

## **Widok. Theories and Practices of Visual Culture**

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Questionnaire

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**abstract:**

We asked several curators, critics, theorists, artists and activists to share their thoughts on the intricate relationship between "race," images and imageries. Below are their responses. We would like to express our sincere gratitude to all of you who accepted our invitation. This is a timely and an important conversation.

**Gabriel Mestre Arrijoja** - He is a writer, artist, filmmaker and independent curator. Mestre Arrijoja works with non-linear projects to generate different epistemological production that reunites artistic practices, the knowledge of the indigenous people of Mexico and the First Nations of the Americas with the history of the avant-garde art movements and notions from critical thinking. His projects are to find different schemes of participation and collaboration with individuals and groups alienated by Capitalism and other production systems, promoting, among other things: aims of decolonialization, the exercise of institutional criticism and civil rights empowerment and the building of alternative and solidarity economies. Since 2002, he has managed several projects as independent, self-supported or freelance curator. His achievements have been developed mostly in the fields of contemporary art and visual culture but also within anthropology and the environmental science. He has collaborated with selected institutions (public, private and personal ones) in Europe and Asia, as well as in the Americas, running his exhibitions, publications and public programs in a number of countries such as: Iceland, Japan, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Austria, Cuba, Colombia and Mexico. Recently, his curatorial research, mediation and management of projects have been benefited by different international grants, programs and institutions, such as: Danish Art Foundation, OCA, FRAME, CCA Estonia, CAC Vilnius, Icelandic Art Center, IFA, Goethe Institute, Austrian Cultural Forum

and Jumex Foundation, among others. He is the founder of the Curatorial Residency In Mexico (CRIMEX), the project space Surplus Int. and the non-profit organization Artenación.

**Eugenia Siapera** - Professor of Information and Communication Studies and head of the ICS School at UCD. Prior to this, she has held positions at Dublin City University, Aristotle University, Greece, University of Leicester, UK and University of Amsterdam, NL. Her research interests are in the area of digital and social media, political communication and journalism. She has recently completed an IRC-funded project on racist hate speech in the Irish digital sphere, and is also working on a project on the digital memory of conflict (RePAST) funded by the European Commission. She has written numerous articles and book chapters, and her most recent book is *Understanding New Media* (Sage, 2018, second edition). She is currently working on an edited volume on *Gendered Cyber Hate* (Palgrave, 2019) with Debbie Ging.

**Andrea Průchová Hrůzová** - Ph.D. She is a theoretician of visual culture, researcher and pedagogue. She teaches at Charles University, Prague College and Scholastica and conducts her research at the Czech Academy of Sciences, the National Film Archive and the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes. She founded and leads the Platform for the Study of Visual Culture Fresh Eye ([www.fresh-eye.cz](http://www.fresh-eye.cz)). She is the recipient of Fulbright scholarships, fellowships Georg Eckert Institute, scholarships Hlávka Foundation Talent. She publishes extensively in Czech and English.

**Thị Linh Nguyễn Vũ** Postdoctoral fellow at the Research Center for The History of Social Transformations (RECET) at the University of Vienna. Linh's research interests include contemporary history of Poland, Vietnam, global socialism, migration, social movements, racism, and Critical Whiteness Studies.

**Margaret Amaka Ohia-Nowak** - Linguist and culture studies scholar. Trainer of intercultural competence. Anti-discrimination trainer. Certified FRIS® Trainer. She runs a training company that teaches intercultural, anti-discriminatory and empathic communication. Her doctoral thesis was devoted to the manifestations of racism in Polish language. She is author of lesson plans, educational materials and scientific publications on intercultural, anti-

discrimination and global issues.❏

**Hana Umeda** - He is a performer, dancer and teacher of Japanese classical dance, a student of master Hanasaki Tokijyo, she has been using the title of Natori in the Hanasaki-ryu school since 2020 and as Sada Hanasaki she nurtures and spreads the tradition of jirutamai dance. She received a scholarship from the Young Poland program of the National Cultural Center in 2018, as part of which she produced the performance SadaYakko, which premiered in February 2019 at Komuna/Warsaw. She is also a PhD student at the Institute of Polish Culture, University of Warsaw.

**Marta Ziólek** - Choreographer and performer. Exploring the space between the visual arts, performance and choreography, Marta Ziólek keeps testing the boundaries and conditions of freedom of action in choreography. She is interested in displaying, exposing, and playing with the notions of control and power inherent in choreography. Before studying choreography at the School for New Dance Development (SNDO) in Amsterdam she enrolled at the College of Individual Interdisciplinary Studies in the Humanities at the University of Warsaw. She participated in workshops, or collaborated with such choreographers and theorists, as Bojana Cvejić, DD Dorvillier, Deborah Hay, Maria La Ribot, Trajal Harrell, Benoit Lachambre, Ann Liv Young, Xavier Le Roy, and Meg Stuart. In 2011 she was awarded the Dance Web scholarship at the ImpulsTanzFestival in Vienna. In 2012 she participated in „Europe in Motion,” a platform dedicated to emerging choreographers. In 2013 she received a scholarship from the Amsterdam Funds of the Arts.

**Monika Bobako** - Philosopher, profesor of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, graduate of UAM and Central European University in Budapest. Author of Islamophobia as a technology of power. A study in political anthropology (Universitas, 2017) and Democracy and Difference. Multiculturalism and Feminism in the Perspective of the Politics of Recognition (Poznan, 2010), and editor of the volumes Emancipatory Theologies (Theoretical Practice, 2013) and Islamophobia. Women❏(Theoretical Practice, 2017). She is interested in the anthropology of power, issues of race and racism, including Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, and problems of the postcolonial world, especially Muslim societies. She also works on feminist

issues, especially in the context of political theory and philosophy of religion. In 2018, her book *Islamophobia as a technology of power. A study in political anthropology* was awarded the Jan Długosz Prize and nominated for the Tadeusz Kotarbiński Prize. Her current research project funded by the National Science Centre is entitled "Genealogies of peripheral whiteness. Polish identities in the perspective of racialisation theory".

## **Questionnaire**

*We asked several curators, critics, theorists, artists and activists to share their thoughts on the intricate relationship between "race," images and imageries. Below are their responses. We would like to express our sincere gratitude to all of you who accepted our invitation. This is a timely and an important conversation.*

### **Gabriel Mestre Arrioja**

#### **What is the connection between race and visuality? How is race constructed as something to be seen?**

Coffee, Native, Exotic, Peach and Normal are just some of the names that the cosmetic industry has given to skin tones, and labels like that only expose our view of ourselves and others. Their color scale of six shades is inspired by the Fitzpatrick Scale, a classification system for human skin color, which was developed in 1975 by the dermatologist Thomas B. Fitzpatrick, who identified six skin types on the basis of their reactions to UV light. According to its creator, the scale is not based on ethnicity, yet still relies on a hierarchical system, starting with white and ending with black, as follows: Type I Pale white, Type II White, Type III Medium, Type IV Moderate brown, Type V Dark brown, and Type VI Dark brown to black. This hierarchy, which starts with the whitest of whites and ends with the blackest of blacks, has meant that it is the Caucasian race's so-called 'white' skin color that has prospered most, and this is why it's been under constant scrutiny recently. From Nazism's belief in a master race, to the history of ancient and modern colonialism and slavery and the West's view of "the Other," skin color is an ever-present, controversial subject. It defines to some degree the

possibilities of a human being and her/his role in society, at the same time race has always served as an excuse for creativity.

### **How is looking a racialized practice, how does it constitute a performance not just of race but also by racialized (racist) viewers?**

An accurate combination doesn't exist, this thing of correcting/evaluating practices within and outside the concept of race is something new, much of the time promoted by white colonialism inserted within the academy and the art market; nevertheless all explorations of this matter must be welcomed, especially after a long process of designated invisibility. What is impossible to deny is that some viewers are deeply invested in maintaining the colonial fantasy that allowed them to think that otherness can be contained in cages according to the white viewer's will.

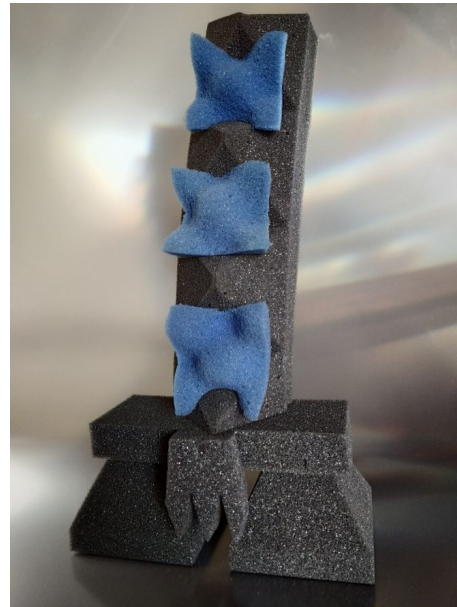
## What is the function of the image of the racialized body and how does it influence the overall concept of the body as such?

Images of racialized bodies were created to send powerful warnings to the other; grotesque representations of people belonging to other cultures or races have frequently been chosen in Western culture as subjects of exaggeration and deformation, as a way of depersonalization and degradation. Analyzed from the classicist aesthetic canon, the category of the grotesque and its anchorage in the carnival vision, mutates into horrifying and incomprehensible ambivalence; for this reason the grotesque is an unresolved clash between incompatible reactions, laughter on the one hand and horror or disgust on the other.

In every historical colonization, ownership has served as an excuse to racialize bodies and nowadays it can still be seen in the behaviour of the owners of academies and those who work in the art market, despite the fact that they acknowledge all the recent postmodern approaches to race, body and gender. In fact, at the same time they objectify the speechless other and voice nothing that is really critical of, and challenging to, Western-colonial narratives of discovery and progress.

## What can working with race mean in a theoretical and practical sense?

If you're an artist living in a country that was forcefully colonized, you just don't work with race as a concept; you are



Gabriel Mestre Arrijoja, *Ethnical Pareidolias* (2020), acoustic foam and beeswax

race and you have to embrace it even though everything is made by whites and for whites. It's all too common to find yourself confused, underrepresented and misrepresented if not blatantly and systematically devalued and attacked, more if you are black, indigenous or a mix in between. Positive role models and a positive self-identity are hard to come by, yet through art some modern gateways are opening now into urban contemporary and originary cultures of the Global South and their experiences, celebrating all its layering and complexities of syncretism, promoting inclusivity, empathy and acceptance amongst all races and genders in the name of social justice; and it only means that women, indigenous and black people needs to define their identity themselves and build up their institutions on their own terms alone, looking to the future, without losing sight of their past but that's far from the notion of contemporary.

**Gabriel Mestre Arrioja is a writer, artist, filmmaker and independent curator based in Mexico.**

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## **Eugenia Siapera**

### **What is the connection between race and visuality? How is race constructed as something to be seen?**

The connection between race and visuality is ambivalent. On the one hand, race, especially blackness, can be something visually apprehended, 'visible' in the sense that it is there for all to see. Race as skin color falls under this category of immediate visibility along with race as cultural and religious practice, for example wearing a hijab. This immediate visibility conjures up all the (mostly or overwhelmingly) negative associations. Franz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* uses the anecdote of a child

saying "Look, a Negro" to illustrate the 'scandal' of this visibility, the embarrassment it brings and the inferiority it imposes on its subjects. Race is therefore in the first instance something that is visual, immediately perceived, and clear for all to 'see' in the dual sense of both visual perception and understanding, i.e. mobilising the cultural baggage that race connotes.

An interesting and telling example of the visibility of race is the so-called practice of 'passing' where a person of color does not exhibit the phenotypic characteristics expected. In the era of scientific racism, lynching and segregation in the US, but also in Europe, passing was a kind of passport to whiteness, a potential survival strategy, but always carried as a huge burden with the capacity to unravel and destroy the person, as for example in the novel *Passing* by the Harlem Renaissance author Nella Larsen (incidentally this is now being turned into a Hollywood film). Passing may be an ambivalent tactic, if the objective is racial liberation, but it is nevertheless revealing: if you remove the epidermal, conspicuous aspects, what remains of race?

Yet despite this obvious visibility of race, its visibility is at the same time denied in post-racial, color blind arguments and practices, often embedded in legal and institutional codes. Color blindness, exemplified by the 'I don't see race' attitude of many who understand themselves as liberal, is a denial of the significance of race, even as we see its results all around us: from racist exclusion to dehumanisation. Color blindness is to ignore racism and its effects on racialized people.

A second form of invisibilisation of race is found in the centering of whiteness as the default: the experiences and ways of being white (mostly men, mostly middle class) are given priority in all domains of life, and everything else revolves around these. We can imagine male whiteness as the centre and other identities placed in concentric circles. The practical implications of this prioritisation are to be seen everywhere: from medical interventions that ignore black bodies to facial

recognition technologies that only work on white skin.

## **How is looking a racialized practice, how does it constitute a performance not just of race but also by racialized (racist) viewers?**

Race depends on visibility which is at the same time denied and those subjected to processes of racialization are continuously gaslighted. One of the most obvious forms of looking as a racial practice is found in racial profiling, most evident in airports, at borders and other securitized spaces. Examples of black travellers and commuters being stopped and searched, black shoppers being followed continuously or denied service are evidence of a racializing form of looking that constitutes surveillance. To be 'raced' therefore, to be looked at as black or brown, is a practice of suspicion: people of color are, in this sense, not looked at but rather 'watched'. The recent case in the Netherlands where welfare services systematically discriminated against black and racialized people based on their 'foreign' sounding names is another form of looking as surveillance. Racial profiling based on the conspicuous aspects of racial and racialized identity, one's skin tone, one's name, one's cultural artefacts – all constitute a crucial practice by which race and racism are enacted.

If we take racial profiling as an emblematic case of the racialized gaze, we can say that this then fixes its subjects in a given ascribed racial identity, it literally arrests them, and in this sense it prevents them from forming and developing their identities in freedom.

## **What is the function of the image of the racialized body and how does it influence the overall concept of the body as such?**

I can only speculate here, based on an understanding of

a hierarchy of races, with whiteness at the top. White bodies are the norm and black/racialized bodies are seen as exceptional. Images of strong athletic black bodies for example are an indication of a deep difference from the normal white bodies which are understood less in their physicality and more in their intellectuality.

I remember a 2008 Vogue cover with LeBron James and Giselle Bündchen which I discussed with students extensively - the juxtaposition of an animal-like strong black body and a fragile white woman was considered very similar to the King Kong image. In other cases, for example in war or images of catastrophes in non-Western contexts or in refugee camps, we see masses of black/racialized bodies, whose individuality and humanity is completely lost - they never speak, they are just there for audiences to see. In cases where the images are of a particular individual, they are often designed to elicit pity. In most of these cases it would be inconceivable to imagine a white person or persons photographed in the same ways. One can think of the dead body of Aylan Kurdi, the three year old boy who died in an attempt to cross from Turkey to Greece: it would be inconceivable for an image of a white European dead boy to circulate in this manner. In this sense, I would argue that the function of images of racialized bodies is to reinforce the hierarchy of whiteness.



## What can working with race mean in a theoretical and practical sense?

This is a difficult question to answer. As a migrant who is occasionally racialized, for me working with race involves both acknowledging its workings and seeking to abolish it. It is difficult to separate its theoretical and practical senses, because it is difficult to address the practical operations and repercussions of race from its theoretical bases and historical manifestations. Race, as Hall put it, is the ultimate floating signifier, so there is a lot of work that needs to be done in pinning down the contemporary meanings and experiences of race. I think in terms of attitude, and this perhaps is in contrast to the current emphasis on visuality, that listening may need to precede looking, given the burden of the immediate signs of race, which immediately conjure up stereotypes. Listening to racialized people means letting them speak directly, give voice to their experiences and concerns and enable these to take precedence over white academic and other voices. It is crucial for me in my work to be always cognizant of the many forms of exploitation, and to reflect and hopefully prevent exploitation.

**Eugenia Siapera is Professor of Information and Communication Studies and head of the ICS School at University College Dublin.**

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## **Andrea Průchová Hružová**

### **What is the connection between race and visuality? How is race constructed as something to be seen?**

We can think of race as a visual box used for the categorization and hierarchization of individuals living within one community, society, or world. It serves as a communication infrastructure which does not require the use of words. I find this socio-psychological phenomenon to be a relic of 19<sup>th</sup>-century science, which was built on the foundations of an imperialistic canon of domination and oppression. In order to be able to truly reveal how local and global solidarity can work, we have to unlearn this destructive way of seeing, which draws a line of division between us before we even start learning more about each other.

### **How is looking a racialized practice, how does it constitute a performance not just of race but also by racialized (racist) viewers?**

My answer corresponds with that above. The practice of looking is a cultural technique, which involves technology – our eyes – and culture – the notions that we link with what/who is seen. Modern science has taught us to see race through a grid of various stereotypes ranging from barbarism and exoticism to criminalization and hate. This way of seeing has been appropriated by wider visual culture and still resonates in various spheres of Central Europe culture: politics, advertising, education, and mainstream popular culture. Within this extensive social network, the stereotypes are confirmed and there is no room left for questioning them. That is why the cultural technique

of seeing via race is perceived to be a “natural” phenomenon that cannot be deconstructed.

## **What is the function of the image of the racialized body and how does it influence the overall concept of the body as such?**

The image of a refugee is a highly visible symbol of the racialized body in contemporary Central European media. It turns the body into the notion of bones and flesh, which can or cannot survive a long journey to the destination that is Europe. It sees the bodies of men as members of dangerous crowds, it presents women as helpless victims and uses children as emotional triggers. It puts a double label on the body: it highlights a set of stereotypical physical features and connects them with another set of stereotypical gender features.

## **What can working with race mean in a theoretical and practical sense?**

Working with race should now be carried out as a practice of unlearning. Take an ethnically homogenous country like the Czech Republic. It shows us that despite the lack of our own imperialistic history, the imperialistic paradigm of thinking can actively operate within contemporary society. Why? Because it simply allows the growth of a false myth of one’s own exceptionalism, it supports nationalistic rhetoric and it strengthens reactionary political culture – all tendencies which find a foothold within populist politics in times of crisis.

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**Thuc Linh Nguyen Vu**

## **What is the connection between race and visuality? How is race constructed as something to be seen?**

Race, racism and visuality share a long and connected history. Visual culture was key to the construction and reproduction of a shared mental landscape at the peak of European colonialism. It supported the organization of the world order around a (pseudo-)scientific and seemingly objective notion of race which, as an epistemic paradigm, deliberately conflated race with hierarchies of mental and cultural superiority and inferiority, and led to, for example, eugenics. The colonial imaginary involved the production and circulation of visual and material culture, literature, and journalism. All these dimensions were involved in world-making practices, even if in different scopes and at different levels. Therefore, a specific type of visuality came to be essential in spreading, visually narrating, normalizing and legitimizing the project of racialized colonialism and the accompanying colonial mindset and political consciousness. In Edward Said's words, this gives rise to an "imaginative geography" where "[i]t is Europe that articulates the Orient" (Said 1979, p.57). The afterlives of this entanglement between visual culture and colonialism are still visible in contemporary European institutions, cultural imaginaries, cityscapes, practices, and internalized behaviors.

Throughout the long history of mutual entanglements between the colonial visual sphere and the actual history of colonialism, the relationship between visuality and its claims to truth merits special attention. Images and the way they are

produced, how they circulate, where they are exhibited, with which discourses they are articulated, and the transformations they enable constitute regimes of visibility. This gives rise to a specific conundrum: despite or maybe thanks to their obviously constructed character, images can (and often do) act as figures of truth playing a fundamental role in knowledge production. Visual representations of racialized populations have the potential, authority and power to construct narratives of truth, i.e. what they depict seems to convey knowledge about whom and what is depicted; a knowledge that is seemingly in accordance with reality and facts. Of course, these narratives have also always been confronted by counter-narratives, by non-hegemonic forms of knowledge and image production, and indeed by practices of visual insurgency with which the colonized and more generally marginalized racialized populations spoke truth to power.

In that sense, visibility matters deeply for both the institutional and grassroots knowledge production on racialized people, cultures and practices. In the tradition of the first generation of the Frankfurt School, which was preoccupied with the culture industry and its integrative power, images are often seen as disseminating homogenous meanings in a top-down fashion, thereby turning viewers into passive recipients and consumers. From that point of view, images sustain the dominant ideology (such as a racialized world order). Yet, as cultural studies scholars from Stuart Hall onwards have powerfully argued, we need a more nuanced account of image circulation, as there are always multiple avenues of interpreting and of appropriating images and integrating them into a different and counter-hegemonic set of practices and strategies. Visibility can thus also be used by racialized minorities as a tool in the symbolic and real struggle for decolonization, as a means to strengthen and empower marginalized communities, as a weapon for community building that oftentimes takes place "off-stage" and thus

remains invisible to dominant points of view on social transformation.

## **How is looking a racialized practice, how does it constitute a performance not just of race but also by racialized (racist) viewers?**

Looking might seem innocuous but it not always is. Just like language, which is a part of an immaterial structure that its users inherit and which goes beyond their immediate intentions, so are ways of looking anchored in a long history of inherited and thickly layered histories and practices and regimes of visibility. What we see is both conceptually and culturally mediated and looking is, in this sense, never immediate and pure. But does this automatically mean that direct links can be established between acts of viewing and racist practices? Practices of viewing can be seen as related to other expressions of race and whiteness as privilege or complicity when located in a specific context. Consider emotional reactions and affective attachments that are triggered by depictions of various racialized bodies both in public and in the private sphere. Racialized bodies are seen—and at times mocked, ridiculed, and laughed at, but they are also uncritically emulated or romanticized. How racialized bodies and cultures are experienced is also embedded in emotional practices that are interlocked with racist habitus. In that sense, the uncritical viewing and experiencing of images can be racist insofar as it is part of a broader set of resilient, yet adaptive and seemingly innocent dispositions that can be racist such as certain types of biases, microaggressions and stereotypes.

## **What is the function of the image of the racialized body and how does it influence the overall concept of the body as such?**

What an image does to racialized people and the viewer very much depends on the specific context, institution and practice. Images speak for themselves as much as they do because they also mirror and co-create broader discourses. Take recent examples of anti-Asian racism. With the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic and the public blame game regarding the "origins" of the virus, East and Southeast Asian people with their culinary heritage were suddenly perceived as a literal threat to public safety. At the same time, Europeans—in a reiteration of what can be called colonial arrogance—assumed that what was happening in China wouldn't happen here. The word "Chinese"—which oftentimes in a world of ignorance still stands for the whole of Asia—was used with reference to all kinds of phenomena, e.g. omnipresent images of impersonal Asian masses with face masks or people eating obscure foods in outdoor markets. Almost overnight, Asian minorities, who are usually seen as a model minority both in North America and in Eastern Europe, became associated with a new and mysterious disease. Fascination with and envy of Asian progress (which often goes hand in hand with harsh neoliberal restructuring) was replaced by a presumed collective guilt regarding the Asians living in North America and Europe. With the surge in media coverage on the pandemic, the Asian body was perceived and treated by some as a carrier of a potentially deadly virus. This simple equation between Asians and the virus in the popular imaginary resulted in concrete responses. The Asian body had to be contained, stayed away from, and physically attacked, as if this, by extension, would stop the virus itself. The isolated but regular incidents of physical assaults and hate speech as well

as the omnipresent but diffuse atmosphere of fear of Asians is a bitter reminder that what I call “racist love” (being seen and racialized as a welcome, even model minority, qualified for acculturation) is always conditional, contingent upon various factors in flux, such as the distribution of power, and has an underbelly of racialized surveillance and disciplinary practices. Rather than being merely another manifestation of the old Yellow Peril trope that is ready to be recycled and reused, recent anti-Asian racism reveals the narrow contours that restrict belonging to the polity and the conditions of acceptance. As Achille Mbembe recently put it, this shows that the question of belonging remains unanswered. Who gets to be “from here”? Perhaps there is also a silver lining: the shared experience of the somewhat unpredictable ebb and flow of racism and the different populations it targets leaves virtually no racialized people untouched. Despite obvious differences between the logics and effects of anti-Muslim racism, especially after 9/11, anti-Black racism and anti-Asian racism, there is potential to create alliances and solidarities grounded in this very experience.

## **What can working with race mean in a theoretical and practical sense?**

Working with race, racism and whiteness involves exposure to one’s own and others’ vulnerabilities, which come with being either regarded as white or as a member of a racialized group. It means confronting the normative category of whiteness and perhaps one’s own complicity. Yet this confrontation can quickly end up in almost ritualistic practices of apology that are caught up in a confessional mode—and that often becomes counterproductive and actually serves to avoid confrontation. Rather, a deep and critical engagement with the social reality of race and racist structures as well as micro-structures should generate a critical and transformative energy that goes beyond the focus on the self. My own work is profoundly shaped

by my life trajectory as a second-generation immigrant of color to Eastern Europe as it made me quickly realize that “race” is not a self-evident phenomenon that can be easily essentialized (although it too often is). Working with racism thus also means questioning race and its supposed obviousness, which thrives on how “race” seems to appear in the field of vision. As much as having a personal stake in working on racism is often a powerful motor driving one’s political and scholarly engagement it shouldn’t be locked into the narrow frame of identity politics as a goal in itself. To work with racism means to acknowledge that whether suppressed, hypostatized or turned into hyperbole, once the personal experience of racism is there it never leaves.

**Thuc Linh Nguyen Vu, works in association with the Research Center for the History of Transformations (RECET), University of Vienna.**

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## **Margaret Amaka Ohia-Nowak**

### **What is the connection between race and visuality? How is race constructed as something to be seen?**

Race, though reflected in real bodies, is a discursive construct, processed through various practices of verbal and visual representation that are founded on oppositions: us/them, me/the other. Race in this sense always belongs to the other, the stranger. The visuality of race is rooted in colonialism, in political, structural, and slave racism. Visual representations of race tend to appeal to stereotypes and prejudices that regulate the invisibility of whiteness and the hypervisibility of blackness. Whiteness does not have to be shown, while blackness must be shown and thus also marked, even stigmatized. The very

expression "people of colour" indicates off the bat that white is not a color, and whites are people without color.

Representations of race should, in my opinion, be looked at intersectionally. The racial colonial view of Africa portrays it not only as black, but also as poor, backward and stricken by crisis, war and disaster. The discourse on migrants, refugees and runaways to Europe is also connected to this set of associations. The situation is, however, different when we consider racism in terms of gender: a black woman evokes (excessive) desire, while a black man evokes anxiety (lined with a sense of threat and fear, but also sexual fascination). Black refugee bodies, on the other hand, are floating bodies, flooding (white) Europe. The visibility of race, then, seems to me to be a component of these many elements of the colonial and undecolonized gaze.

### **How is looking a racialized practice, how does it constitute a performance not only of race but also by racialized (racist) viewers?**

The Polish structure of racism is not so much filled with real-life experience as it is with imaginaries or phantasms. Thus, we are talking about the imagined other. Blacks in Poland and blackness in Poland have more to do with the practice of imagination than with the practice of mere looking. But the experience of Afropoles is first of all an experience of being seen or even observed. It is also my experience. I feel that when I walk, I "attract" stares. It is a gaze that recognizes me as the Other. Thus, one is constantly visible at the very "first glance", it is impossible to blend into the crowd, impossible not to stand out. The visibility of race is forced, for non-white people it is an experience of a lifetime. For Afro-Europeans, there is no escaping this visibility, or from this gaze, because there is no way to "go home," home is here. It is akin to a home under constant surveillance. This situation forces constant self-control, paying

attention to how I look, how I behave, whether I “catch the eye” (although, of course, I cannot avoid catching the eye, I can't not be conspicuous - I have no control over that).

## **What is the function of the image of the racialized body and how does it influence the overall concept of the body as such?**

Many black feminists point out the various ways in which non-white bodies attempt to negotiate with canons of beauty, and not just beauty of course. Take straightening one's hair, for example. Straight hair is associated not only with beauty but also with professionalism, orderliness, and rationality. The black woman's body is completely subordinated to the male gaze, more even than the female body as such. For this body to be able to emancipate itself, it has to work really hard. By itself, it is not worthy of respect. Subjected to this oppressive structure, the black woman's body finds itself in an impossible situation: either it will not be beautiful enough (it will not be a white woman's body) or it will choose to live up to the racist ideal of the “sexy black woman”. Neither position is comfortable or emancipating. In this context it is worth mentioning that every “drop” of white blood, every kind of “mixing”, gives more opportunities. The image of such a body becomes, as it were, better and easier to bear for the white onlooker.

## **What can working with race mean in a theoretical and practical sense?**

For me, it means something very practical. I run anti-racism workshops to look at mechanisms and develop strategies for “disarming” the system of white supremacy, which is too often and mistakenly associated only with extreme forms of racism. Meanwhile, it is a system we all live in. In these workshops we talk about, among other things, what white supremacy is in the

broadest sense, what white privilege is, how racial microaggressions manifest themselves, what they are a symptom of, and how to counteract them. We discuss how one experiences white privilege and what to do with that experience. I work primarily with white people. I'm interested in what I call critical or self-critical whiteness, which is primarily about noticing, seeing color – the color white. I encourage people to see whiteness and to stop seeing it only as a neutral background or dominant color setting.

An important component of my work is an embodied approach, related to healing the embodied trauma of racism that we all carry within us whether we experience white supremacy as non-white people or contribute to it as white people. The foundation of change in this field is seeing yourself and your contribution. I try to work with people in this way to work through this via the body as well, rather than experiencing it only on an intellectual level. I modify and deconstruct tools for this kind of work (introduced in the United States) for Central and Eastern Europe.

Another aspect of my work is education about race. Race being a racist construct, the result of scientific racism. And in the next step I work on what strategies to turn this knowledge into, how to act and how to understand the actions of others. Whiteness is power, but power doesn't always have to be a bad thing. Lately in my work I have been particularly looking at the topic of white fragility. I draw inspiration from such books as Layla F. Saad's *Me and White Supremacy*, Ijeoma Oluo's *So You Want to Talk About Race* and Robin Jeanne DiAngelo's *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism*.

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## Hana Umeda

### What is the connection between race and visuality? How is race constructed as something to be seen?

In my personal experience, race is often a veil that obscures visuality. I often get the impression that race deforms me as a private individual and as an artist—it covers what’s important to me, filtering it through stereotypes, associations, and simplifications. And yet I’ve used this veil deliberately, at times. The possibility to hide behind race sometimes gives me a sense of security.

One of the main themes in my performance *SadaYakko* (Komuna/Warszawa, 2019) is a hybrid Japanese-Polish—or perhaps Japanese-European—identity. The pretext to examine my own racial duality comes from the titular character



Hana Umeda, *SadaYakko*, 2019, photo  
Karolina Gorzelańczyk

*Sada Yakko*, a late nineteenth and early twentieth century Japanese artist who was fascinated by the West. I had worked on imagined notions of the “Japanese body” and the “Western body,” studying the Orientalization and Occidentalization of the gaze as tropes, but the Western element has remained all but ignored in Poland. I dreamed that this performance would free both me and my character from the role of “exotic phenomenon.” Unfortunately, I do not feel as if I have succeeded. In a country where the avant-garde *butoh* dance—whose roots lie in German Expressionism—is so often perceived to be a traditional Japanese spectacle, my attempts to deconstruct the classical *jiutamai* dance are considered just as Japanese as *jiutamai*

in its unadulterated form.

## **How is looking a racialized practice, how does it constitute a performance not only of race but also by racialized (racist) viewers?**

I was born and raised in Poland, where due to my appearance, I was constantly looked at and subjected to a framing gaze. I never experienced violence, animosity, or discrimination, but neither could I blend in with the crowd, draw no attention to myself, or go completely unnoticed. Ever since I was a child, being looked at felt completely normal to me. Perhaps it is was precisely this experience of constantly being “on view” that helped me find my feet on the stage.

To this day, I encounter situations in which my interlocutors are astonished to hear me speak Polish fluently. And though I stress the fact that I was born in Poland, I am sometimes asked about my impressions of this country, as if I could offer an outsider’s perspective. I am puzzled by the traps the human mind falls into. Looking at others through the lens of race imposes a permanent strangeness.

On the other hand, I am convinced that my appearance is one of the main reasons why my *jiutamai* is perceived, in Poland, as authentic. Audiences don’t need to be aware of the time and effort I’ve expended to adopt an unfamiliar Japanese model of performing with the body: my Asian features seem to sanction my practicing the Japanese choreographic tradition. To me, it is a game, a costume of sorts. After all, I am neither Japanese nor Polish. I consider myself a hybrid, performing a selected race depending on the situation.

## What is the function of the image of the racialized body and how does it influence the overall concept of the body as such?

The racialization of the body is a complicated issue for me. As I mention above, as a mixed-race person I do not feel a sense of belonging to any race. If I use the image of my racialized body, it is only as a performative gesture.

In my *jiutamai* practice, I strive to fully internalize the Japaneseness inscribed in this technique, to overcome Western movement habits, and to assume the traditional model of the body presented in this dance. The kimono, wig, and white face paint serve to erase ethnic otherness, which is at odds with the image of the Japanese dancing body. When I perform in Japan, I am introduced as a foreigner who has fallen in love with *jiutamai*, and I feel even more appreciated when audiences praise me for hiding my otherness so successfully. I strive to achieve virtuosity, which, in this context, I understand to be the elimination of any elements that would impede the viewers' appreciation of the profound beauty of this choreographic tradition. One such element is the Europeanness of the body. The culture in which we are raised can permeate the body's physicality so deeply that it becomes inextricable from our purely biological traits. I feel that erasing these Western movement habits is not so much a way of achieving full Japaneseness, but a means of bringing the universal dimension of *jiutamai* to the surface.

*Jiutamai* is a unique element of Japanese culture. It is a choreographic practice passed down from one generation to the next, but only by women. We tell and retell one another the same stories: about our exploitation, how our voices cannot be heard, and the emotions that well up inside us. The nineteenth century Japanese woman who is the model heroine of *jiutamai* had to accept that her lover abandoned her, that her husband

cheated on her, or that the man whom she had fallen for used her once and left. That is why she dances. This is terribly universal, and not just characteristic of Japanese culture. It is completely different from *kabuki* or *noh*, in which a man walks onto the stage and performs fantasies about womanhood. Here, women dance in small, closed rooms, and then have to perform as geisha for male clients, for whom their tales of broken hearts are wonderful erotic dance shows, designed to put them in a certain mood. Does that have anything to do with race?

However, there are moments in my artistic practice when the image of the racialized body is of decisive importance. In *Pamela*, Marta Ziótek created a monumental figure that alludes aesthetically to the imagery found on tarot cards, dressing me in a layered kimono and surrounding me with laser beams. Here the image is much more important than the dance itself; my facial features become one of the elements contributing to a sense of visual foreignness.

I adopt a different approach in *Salvage* (Nowy Teatr, 2021), where I have been invited by Kasia Wolińska to deconstruct traditional Japanese choreography in the spirit of a futuristic depiction of a culture built upon the ruins of the old world. Here my dance belongs more to the order of remains: I draw on specific cultural artifacts, but only to chew them up and spit them back out in a completely new form. Kasia and I created a dance based on the remnants of Japanese tradition, blending elements of traditional choreography, Soviet monuments, pieces of positions by Isadora Duncan, David Attenborough nature documentaries, and clips of Japanese films from the 1960s.

The function race plays in the body is, to me, precisely that of a remnant, fragment, or vestige. This corresponds to my identity, and it is also the logic underpinning *SadaYakko*. If I perform my identity, I do it through this amalgam. It is perhaps for this reason that I am skeptical of cultural appropriation as a concept. *Jiutamai* is, to me, above all else a choreographic technique, a wealth of forms and movements, a language that allows me to tell any story. I am interested in the kind of presence the dance produces and the way emotions are experienced in it, as well as the community that comes with belonging to a family of dancers. That is why it was such a great honor for me to join the Hanasaki dance family, from which I received a new name and surname during a *natori* ceremony, becoming Sada Hanasaki, daughter of master Tokijyo Hanasaki. But I do not see this affiliation as having anything to do with race or nationality. When I adopted my new name, I took it upon myself to nurture this tradition and pass it on to my Polish students. This, in my view, is one of the most exciting aspects of practicing Japanese dance: how to adapt the technique to the European body, which is built slightly differently, and is accustomed to different things; we sit differently, and we're raised differently and with different goals. Like any dance practice, regardless of the culture from which it originates, *jiutamai* has a considerable impact on the body.



Hana Umeda, *SadaYakko*, 2019, photo  
Karolina Gorzelańczyk

## What can working with race mean in a theoretical and practical sense?

Developing a hybrid racial and ethnic identity is something that came completely naturally to me. I have always been different enough from both Poles and Japanese that I never felt as if I fully belonged to either. But we are all hybrids to some extent, as recent developments in genetic testing have shown, often revealing ancestors who have completely disappeared from family memory. If genes can provide us information about ethnic identities of which we would otherwise be unaware, why can't we draw on the cultural wealth of all of humankind? Why shouldn't we adopt more fluid attitudes toward our racial identities?

My father was Japanese, the son of a Buddhist monk, but completely assimilated into Polish society – to the extent that he became involved in the Solidarity movement, for which he was deported. He could hardly have been more Polish in the 1980s. At home he would always say that we lived in Poland, and should speak Polish. He even put up a picture of the pope. He performed Polishness as well as he could, but of course he was never perceived to be a Pole. His Solidarity colleagues would never have allowed him to join them in the first term Sejm, which must have been devastating to him. I grew up imagining my father to be a super-Pole who was at once one hundred percent Japanese, and with a mother who was Polish yet Jewish, but also Catholic and a Japan scholar, and in terms of her knowledge of Japanese cultural codes and the ease with which she used them, was much more Japanese than my father. I grew up believing that cultural affiliation was a matter of choice. Perhaps race can—or even should—be queered.

**Hana Umeda performer, dancer and *nihon buyō* dance**

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**Marta Ziółek**

## **What is the connection between race and visuality? How is race constructed as something to be seen?**

As an artist and a performer, I can only speak from the perspective of an experience which I call "black mask." However, the difference between donning a mask and the experience of race is an ontological one. Race, in its visual dimension, maps out the contours of the body; it is a gaze that shapes the body. Inherent in this is violence and injustice, pain and profound anger from which one cannot escape. This is beyond the scope of my experience, although, on the other hand, I do know what it means to be marked and hurt. A body thus transformed into an image is hurt, even though it does not demand to be harmed. It is exposed to public view and humiliated. However, the path that led me to take an interest in "black mask" and its peculiar performativity was not visuality, but music.

I would describe it as a kind of kinesthetic and aural empathy. As you delve deeper into music that mediates the experience of race, a question emerges: How do you enter this experience as a different body? Does it start to affect you, do you synchronize with it, does it sweep you away? How deep can you go? For me, this is connected to the experience of listening to the blues.

I see “black mask” as a strategy for adopting gestures and visual representations that refer to both race and a particular cultural context. The key question, for me, is: What motivates this type of action? One part of the *Pamela* cycle references *kuduro* dance from Angola. To the Western gaze, this contains the elements associated with vitality and the experience of the body in ritual. But this is a dance of the marginalized, adopted from the vernacular of the streets and performed with stumbling body movements; it creates a different type of signification and intensifies its presence. It was important to us that, through *kuduro*, the body spoke from an unprivileged space, as an outsider. Race, therefore, is not only constructed as something that is oppressively visible, but as an attribute of music, gestures, presence, and history that cannot be disregarded.



Marta Ziótek, *A Seance with Pamela*, 2017,  
photo Pat Mic

### **How is looking a racialized practice, how does it constitute a performance not only of race but also by racialized (racist) viewers?**

Maaïke Bleeker writes in the book *Visuality in the Theatre*, that between the one who acts and the one who views, there appears a third subject, namely the theatrical event, or, in the context of this question, the racial event. In my opinion, this event is complex and contains not just the gesture of oppression, but also the reaction to that gesture. When I see someone looking at me with a gaze that defines me, that frames me and attempts to seize my territory of operation, I can immediately reflect that gaze, counteract it, and find a counter-formula for my corporeality. Angry gestures are precisely that. I anticipate the gaze before it can objectify me, and I resist it by taking action to

forestall my objectification.

As Fred Moten writes, the one thing in the body that cannot be objectified is the voice. The voice emanates from the body, from the profound experience of the corporeal, and—interestingly—establishes a certain visual order that prevents objectification. The voice freezes the gaze; the cry envelopes the body and begins to change its territory. The cry of resistance is not a physical manifestation of defiance by the body. No longer limited to its physical contours, the body begins to vibrate. This, for me, is how gospel music works. The body expands to occupy more than just the space you think it occupies when you look at me. My body extends beyond the realm of the visible. Vibrations take control of that which the gaze attempts to take away from the body. This is that third subject Bleeker writes about: the one located between me and the person who looks at me and attempts to label and categorize me.

I am fascinated by the voice rooted in the body. It is a tool of mysticism, of constant corporeal transgression. It acts by marking places of homelessness and cruelty, but is at once a cry for more territory. As I mentioned before, in the visual order the body quickly becomes an image; it is contoured, becoming something another person wants to take and own. My sense is that the powers of performativity that can be employed here are; the gesture of intensification, the refusal to have one's body turned into an image, vibration, the opening of boundaries, and the refusal to become a frozen mask or image. The surface of the body is opened.

On the other hand, how that person looks at me matters, too: Is he a voyeur in response to whom I act, creating a kind of antagonism? Or do I refuse to engage in that antagonism, and instead create a space in which I set my own boundaries and seek some sort of comfort? That depends on who's looking, but it also depends on me. If I remain in the visual order and allow myself to be defined by that gaze, I deprive myself of the

freedom of self-determination at the level of my own body. And my body is what allows me to not be what someone else constantly wants to see me as. It is in the process of changing and opening boundaries. The point is to reflect the gaze or to prevent yourself from being appropriated by it. I have to start appropriating before it appropriates me; I have to adopt the gesture of violence—or see to it that the gaze no longer owns me, undresses me, makes me dependent. This is not my experience of race, but using my experience with performance and the body, this is how I relate to it.

## **What is the function of the image of the racialized body and how does it influence the overall concept of the body as such?**

Based on my practice and my experience, I believe that the performing body can consciously refuse to become an image. I find these strategies of refusal most interesting in the context of race. In her book *Americanah*, the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie describes the community of African immigrants in the United States. Having arrived from Africa, her characters encounter a completely unfamiliar racial performativity: they discover that strategies of resistance, gestures of oppression, interpretations of violence, and different kinds of marking are varied and multi-layered. It is, at its core, a novel about hair. The main character realizes that her afro deprives her of certain opportunities. The body turns out to be a function, an indicator of status in a capitalist society. To refuse to allow it to become an image, in this sense, is to ask the question: Do I have the right to exist in my Africanness? Do I want to allow myself to be read in public in this specific manner? This leads to a reflection on dignity, understood in a deeply corporeal sense. Here lies the source of the anger inscribed into the performance of race—anger that involves the search for bodily integrity and

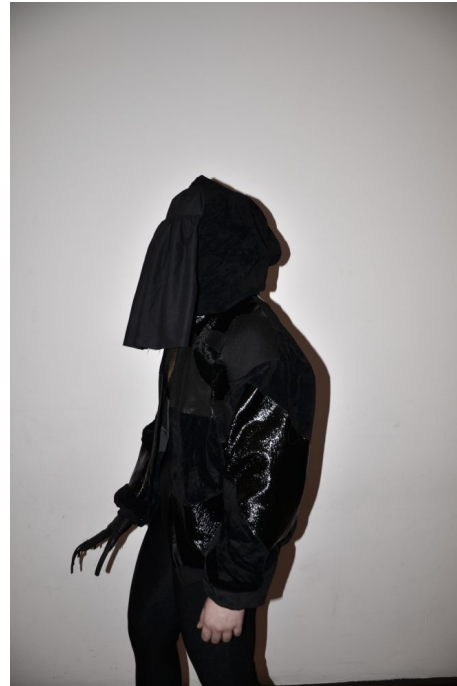
finding one's rooting elsewhere.

## What can working with race mean in a theoretical and practical sense?

In this context, I take inspiration from Fred Moten, whom I mention above, and his theories. Moten's proposed way of thinking about blackness in terms of abundance and scarcity translates, for me, into something I would describe as a performance of intensity or absence. Similarly, his thoughts on the voice strike me as important in the context of the protesting body—a particularly salient issue in Poland today.

Race, the bodily condition associated with it, and its construction and deconstruction are all fascinating to me. As I study and absorb the practices which race permeates, I learn about my place—the place in which I am. To what does my visibility predestine me? What are the defining features of a "white mask"?

These topics can easily be translated into cultural differences, but on the other hand, there is a sense of closeness that I cannot shake. The basis for this feeling is a profound experience of a different kind of alienation, pain, and injustice afflicting the body. I realize, however, that without the experience of living my daily life in the condition of race, I cannot speak about this experience, and I have no right to reference it. I can only return to the condition of kinesthetic and audial empathy as a framework in which to carry out my practice. This leads me to a certain kind



Marta Ziótek, *Black on black*, 2017, photo Katarzyna Szugajew

of mysticism founded on the recognition of different levels of corporeality: physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual.

**Marta Ziólek choreographer, director, performer, lives in Poland**

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## Monika Bobako

### What is the connection between race and visuality? How is race constructed as something to be seen?

Race, in the modern sense, is inextricably tied to the emergence of a culture grounded in representation, a key feature of which is that in it, the world is perceived as an image. A philosophical profile of this culture can be found in Martin Heidegger's seminal text "The Age of the World Picture," in which he attempts to define the essence of modernity. According to Heidegger, in the modern view, "beings as a whole are now taken in such a way that a being is first and only in being insofar as it is set in place by representing-producing [*vorstellend-herstellenden*] humanity. Whenever we have a world picture, an essential decision occurs concerning beings as a whole. The being of beings is sought and found in the representedness of beings"

(Heidegger, 2001, p.67-68). A similar intuition—albeit in a different theoretical idiom—is articulated by scholars who study the history of cognitive mechanisms and transformations in the structure of humankind's knowledge. They emphasize the role that knowledge, understood as the creation of a suitable image of the world, has played in the development of modern science. However, in science this image is not treated as a literal facsimile of reality akin to a map depicting the world at a scale of 1:1, as famously described by Borges, but rather as a representation of

the order of the world and the laws governing it.

In order to understand the connection between race and visuality, one must first realize the significance of visual representations such as maps, charts, formulas, and diagrams to this concept. In this context, the evolution of the illustrations accompanying the scholarly works of botanists is particularly informative.

Before the Modern era, these images were typically artistic drawings that lacked any informative content. They were later replaced, in the time of Linnaeus, by diagrams that enabled any observer to identify individual plant specimens. These illustrations had a specific quality, one which David R. Olson describes as follows:

A school-book illustration of the parts of a flower looks nothing like any real flower. Yet the pictured flower, the representation, becomes the conceptual entity in terms of which real flowers are perceived and classified. Botanical drawings, like maps, become the conceptual models in terms of which we experience the world (Olson, 2001, p. 227).

It is precisely this manner of thinking—motivated by the need to uncover structures and order in that which is manifold and diverse, and to group individual “cases” into general categories that can be depicted visually—that led to the creation of race as a concept. Initially used in the domain of natural history, the notion of race soon found its way into reflections on the diversity of humankind, and subsequently became one of the instruments of modern, institutionalized racism, in its myriad forms.

The paradox—or perhaps simply the cognitive and ethical failure—of thinking about people in terms of race, is that in its search for a suitable depiction of humankind’s diversity, this mindset has created many incohesive and contradictory classifications, the absurdity of which has inevitably been laid bare whenever their practical application has been attempted. Perhaps the most apt illustration of this absurdity are the stories

of people who exist on the boundaries of racial division and have experienced a sort of migration between (allegedly objective) "racial" categories. A constant element of life in racially segregated societies, these migrations have taken the form of official classifications and reclassifications, or the unofficial (and extraordinarily risky) practice of "passing" for a member of a particular, usually "superordinate," category (Boker and Star, 1999). In other instances, this migration was tied to the historical process of certain groups (such as Irish, Jewish, Italian, and Polish immigrants in the United States) climbing the social ladder, shedding over the course of generations the stigma of racial inferiority and entering the exclusive "white" club (Roediger, 2006).

These examples not only show how racial categories essentially attempt to classify the unclassifiable, they also point to two essential features that define the relationship between race and visibility. The first is the fact that, by assuming the existence of an ontological, essential distinctiveness between individual races, these categorizations have in fact always created unstable and volatile cartographies of racial divisions (which in no way mitigated their oppressiveness, of course). Their stated objective, namely to represent these divisions, was revealed to actually be the procedure of fabricating those same divisions in order to manage a diverse society. This procedure is best described by the term "racialization." The other feature is the politicality of the mode in which, under a given set of circumstances, a connection is established between the presumed image of racial "types" (their constituent traits, including visible characteristics) and what, in specific instances, is seen by the eye of the classifying beholder. Examples of reclassification, "racial uplift," and "passing" show that the experienced distribution of racial divisions and the racial identities ascribed to individuals are products of power relations and their attendant institutions, infrastructure, and social practices, to a much greater degree

than they are consequences of some inherent racial “truth.” Power relations, it turns out, are what creates a (by its very nature, ad-hoc) correspondence between the presumed image of a particular racial “type” and what is observed in the case of a specific individual or group. In this context, one could say that the very act of seeing race—understood as an element of racialization processes—is always dependent on the specific political (symbolic, discursive, institutional) conditions of its visibility in a given place and time.

### **How is looking a racialized practice, how does it constitute a performance not only of race but also by racialized (racist) viewers?**

A peculiar feature of the racializing gaze is its power to permeate below the level of what is phenomenologically given. Referencing the classic text by Frantz Fanon, Sara Ahmed observes:

Where phenomenology attends to the tactile, vestibular, kinaesthetic and visual character of embodied reality, Fanon asks us to think of the ‘historic-racial’ schema, which is ‘below it’. In other words, the racial and historical dimensions are beneath the surface of the body described by phenomenology, which becomes, by virtue of its own orientation, a way of thinking the body that has surface appeal (Ahmed, 2007, p. 153).

In his book *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon demonstrates how the gaze of the white man imposes onto the black experience a historical and racial scheme created by white Western dominance, which not only defines and limits the corporeal functions of a black person within a white space, but also deprives his existence of ontological significance. This is because it treats him (Fanon’s narrative is strongly androcentric) as the reverse and derivative of notions about white men. The racializing gaze makes the black individual invisible while

displaying him as a representative of the “Negro” racial type, the existence of which defines what the white imagination associates with blackness: Fanon mentions cannibalism, tom-toms, slavery, childishness, and intellectual deficiency (Fanon, 2008, p. 84-85).

James Baldwin describes a similar experience in his essay “Stranger in the Village,” contrasting the bewildered looks with which the inhabitants of African villages likely greeted the first white colonizers with the glances he encountered in a tiny Swiss village nestled deep in the mountains, whose residents had never seen a person with black skin (Baldwin, 2017). While the astonishment contained in the first look could have been interpreted by its white recipient as a form of tribute, the latter look strikes Baldwin as “poison,” undermining his confidence and reminding him of his own insurmountable otherness in a white world. The racializing power of the gaze—realized unconsciously by those who wield it—lies in its expression of belonging to, and ownership of, Western culture (even if in reality they know little about it), both of which Baldwin is denied based on the color of his skin. This gaze grants him the status of an oddity and reduces him to an imagined African genealogy, erasing his individuality as a writer, an American, a person shaped by Western culture, with all that it entails.

The decades that have elapsed since Fanon and Baldwin penned these texts have been marked by the challenging of white supremacy and the struggle for recognition by non-white people. There has been a reorganization of the social, political, and cultural space in which individuals and groups look at each other, realizing their identitarian performances. While the dismantling of the system of white dominance can hardly be considered complete, it is true that significant shifts have taken place in the racial and racializing economy of the gaze. First of all, in many areas of culture, politics, and social life, non-whites have won the right to be present and visible outside the optics of racial stereotypes. It should be noted, however, that even

this accomplishment is sometimes appropriated by the dominant culture and institutions under the banner of “diversity,” or is negated and silenced by “color blindness,” which is believed to be a “graceful, even generous, liberal gesture” (Morrison, 1992, p. 9). Secondly, the struggle adopted the tactic of redirecting the gaze, focusing it on those who had long harbored the illusion—at times reinforced by racist prohibitions—that the ability to look is their sole privilege, and who believed that they could not themselves become the object of the gaze, analysis, or judgment of non-whites (hooks, 1992). In academia, the cognitive (and, in essence, also the political) program of reversing the gaze is being pursued in the field of whiteness studies. The scholars associated with this are both white and non-white; the former treat it as a form of self-reflection on their own dominant culture, while for the latter it is part of a process of deconstructing that culture and dismantling the “historico-racial schema.” The establishment of whiteness studies was prompted by the observation, perhaps most emphatically articulated by James Baldwin and Toni Morrison, that the way white people perceive non-whites and the notions whites have about them say more about whites themselves than they do about those whom they have subjugated as “racial Others.”

### **What is the function of the image of the racialized body and how does it influence the overall concept of the body as such?**

The answer to the question of whose bodies are racialized, and how, hinges on the point from which the glance is cast and, more importantly, where it is located within the power structure. For whites, bodies that are not marked by race are bodies representing their own, dominant race, and are perceived as universal and definitive of the norm. From this standpoint, the bodies of others are always encumbered by racial particularism and merely constitute non-representative variants of the “body

as such.” However, this depends on context. The illusion that white bodies are not subject to racialization exists wherever whites constitute the majority, and wherever the social reality is consistently and transparently shaped by the principle of white dominance. In fact, the opposite often appears to have been true of colonial societies, for example. The very fact that small groups of white colonizers from a different world lived among much larger populations of non-white people meant that the exercise of colonial power required the use of much more rigorous and deliberate strategies to maintain “white prestige” and racial distinction. Ethnographic accounts of the subject reveal that even colonizers’ compatriots, upon arrival from the metropole, often struggled to understand the complicated practices of dominant self-racialization, the purpose of which was to guard “white prestige” in the colonies (by strictly policing interactions with “natives” and imposing constraints on the behavior and composition of the white population; Stoler, 1989). It seems that, in such contexts, even white Europeans perceived white bodies as racialized: the personification of a cultural and civilizational difference, rather than universality.

However, this type of self-referential racialization, which serves to reinforce white dominance, differs from the experience of those who were and continue to be subject to this dominance. As the phenomenon known as colorism (sometimes referred to as pigmentocracy) demonstrates, the racialization of the subjugated not only places them in a separate, lower anthropological category, it also assigns them a rank within the category’s internal hierarchy. Colorism is the systemic favoring of non-white people with lighter skin color. Studies of American society have shown that hierarchies defined by skin tone map onto social hierarchies determined by income, education, housing access, and professional and matrimonial opportunities (Hunter, 2007). This hierarchy is enforced by the institutions and practices of a white-dominated society in which deeply embedded

patterns of white supremacy influence the hiring of employees, the grading of students, criteria of credibility, and physical attractiveness. The destructive power of colorism also lies in the fact that, while it feeds off the cultural depreciation of the non-white body, it is simultaneously imposed with the complicity of the very subjugated groups it impacts, who in turn internalize this depreciation under pressure from the hegemonic culture. One expression of colorism is the global popularity of skin-whitening cosmetics, the manufacture and sale of which exploits the promise of the higher prestige and increased opportunities that await individuals who change their skin tone. The solution to the trap of double racialization is political resistance and challenging the order of white supremacy by affirming the non-white body. Examples include political and cultural efforts grounded in ideas of "black pride" and "black beauty," whose intellectual foundations trace back to concepts developed under the banners of *Négritude* and Black Power.

## **What can working with race mean in a theoretical and practical sense?**

Any discussion of race inevitably entails a discussion of racism, which in turn necessitates a reflection on power relations, in which the term "race" becomes significant and acquires practical applications. An interest in the subject of race therefore requires one to enter the realm of the political. In a certain sense, "working with race" is practiced both by those who deliberately construct social orders founded on racialized hierarchical groups (for example, by implementing anti-immigration policies, discriminating against minorities, or creating a permissive atmosphere for violence against otherness), and by those who strive to challenge and delegitimize this order. The latter goal involves criticizing camouflaged forms of the raciological pseudo-science that has historically informed racism, revising models of cultural validation and social practices that contribute to the

reproduction of racism, and dismantling the institutions and economic structures responsible for maintaining it. More importantly, however, to accomplish this goal one must first understand the causes of the racist backlash driven by the current renaissance of white supremacist ideology. I believe that this form of “working with race” has a chance to break the vicious cycle of reemerging racialization mechanisms, provided that it addresses three issues.

First, it is necessary to realize that the sources of racism do not lie solely in radical political ideologies, ignorance, or the institutional practices of a disreputable past, but that they are also present in mainstream discourses and actions, and in widely accepted institutions and methods of organizing public space. One can mention in this context such wide-ranging issues as the institutional racism plaguing the law enforcement, healthcare, and education systems of many countries; the nature of institutions of arts and culture, such as museums, whose collections were built on colonial plunder; the presence, in public spaces, of monuments honoring people and events whose role in upholding racist systems is unquestionable; the sanctioning of racist discourse on the grounds of freedom of speech, and the concealing of economic racism under the guise of economic freedom.

The second issue is tied to the ambiguous ontological status of race, namely that while race does not exist in the genetic sense, it remains real in the sociological sense. It involves the question: In what situation is the mention of race merely an expression of racism (not necessarily an entirely conscious one), and when does it provide a basis for emancipatory mobilization and an expression of support for its political aspirations? Another formulation of this question is: When is ignoring race (the policy of race-blindness) an anti-racist gesture, and when does it serve to perpetuate inequality and exclusion? In my view, under the current historical circumstances, mentions of race, or the lack thereof, always represent one of these two polar opposites.

This is synonymous with the statement that there is no such thing as “neutral raciology.”

This problem, one that has a series of practical implications, is tied to a third issue that is philosophical in nature. I refer to the question of what the ultimate, ideal goal of anti-racist politics would be. In other words: What would happen to race in a world free of racism? In the most general sense, this is a question about the possibility of the existence of a new universalism that would make the very concept of race meaningless. The challenge involved in this problem is that we cannot achieve a new universalism without first grappling with the racist echoes of its earlier variants.

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