varieties of racial terror that have marked and marred the twentieth century—in everyday as well as extreme forms—leave their tracks on all forms of knowledge."[14] Yet, this lesson can also be taught locally: the ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto were the ruins of Warsaw, the ruins of the city and the country. Its inhabitants have tried, even struggled, to own them for decades now. Maybe not all the inhabitants, maybe just a minority of them. It seems just as troubled to own one's whiteness, to realize one's privilege, which, from the peripheral position of the here and now, seems even more difficult to embrace, as it brings with it the danger of appropriation on the one hand and the danger of usurpation on the other. But it does seem to be time to embrace one's position of thinking and imagining this history and owning it. How do we see the race problem and racism historically and from here? What does this peripheral position enable and what does it forbid the imagining of? How do we narrate our relationship to the race problem and how do we perceive our whiteness? Whose ancestors are we taking on board for this journey?

In his essay "People Doomed Jews to This Fate" from the collection *The Non-Artistic Truth*, the Polish-Jewish writer and Holocaust survivor Henryk Grynberg challenged Nałkowska's epigram, its universalistic claim, and Polish anti-Semitism. The Holocaust, he wrote, was a crime of humanity (hence "people") but it was not a crime against people (or humanity), as only Jews were selected and excluded from it in an "unheard-of" (sic) way and doomed to extermination and erasure.[15] In the 1990s many responded to this intellectually and ethically provocative stance. And so it needs to be challenged today: which people did Grynberg have in mind when reformulating Nałkowska's phrase and questioning the worldview supporting it? Did he include the colonized people of Africa? Did he include the indigenous peoples of North America or Australia? It is time to meet Du Bois in the

ruins of Warsaw and challenge the above phrase yet again: whites doomed Jews to this fate. This history might as well be narrated along these lines. And then when we decide to zoom out, we might even think that *whites doomed people to this fate*. Can this history be imagined?[16]

In this issue of *View*, we will take you on a visual excursion to contemporary Haiti with female photographer Agata Grzybowska, following in the footsteps of two other women: Susan Buck-Morss and Maya Deren. The artist's visual essay, *Invisible/ Les Invisibles*, is accompanied by an essay by Dorota Sajewska, who detects humility in Grzybowska's look – humility "which stems from ceaseless negotiation between thought and emotion, observation and experience, and manifests itself in a subtle, focused search for visible traces of the invisible."[17] With the real politics outside of the frame, the possible politics of historicity begins to emerge.

In the **Close-Up** section, MC Koch looks at how Marc Chagall's experiences as a Jew living in France and Russia at a certain historical moment influenced the coloring of the Jewish characters on his canvases, which in turn served to signify and destabilize perceptions of racial differences in those two societies. She sees in these paintings a compelling view of racial identity as existing somewhere between the psychic and the social, a reading that emphasizes the phantasmatic aspect of race. In her essay "Ashanti in Warsaw," Agata Łuksza returns to the end of the 19th century to trace the remnants of "blackness" in the history of Polish theatre, which allows her to address the implication of Polish society in the European colonial project – in its ideas, values, and cultural practices. In "'Foreign in Their Own Country': Afro-Germans and Post-Unification Memory Conflicts in the Light of Laura Horelli's *Namibia Today* Project and the Work of Mwangi Hutter," Justyna Balisz-Schmelz takes a closer look at the condition of black Germans after 1989. The works of artists Laura Horelli and Mwangi Hutter allow the author to open

up alternative narratives of contemporary German identity, which consider race and Germany's colonial history, and also question the post-world war II and post-Cold War consensuses regarding Germanness and German art. This section closes with the Polish translation of "The King's Two Bodies," a chapter from "the maverick art historian" Darby English's book *To Describe a Life: Notes from the Intersection of Art and Race Terror*.[18] The essay deals with a troubling object: *Lorraine Motel, April 4, 1968* – a model of the site of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., produced in 1998 by the design firm Boym Partners as part of their *Buildings of Disaster* series. The author analyzes the object from several perspectives: that of historical and contemporary race terror in the USA; the civil rights movement and its protagonists; the idea of racial integration; as well as the affective dimension of the 1960s and that decade's public feelings, desires, and intimacies.

In **Perspectives**, we invite you to dive into a conversation between Katarzyna Bojarska and Ana Teixeira Pinto, the co-curator – with Kader Attia et al. – of *The White West* project, whose current episode is ongoing at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin. The project is "an attempt to analyze white supremacy as a political system, rather than as a cultural pathology,"[19] and to see this system as including and implicating the art world and artistic production worldwide. We also present a contribution from the curators of the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, Natalia Słaboń and Jakub Gawkowski, who experiment with applying terms and categories from postcolonial studies and decolonial museology to the local context of the institution, whose history was founded not on and by imperialism, but rather by the grassroots and horizontal cooperation of the international artistic community.

In **Panorama**, we continue with the presentation of essays written for the Research Proseminar "Race in American Film," taught by Professor Agnieszka Graff at the American Studies

Center of the University of Warsaw. Aleksandra Jehn-Olszewska, in her essay entitled "America's Fascination with the Ku Klux Klan: *BlacKkKlansman* and *Accidental Courtesy*: Daryl Davis, Race, and America," explores the past and present shape of the KKK's representation in film, and relates it to discourse on the representation of race and ethnicity in the United States. The conscious aesthetic and meta-cinematographic techniques employed by the titular films are analyzed through the lens of two related concepts: Brecht's reflective spectatorship and Shklovsky's defamiliarization in art. In "Colorblindness and Masculinity: *Lethal Weapon* and the Construction of a Post-Racial Reality," Jakub Olech discusses a classic Hollywood buddy cop action film as a vision of a post-racial society. The author finds it relevant to revisit this "vision" in the wake of the biggest protests against racial injustice in decades, which in 2020 swept the United States and spread to parts of Europe, and to enquire about the current popular imaginary of race. These essays – as with those in the previous issue – merge Polish and American perspectives in interesting ways, analyzing images and imageries of race in historical contexts. The section closes with a polemical essay by Wojciech Michera, devoted to the archive of portraits of the inhabitants of Dębica taken by pre-war female photographer Stefania Gurdowa, which was discovered in 1997 in an attic of an apartment building. Michera emphasizes the materiality of the photographic images and their irreducible alterity, which requires, first and foremost, a restrained cognitive rather than sentimental approach.

In **Snapshots**, you will find Łukasz Zaremba's critical and comparative reading of two recent books – Aston Gonzalez's *Visualizing Equality: African American Rights and Visual Culture in the Nineteenth Century*, and Matthew Fox-Amato's *Exposing Slavery: Photography, Human Bondage, and the Birth of Modern Visual Politics in America*. While the former follows its protagonists, 19th-century black image producers in North

America, the latter offers a narrative on the first quarter-century of photography in the United States, with emphasis on the fact that it is impossible to think of race without photography, and that racial politics has shaped the social uses of photographic media in the US. Last but not least, Katarzyna Bojarska visits two underground artistic and curatorial explorations: *Here Is Muranów* – a temporary exhibition at the POLIN Museum, with the participation of Artur Żmijewski, and Joanna Rajkowska's *Rhizopolis* at the Zachęta National Art Gallery in Warsaw. The author returns to the artists' joint trip to Israel/Palestine, which took place twenty years ago, and looks at the different approaches they took in addressing troubled collective memories and memory conflicts. The current "encounter" of the artists in two very different curatorial frameworks provides an opportunity for the critic to rethink historicity as conceptualized by contemporary art. Żmijewski deals with what has been dug out from underneath Muranów – the remnants of Jewish life destroyed by racially motivated hatred; Rajkowska fantasizes about the catastrophe that sent us all underground once the project to colonize the world (including the natural world) finally failed.



So, once again, with the detour to W. E. B. Du Bois, we are back in Warsaw's Muranów, thinking histories that might converge and images that might resonate with dissonant memories. In 2012, a friend sent a picture taken in Muranów, asking: "Is there really a Dubois street in Warsaw? Is it named after W. E. B. Du Bois?"[20] No, it isn't. The Dubois commemorated in Muranów was a socialist activist, editor, writer, and resistance fighter who died

in Auschwitz. So, it is quite a different story, or is it not that different...

Have a good read,
Editorial Team.

1 W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto," *Jewish Life* (May 1952), 14–15.

2 Dirk Moses, "Conceptual blockages and definitional dilemmas in the 'racial century': genocides of indigenous peoples and the Holocaust," *Patterns of Prejudice* vol. 36, no. 4 (2002), 7–36.

3 See, among others, Ariella Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (London: Verso, 2019); Raoul Peck, *Exterminate All the Brutes* 2020, four-part series streaming on HBO.

4 Dirk Moses in conversation with Anselm Franke, *The White West: Whose Universal?* podcast series episode 4 (accessed March 20, 2021).

5 Mikołaj Gliński, "Zofia Nałkowska's 'Medallions' & The Bomb That Never Went Off" *Culture.pl* (accessed March 20, 2021).

6 As a side-note, in 2019, the Polish Institute of National Remembrance introduced a correction to Nałkowska's epigraph while using it in the opening frame of a film depicting life in Nazi-occupied Warsaw, produced by the IPN: "People (Germans [in red, K.B.]) doomed people to this fate," and signed it "Zofia Nałkowska."

7 Françoise Vergès, *The White West: Whose Universal?* podcast series episode 3 (accessed March 20, 2021).

8 See: Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 2009); Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995); *The Life of Toussaint L'Ouverture*, exhibition at the Cleveland Museum of Art by Jacob Lawrence (2014–2015); Joanna Malinowska and C. T. Jasper, *Halka/Haiti 18°48'05"N 72°23'01"W* (2015), and many others.

9 Houria Bouteldja, *Whites, Jews, and Us: Toward a Politics of Revolutionary Love,* trans. Rachel Valinsky (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2016), 24.

10 Jean Genet, "Interview with Bertrand Poirot-Delpech," in: idem, *The Declared Enemy: Texts and Interviews* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 203. Quoted after Bouteldja, *Whites, Jews, and Us*, 25.

11 Bouteldja, *Whites, Jews, and Us*, 26.

12 Ibid., 50.

13 C. L. R. James, "The Making of the Caribbean People," in: idem, *Spheres of Existence: Selected Writings* (London: Allison and Busby, 1980), 187. Quoted after Bouteldja, *Whites, Jews, and Us*, 50.

14 Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 115.

15 Henryk Grynberg, *Prawda nieartystyczna* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1994).

16 Dorota Sajewska puts Du Bois's visit to Warsaw in an interesting context of peripheral racism in her article "Perspektywy peryferyjnej historii i teorii kultury" [Perspectives on Peripheral History and Theory of Culture]. She writes there: "A fascinating document of the era problematizing Poland as a semi-peripheral space in the context of issues of race and racism is the essay by African-American writer and social activist W. E. B. Du Bois, 'The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto'." Dorota Sajewska, "Perspektywy peryferyjnej historii i teorii kultury *Didaskalia* 154 (April 2020)(accessed March 20, 2021).

17 Dorota Sajewska, "Invisible: White Women and Haiti," *View. Theories and Practices of Visual Culture* 29 (2021) April 10, 2021 **LINK**

18 Darby English, *To Describe a Life: Notes at the Intersection of Art and Race Terror* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2019).

19 "Whose West and Whose Universal? Ana Teixeira Pinto in Conversation with Katarzyna Bojarska," *View. Theories and Practices of Visual Culture* issue 29 (2021) April 10, 2021.

20 From an email from Michael Rothberg to Katarzyna Bojarska; picture taken by Dirk Moses and sent to Michael Rothberg.