

(In)Visible Universal Bodies

... *racially* invisible – the ghosts of modernity, whites could assume power as the norm of humanity, as the naturally given. Unseen racially, that is seen as racially marked – or seen precisely as racially unmarked – whites could be everywhere.

Goldberg, *Racial Subjects*

The idea that professional positions have job descriptions drawn up in neutered, neutral and colourless terms holds an enormous power. The story is that, having arrived at the door to the summit of whichever chosen profession, that is, those who are lucky enough to arrive at this point, people will then flourish, develop and be respected, regardless of gender, ‘race’ or class background. Received and treated as any other fellow human being (colleague); their professional identity as an artist, writer, lawyer, politician, United Nations inspector, senior civil servant or academic will be the main point of engagement.

Of course, it is correct to say that there are no explicit barriers barring women, Black or Asian people from taking up positions in the professions; and the fact that they do enter, in however small numbers, evidences this. The promise of a realm of pure reason, rationality and mind is at the same time, although it is unacknowledged, deeply and specifically corporeal in terms of which bodies can bear the torch of reason and leadership: a reminder (or remainder) of the exclusive and differentiated hierarchies which have formed the public realm (as discussed in Chapter 2), and of how an ideal figure of modernity continues to be an undeclared corporeal norm, against whom others are measured.

The Universal Human Form

The subtle and nuanced ways in which racial inequality continues alongside official claims to equality between all in liberalism are captured by Kobena Mercer (1995) in his commentary on a sculpture by

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Charles Cordier titled *Fraternité*. This sculpture, which is taken to be a representation of formal equality between black and white, displays two cherubs – one black and one white – who reach towards each other for an embrace. Mercer notes that, despite the fact that this artifice has been made to honour the principle of equality, inequality is actually implicit in the display of fraternity in the sculpture. He argues:

While it enacts the sentimental trope repeated today in the exhortation that ‘ebony and ivory get together in perfect harmony’ upon closer examination of the subtle disposition of these two black and white figures it is the black cherub who actively moves towards the slightly superior, upright, posture of the white one, thus positioned as the universal human from which the other is differentiated. (1995: 25)

The ability to pass as the ‘universal human’ is an incredibly powerful location precisely because positions within the public realm are normed as being universal and disembodied. And yet we know that only certain bodies are assigned as having the capacity to be universal. Commenting on how representation, leadership and whiteness coalesce, Richard Dyer states: ‘The idea of leadership suggests both a narrative of human progress and the peculiar quality to effect it. Thus white people lead humanity forward because of their temperamental qualities of leadership: will power, far sightedness, energy’ (1997: 14).

There is a co-constitutive relationship between the body of the universal human and universal space(s). Professional spaces are exalted as being organised by the rules of universal reason. In precious professional circles, the character Mr Spock, from *Star Trek*, represents the archetypal figure; he discards all that is not logical. In fact, he is so logical that he himself states: ‘I am incapable of emotion.’ A defining feature of the universal human is that he brings us a transcendental vision. He embodies the age of reason, culture and science over and above emotion, nature and myth. Scientific rationality itself is seen to be a defining feature of modern bureaucracies, an integral component of professionalism. Bureaucrats in particular, that is, senior civil servants in Westminster, Brussels or the United Nations, are represented as being at the absolute pinnacle of organisational rationality. There is, in fact, a distinction between specialists, such as lawyers, economists or doctors, for instance, and the more superior generalist figures found in the bureaucracies, who guard the public domain with a god-like balanced, panoramic view of matters across the land. All of them, though – as professionals – are, like the classic Mr Spock scientist, represented as the producers of unbiased,

value-free information and advice. Working in adherence to scientific procedure, these bureaucratic bodies, like their close cousins who work in laboratories, are exalted as the guardians of impartiality, in a world riddled by particularisms.¹

Disembodied Institutional Narratives

An overwhelming feature of this majestic story is that the universal figure is disembodied; the body is irrelevant to this positionality. Being pure mind, their bodies are of no consequence. So whether they are men or women or from a specific class or race is considered irrelevant; they are blank individuals who act out their duties and responsibilities. The capacity to be unmarked by one's body, in terms of race, gender or for that matter any other social feature, is a key component of what makes a universal body. It is a 'privileged position' that is 'reserved' for those who are not bedraggled by the humble shackles of nature, emotion and, in effect, the bodily, allowing them to escape into the higher realms of rationality and mind. The conceptualisation of liberal bureaucracy as a place of ideas, abstracted from the body, is extremely pervasive within public discourse. Not surprisingly, this institutional narrative is also a defining feature of the identity and work ethic of professionals themselves.

In an enormously influential spin on the tale of the public realm, the body has been repressed. As noted in Chapter 2, the repression of embodiment is absolutely key to the characterisation of the abstract 'individual', since the 'universalism of the category of the "individual" can be maintained only as long as the abstraction from the body is maintained' (Pateman 1995: 50). Interestingly, though, in the folds of the spin we find that 'the body is only irrelevant when it's the (white) male body' (Mills 1997: 53). The vital ingredient, a transcendence of the body, is a capacity that women and non-whites are not associated with. Their physicality remains visible.

The Power of Invisibility

When a body is emptied of its gender or race, this is a mark of how its position is the privileged norm. Its power emanates from its ability to be seen as just normal, to be without corporeality. Its own gender or race remains invisible; a non-issue. With 'whiteness' 'defined as an absence

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of colour' (Williams 1997a), whiteness exists as an unmarked normative position. Similarly the male body is invisible as a sexed entity. Its absence of gender entitles it to take up the unmarked normative locale. The fact that whiteness is also a colour and a racialised position remains a non-issue precisely because race is ex-nominated. Left unnamed and unseen, invisibility in this context is clearly a place of power. Invisibility is, as noted by Burgin, a general instrument of power:

Roland Barthes once defined the bourgeoisie as 'the social class which does not want to be named.' ... By refusing to be named, the bourgeois class represents itself and its interests as a universal norm, from which anything else is a deviation ... *White* however has the strange property of directing our attention to color while in the very same movement it exnominates itself *as* a color. For evidence of this we need to look no further than to the expression 'people of color,' for we know very well that this means 'not White.' ... To speak of the color of skin is to speak of a body. 'People of color' are embodied people. To have no color is to have no body. The body denied here however is a very particular body. (1996: 130–1)

The ideal representatives of humanity are those who are not marked by their body and who are, in an embodied sense, invisible. This is a privilege which is not, as we have seen in the discussion so far in this chapter, available to those who are considered to be of colour, who are considered to be marked and highly visible. The last chapter considered the socio-spatial impact of highly conspicuous racialised and gendered bodies in places where they are not the norm. This chapter will pay attention to how processes of invisibility and visibility help us to understand the nuanced dynamics of subtle forms of exclusion as well as the basis of differentiated inclusion. They are both insiders and outsiders, who are of the world they work in and at the same time not totally of it. They have a social position in occupational space that is tenuous, a contradictory location marked by dynamics of in/visibility.

Issues of in/visibility are manifested in a series of social dynamics. This chapter identifies them as being: a burden of doubt, infantilisation, super-surveillance and a burden of representation. Simultaneously they are seen without being seen; complicated processes of strait-jacketing grant recognition within very select parameters. On the one hand, they are highly visible as conspicuous bodies, for whom specific slots are made as representatives of particular rather than general forms of humanity. On the other hand, they are invisible as they struggle to be seen as competent and capable. Questions of the marked and invisible body, as discussed above, are integral to the ways in which each of these

processes functions. While I draw on specific occupations, the analytical framework could be easily applied and adapted to different fields of work.

A Burden of Doubt

Discussing the effect of the simultaneous enactment of visibility and invisibility of black bodies, an analysis which can very easily be stretched to include women, Goldberg states, 'Race hides those it is projected to mark and illuminates those it leaves unmarked' (1997: 80). It is thus the unmarked who are illuminated as able, intelligent and proficient, as having the temperamental qualities of leadership (Dyer 1997: 14). Not being the standard bearers of the universal human, women and non-whites are instead highly visible as deviations from the norm and invisible as the norm. Existing as anomalies in places where they are not the normative figure of authority, their capabilities are viewed suspiciously. Since human characteristics have been historically constructed as gender- and race-specific, they are not imagined as free-floating qualities; rather they are imagined within specific bodies and not others. There is a significant level of doubt concerning their capabilities to measure up to the job. Although they endure all the trials and tribulations involved in becoming a professional, they are still not automatically assumed to have the required competencies. There is a niggling suspicion that they are not quite proper and can't quite cut it. They have thus to prove that they are capable of doing the job. They bear a burden of doubt. The burden may be larger in some sectors and institutions than in others, but it is nevertheless present in some form or another.

The following remarks were made when speaking of the pressures imposed by the burden of doubt that haunts racialised staff in the senior civil service:

I feel that I have to prove that I am at least two or three times as good as anybody else before I am allowed in.²

As a member of an ethnic minority you have to do much better than everybody else ... you really have to excel.

In order to combat under-expectations racialised minorities have to prove themselves. As they are not automatically expected to have the appropriate competences, they have to make a concerted effort to make themselves visible as proficient and competent, in a place where they

are largely invisible as automatically capable. Thus they have to work against their invisibility.

Infantilisation

The reluctance to accept racialised bodies as being capable occupants of senior authoritative positions can result in infantilisation. Fanon (1986) has observed infantilisation as one of the ways in which racism is manifested. People are assumed to have reduced capacities. Placed as minors in a social hierarchy, they are assigned as having lesser faculties. In the occupational world, infantilisation involves women and racialised groups being imagined as much more junior, in rank terms, than they actually are. As the occupant of a senior position is not imagined to be non-white, often a black person who resides in a senior position is seen to be much more junior than he or she actually is and thus overlooked. Within the senior civil service, for instance, infantilisation places these black senior civil servants in scenarios of the following kind:

I would often phone another grade seven in another department and they would listen to you and ask your name and immediately say talk to my HEO [Higher Executive Officer],³ which is their junior. But the general assumption is that, because they hear your name, or they see you, is that you must be in a lower grade. That kind of thing happens every day. I mean if I go with one of my staff who is junior to me, but may have even more grey hair than I have, and they don't know me, they will automatically assume that the other person is more senior to me. That happens quite regularly ... either I go and introduce myself and say I am [mentions his title] and introduce my colleague. Whereas you can see their hand approaching for the other one first because they assume he is senior.

I've had occasions when I've gone with a member of my staff to meetings, where people haven't known me and it's automatically assumed that I'm not the senior one, it's the person whose with me. That sort of thing. It's just a perception that people have that the Grade ... whose come to meet me is going to be a white person.

The above incidents offer some sense of how it is automatically assumed that black bodies cannot possibly be capable of occupying senior positions. While they are highly visible as 'space invaders', at the same time they are in many respects invisible. The negative construction of black bodies in the asymmetrical racial binary has placed them outside 'civilised' white places. Thus black bodies in these senior

positions are seen as 'different' and the 'unknown', resulting in a series of racialised assumptions. Women are also infantilised, especially when they are young. The process, however, is so much more in evidence on the grounds of race rather than gender, though the burden of doubt is still a pertinent feature of gender in organisations (discussed further in Chapter 5).

Super-surveillance

Not only do these bodies that are out of place have to work harder to convince people that they are capable, but they also almost have to be crystal-clear perfect in their job performances, as any imperfections are easily picked up and amplified. The scholarly work on black bodies, space and surveillance (Keith 1993; Carter, Donald and Squires 1995; Hesse 1997; Fisk, 1998; Sibley 1998) can be extremely useful for analysing the dynamics of surveillance within institutional contexts. In his discussion of the social formation of Los Angeles, Goldberg notes how bodies in 'black' neighbourhoods are continuously under 'Super/Vision': 'the police loom large both in terms of the apparatus of micro-disciplines and as the general form of urban administration and supervision. Helicopters and floodlights ensure the surveilled and supervised visibility of the racially marginalized population within their constructed confines' (1996: 198). Being under super-surveillance, or to borrow Goldberg's phrase 'Super/Vision', there is a sense in which black men and women are constantly under a spotlight, as they are seen to represent a potential hazard. Existing under the pressures of a microscopic spotlight of racialised and gendered optics, the slightest mistake is likely to be noticed, even exaggerated, and then taken as evidence of authority being misplaced.

Fanon offers an acute observation of the technologies of surveillance that monitor the authority of black bodies to be in professional posts. Here we clearly see how the burden of doubt operates in combination with super-surveillance. He says:

We had physicians, professors, statesmen. Yes, but something out of the ordinary still clung to such cases. 'We have a Senegalese history teacher. He is quite bright ... Our doctor is colored. He is very gentle.' It was always the Negro teacher, the Negro doctor; brittle as I was becoming, I shivered at the slightest pretext. I knew, for instance, that if the physician made a mistake it would be the end of him and all of those who came after him. What could one expect, after all, from a Negro physician? As long as everything went well, he was praised to the skies, but look out, no nonsense, under any conditions! The

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black physician can never be sure how close he is to disgrace. I tell you, I was walled in: No exception was made for my refined manners, or my knowledge of literature, or my understanding of the quantum theory. (1986: 117)

The tenuous position of black professionals is vividly recalled by Fanon. There is a very thin line between being praised and being displaced of authority. The margins for making mistakes are extremely small. The tiniest error in a performance can be picked up and amplified as proof of the person not being quite up to the job. This can be utilised to warrant further surveillance, with observations becoming more and more intensified. A microscopic inspection not only leaves little leeway for inaccuracies, but this inspecting gaze is likely to find what it is desperately searching for. Undue pressure can itself induce mistakes which are indicative of the anxiety and nervousness produced, rather than of the actual abilities of the person under scrutiny.

In our age of ‘diversity’ the high hopes invested in the appointment of a person of colour as an academic, senior civil servant or politician, for instance, can all too easily be crushed by the smallest errors. These mistakes are less likely to be noted in others, and if they are noted they are less likely to be amplified. Disproportional surveillance finds errors in those who are not absolutely perfect. This in turn justifies further scrutiny, setting in processes of pathologisation.

The visibility of marked bodies, either in terms of gender or race or both, and the added scrutiny (‘Super/Vision’) that comes with it requires, as depressingly observed by Fanon, self-surveillance and acute astuteness.

Burden of Representation

Due to the existence of a racialised form of surveillance, there is also a racialised reason for wanting to succeed. Knowing that they are in a precarious situation and that the most minor of mistakes could be taken as evidence of incompetence, women and racialised minorities carry what might be termed the ‘burden of representation’, as they are seen to represent the capacities of groups for which they are marked and visible *per se*. Fanon observed (see above) how there was more than an individual career hanging on the ‘Negro’ physician’s performance. Being seen as representing the capacities of certain racialised groups, there is a consequent burden attached to being one of a minority, as people feel the pressure to do the job well, in order to show that non-white people can

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also do the work. As one senior civil servant remarked: 'I don't want to do badly. It's partly to do with letting the side down. I'm determined to do well partly because I want to prove to a lot of people that Asian people can do this too actually.'

The pressure to show they can perform, in the face of contrary suspicions, becomes even more pressing when the appointment has been made amidst competing factions, with some vying for the candidate and others being violently opposed to them. For those who have had to fight explicit bias to reach a senior level, the burden of representation is further heightened. A black civil servant mentioned that he found it 'difficult at the beginning' of his present post because another white colleague had 'competed for the job and every one expected him to get it, and they didn't like it when it was given to me'. Given these circumstances, he 'felt a bit under pressure' to win people over by proving that he could do the job and 'do the job better'. From this example, we can see how he was viewed especially suspiciously when he managed to get a position informally 'reserved' for another colleague. Under these negative and conflictual conditions, 'black' staff exist under the spotlight of intense racialised optics.

The Generalists: the Intangibles

Intangible qualities are attached to positions of leadership. These are rarely stated in job descriptions but they none the less remain crucial for the ways in which people are sized up for promotion and organisational honours. An assessment of character is often the most important, though unstated, criterion for selection. It outweighs strictly technical requirements and is so often the deciding factor in the allocation of positions. To those on the outside of selection processes, the judgements can remain something of a mystery. In the senior civil service there is a hierarchical distinction between the more generalist-orientated administrators and the specialists. 'Black' staff are more likely to be employed in specialist posts (lawyers, scientists, economists, statisticians) and are much less likely to be in those positions which assume the skills of a generalist (having sound judgement and general managerial and leadership skills), which are the more reputable posts requiring 'universal' leadership skills. A sense of 'balance', 'maturity' and being 'solid' are all rather vague terms on which 'sound judgement' is based.

In order to throw light on the shadowy phenomena of 'fit', character and institutional endorsement, an example from Edward Said's

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educational experiences in the United States can help us to consider what some of the unstated ‘core’ qualities of leadership might be. Although he was academically successful, he wasn’t given honorary endowments or positions of status. He had a sense that he did not have the vital ingredients.⁴ He observes:

I did well enough in my Massachusetts boarding-school, achieving the rank of either first or second in a class of about a hundred and sixty. But I was also found to be morally wanting, as if there was something mysteriously not-quite-right about me. When I graduated, for instance, the rank of valedictorian or salutatorian was withheld from me on the grounds that I was not fit for the honor – a moral judgement which I have ever since found difficult to either understand or to forgive. (2000: 559)

I was not a leader, nor a good citizen, nor pious, nor just all-round acceptable. I realized I was to remain the outsider, no matter what I did. (1999: 248)

Representing the Universal

Who can represent universally is defined in the shadow of the nation and modernity as it has come to be dominantly defined.

Black bodies in professions that pertain to the universal, the general and the truth are, unlike white bodies, perceived to be representatives of their race. This is a phenomenon that can be observed across different fields (Puwar 2004b). It is, though, probably most clearly shown in the world of formal political representation.

Political authority is seen to be appropriate for those who are racially unmarked, and yet black bodies are perceived to be over-determined by race in terms of whom and what they represent. This conundrum necessitates that we remind ourselves of the two cherubs at the beginning of this chapter, which, as noted by Mercer, enact the sentimental trope that ebony and ivory get together in perfect harmony but on closer examination reveal that it is the white cherub who is positioned as the universal human from which the other is differentiated (1995: 25).

Although black and white MPs sit on the same benches as fellow comrades, it is the white MP who is positioned as the ‘real’ representative of the universal human, not the black MPs. The representative Chamber is defined as a place where MPs air the particular interests of constituents. These particular interests are then rationalised, distanced and separated through rituals and practices of parliamentary reasoning. And, finally, it

is the 'greater good', the 'general will' and the 'public good' that prevails. This is the dominant representation of parliamentary democracy. Just as certain discussions see this representation as a 'sham' and a 'myth' (Marx 1843), it is also built on a racial mythology. Not only do we have an institutional representation which mythologises the place as enshrining the 'general will' or the 'public interest', but the bearers and carriers of the national interest are imagined to be white. It is white bodies who are defined as capable of being trusted with the national interest. It is these bodies who are deemed capable of engaging in arduous reasoning to arrive at a point where they can represent the interests of all humans. In contrast, black bodies are not viewed as being the representatives of the human race *per se*. Being the visible carriers of race, they are always considered to be marked by their race, and thus bounded by their race.

Dyer's observation that, if you are unmarked by race and considered to be just human, then you can, unlike racialised people, who are limited to speaking for their race, claim to speak for the whole of humanity (1997: 2) is highly appropriate to the experience of black MPs. Whilst white MPs can just assume that they are seen as universal MPs, black MPs have to consciously assert their ability to represent humanity *per se*. This means that they have to continually work against their designated particularity. The struggle involved in upholding one's ability to be a British MP, rather than an MP who is wholly marked by his/her race, is captured in the following quote from one of the MPs:

It is important to make clear that you are a British MP, because you know people try to turn you into all sorts of things . . . they turn you into a community leader. [You have to struggle] to establish that you're a properly elected MP. Even though they know, they try to make out that you are a black leader . . . I make it quite clear that I am a Member of Parliament and I am a British Member of Parliament.

The dissonance between being black and being a 'British' MP results from two social dynamics, which are in fact two sides of the same coin. First, there is the issue of what is Britishness. The British nation is imagined to be authentically white (Rich 1989; Samuel 1989; Anderson 1991; Schwarz 1996). Moreover, the representatives of the British nation are definitely imagined to be white. Indeed, it is probably a little too much to expect black bodies to be considered as representatives of Britishness when the psychic assumption is that, in the words of Paul Gilroy (1987), 'There ain't no black in the Union Jack.' Secondly, we have the phenomena of racial visibility and invisibility (discussed above

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in relation to the question of authority), whereby whiteness is invisible and blackness is super-visible, to the extent that a black body is always racially particularised. Black MPs are differentiated from the other MPs because of their racial inscription.

Even though black MPs represent a mixed group of constituents, there is still a tendency to see them as only representing black people. Thus everything they do in the public sphere is reduced to their racial identity. White MPs, however, do not have this restriction imposed on them, as they are, as Goldberg says, ‘the ghosts of modernity’ (1997: 83). Positioned as being over-determined by race, in an institutional position that requires one to connect with constituents from differing social backgrounds (in terms of class, race, gender, etc.), black MPs are in a contradictory state of existence. They are in fact caught in a sisyphian state of existence; even though they toil over the concerns of all sorts of issues and constituents, they are ultimately positioned as representatives of their race rather than representatives of all their constituents. In the following statement we can see how Black MPs have to constantly struggle against the way in which they are positioned: ‘70 per cent of my constituents are not Asian and therefore it is very, very important that people realise that I act for everybody, and the perception that Asian or black MPs act only for their own people or their own races is just nonsense. I mean all of us ... we act for everybody.’

Representing What?

Not only are black MPs singled out as being marked by their racial particularity in terms of whom they can represent, but also in terms of what they can represent. It is assumed that race is their main interest. Mainstream subjects, like the economy, the environment and so on, are not considered to be their ‘natural’ domain. So they feel that ‘whereas a white MP can choose his special interest, our special interest is foisted upon us’. It is only when black MPs have something to say about race that they are treated seriously. Some of them feel trapped in this ‘strait-jacket’:

it’s very sad we are in a strait-jacket, and so you think you are totally labelled and you are not really seen as real Members of Parliament anyway, we are seen as real Members of Parliament but as being slightly bizarre. I think it is very difficult for us to be treated seriously on the issues that we want to be treated seriously unless it’s race, it is a great tragedy.

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Race as a subject marks the black MPs wherever they go. It is always with them, almost as a permanent and automatic topic. Conversely, one could say that white MPs hardly ever have to problematise or discuss their whiteness. Such is the privilege of being racially invisible in a world structured by whiteness (Williams 1997a). We find that black MPs have race as a special interest 'foisted' upon them, whether they want it or not. They have very little choice in this matter. These MPs are predominantly thought of in terms of race and are seen as race specialists. Hence they are over-determined by race. Whilst they may actually want to deal with 'race' issues, they also want the freedom to engage with other more 'mainstream' subjects. It is important to note that the appeal to be allowed to be more than one's race can be heard from black people working in the public sphere in general.

For those who have tried to widen their remit, one of the interviewees noted how it is difficult to avoid being seen as a race specialist, as black MPs are continually pulled and pushed towards specialising in race. This MP observed that black MPs:

can't hide and run away from the [race] issues. So, whether you like it or not, you will be dragged into a whole number of issues and the press and the media they will be after them on a whole number of issues ... There are some [black MPs] who say they are mainstream MPs and don't want to be sidetracked into race and all these 'black alleys' as they call it. But, whenever something happens on the race front, the press go to them because they are black and that is the difference between them and white people.

It is quite clear from this account how the media, particularly the press, are fixated on the race of the black MPs. The media play a central role in limiting the subject speciality of black MPs to race by constantly focusing on the blackness of these MPs. It is argued that 'the great problem for Black and Asian MPs is the mainstream press, who never see us as anything but Black and Asian MPs'. Interestingly, while they are allocated 'race' as a speciality they are often closely watched for what they say on this nationally sensitive subject. Black MPs have to be especially careful about what they say on race issues, because they know that the media are just waiting and watching them for any kind of controversial statement or behaviour. This leaves these MPs in an apprehensive situation, whereby they place themselves under self-surveillance and try to guard themselves.⁵ As one of the MPs said, 'We are so worried about what the *Sun* is going to print about us, and so you know weighing up every word we use on race issues.'

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What they say about ‘race’ occurs in a context in which the media play a key role in enacting super-surveillance upon racialised bodies, especially on those who have jobs that are in the public eye, such as politicians – local, national or international. There is a national phenomenon, as John Solomos and Les Back found in the study of Birmingham City Council, whereby black politicians are associated with ‘patronage, criminality and politics’ (1995: 101). Black politicians themselves are quite conscious of the fact that they are automatically distrusted: ‘People begin with this perception that we must have done something wrong to get where we are today, that we possibly competed unequally, and that there must have been something, some bit of help here, some bending of the rules there.’

Keeping in mind debates on bodies and surveillance, it would not be an overstatement to contend that black MPs similarly exist under conditions of ‘Super/Vision’. The media ensure the surveilled, supervised visibility of these black bodies who have stepped outside the confines of their designated spaces. Being under super-surveillance, black MPs are an easy target. As one of them noted, ‘I know we [black MPs] are an interesting target, I mean I would be amazed if I wasn’t a target and others weren’t a target. It’s a case that if you put yourself above the parapet you are there to be shot at.’ They have to be mindful of what they say on race, as the press are only too quick to brand them as extremists or as unrepresentative of black people’s opinions (despite the fact that they have been elected as constituency MPs rather than as black representatives). Black MPs are caught in a double bind: first, they are particularised and constrained to be nothing but race specialists and, secondly, they have to be careful about what they actually say about race. Anything they say that is mildly unconventional, which is easily done in relation to race issues, is very easily labelled as extremist. For instance, as one of the black MPs reflected on her/his own sense of the media watching him/her, s/he mentioned that the media are only too quick to admonish an MP who is nonconformist on race as ‘the high priest of race and race hate’. These labels and surveillance techniques just add to the mesh of particularity that black MPs are defined by.

Strait-jacketed

In *Making Myself Visible* the artist Rasheed Araeen (1994) discusses the contortions involved in trying to make himself visible in the institutional world of art, where his work is ethnically marked. He is invited, accepted

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and appreciated as an artist within tight confines, confines which patronise him and reduce his work to being ethnically specific. Araeen calls upon constitutively exclusive features of modernity, and the place of racialised 'others' within it, to shed greater light on how ethnic marking exists in his profession. Speaking of 'black' artists he says:

Modernist techniques or methods, including film or video, may be adopted by them. They may even critique the dominant culture (so long as they don't threaten the system). But whatever they do, they must not escape from their specific ethnic or racial identity. For them to adopt an autonomous subject position, like their white contemporaries, would deprive them of the link necessary to authenticise their positions. This is based on the nineteenth century belief ... by which 'others' are ontologically linked to their own cultural roots (African or Asian), and are presumed to be incapable of entering the world of modern ideas without this link. (Araeen 2000: 62)

The participation in modernity of racialised 'others' is thus as marked subjects who can't escape their 'ethnic' identity. The racial particularity they are said to carry is highly visible, while the particularity of whiteness, as pointed out in the discussion above, is invisible. Furthermore, the artwork itself is seen to be, at some point or another, mimetically linked to an ethnic specificity. It is on these limited and narrow terms that recognition is most easily granted.

Thinking about the impact of the process of marking and ethnic reification upon the institutions of art, Eddie Chambers states that there is in operation an administrative logic for regulating and managing cultural difference. For instance, there has, he says, been in evidence an increasing obligation and responsibility for funders to support black artists within institutional notions of multiculturalism, internationalism and cosmopolitanism. However, despite the apparent 'openness' of these initiatives which seek to diversify institutions, he notes that there is a tendency to make 'black slots' available within digestible constrictors of ethnic vibrancy (1999: 27).

We are witnessing an unflagging multicultural hunger within the drive for diversity in institutions. Alongside this shift, long-standing traditions seem to be alive and well, as the spiritual, authentic, exotic, religious, ceremonial, innocent and barbaric (Said 1995) continue to be the dominant ways in which diverse bodies are received. Difference continues to be celebrated but trapped in managerial and reified understandings of multiculturalism. In more bohemian and avant-garde circles, the fascination has moved on from essentialist notions of tradition and culture to the newness of hybrid cosmopolitan bodies (Hall 1998;

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Cohen 1999; Puwar 2002, 2003c). The effect of both of them is similar – objectification and fetishism. Easily available tropes such as Bollywood and ‘black cool’ are preferred over open-ended conversations.

The connection between the body and the reach of ideas remains tight. Even approaches that attempt to ‘democratise’ public institutions by bypassing experts to bring in hitherto unheard voices find it hard to frame these conversations and representations outside long-standing, and much criticised, dichotomies. A naïve populist empiricism seeks to ‘reach out’ by continuing to hear through established epistemic categories.

All speech is embodied and spoken from somewhere, but the issue here is that the speech of ‘black artists’ is mimetically taken back to what their ethnic and cultural positioning is read as being. The struggle to escape the fixity of racial identities, as well as those of gender, sexuality and class, is summed up by the artist Sonia Boyce, when she says:

Whatever black people do, it is said to be about identity, first and foremost. It becomes a blanket term for everything we do, regardless of what we’re doing ... I don’t say it should be abandoned, [but] am I only able to talk about who I am? Of course, who I am changes as I get older: it can be a life-long inquiry. But why should I only be allowed to talk about race, gender, sexuality and class? Are we only able to say who we are, and not able to say anything else? If I speak, I speak ‘as a’ black woman artist or ‘as a’ black woman or ‘as a’ black person. I always have to name who I am: I’m constantly being put in that position, required to talk in that place ... never allowed to speak because I speak. (quoted in Mercer 1995: 30)

Boyce’s account reveals the strait-jacket of marked identities, which repeatedly attempt to lock the speaking subject outside universal speech and within particular ethnic enclaves.

On several occasions the artist Steve McQueen has publicly commented on the attempt to view his work as something very particular to blackness *per se*, rather than just art. In a conversation with the cultural artist Kobena Mercer at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in 2000 in London, he remarked on his time as a student at Goldsmiths College in the 1980s and how he faced this constant expectation that he would want to create something ‘ethnic’ in the anthropological sense, such as carnival masks, and would not want to engage with what are termed mainstream issues. He has now won the Turner Prize (in 1999) and created numerous projects which are cinematic revelations in themselves. But, still, some people can’t desist from wanting to know how his work speaks from the deepest depths of his blackness. At a public discussion of the screening

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of the gripping journey down a mile-deep mine in South Africa, *Western Deep*, and the lamenting *Caribs Leap*, shown in the concrete cast of the first Cinema Lumière in Leicester Square, a member of the audience asked McQueen how being black affected his artwork. Being no doubt fully conversant with tiring questions which indirectly ask ‘What is it like to be the black you?’ and ‘Please show us where precisely the black is in the works you create?’, to this question McQueen shrugged his shoulders with a facial expression which said, ‘Isn’t that just a ridiculous, predictable question?’ (McQueen 2002).

Visibility: Seeking But Not Hearing

In the arts, literature and academia there has been a notable shift in the near invisibility of black texts and cultural production to significant visibility. In fact, some commentators have noted an over-exuberance. Undeniably the migrant, the refugee and the exile are the figures of our time. However, how they are received is questionable. What speaking position is allotted to them and the investments in this figure deserve scrutiny. There is a fascination with seeking out the ‘down below’ (Puwar 2003a,b). Michael Keith (1999) notes, for instance, that Bangladeshi youth in Brick Lane, a long-standing, run-down, migrant area of East London, are treated by academics on the Left as the teleological delivery boys.

The fascination with whoever becomes defined as the archetypal figure of alterity is found in forums across different sectors. This is an international phenomenon. People are mesmerised by this ‘object’ of otherness. Speaking of how this notion is embedded in Hoxton in London (UK), a relatively impoverished area which in the 1990s became fashionable with those who ally themselves with new creative-media arts and industries, the renowned novelist Zadie Smith mentions:

One of the strange things about Hoxton, which is particularly intense there but mirrored throughout the young middle-class university educated people of this country, is a real desire for a story or some kind of victimhood that they don’t have. The story you hear most often in the *Hoxton Bar & Grill* or the *Electricity Showroom* is how difficult it is to be white, for your parents to both be academics and have no story of your own. They are constantly looking for ideas for this film or that film, but no one really has a plot. There is a kind of envy of people different from themselves, as if, for example, cultural minority status gives other people immediate access to creativity that the

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Hoxton kids think they themselves don't have. Personally, I'm not interested in writing about my own experience for the rest of my life, but it is seen as a gift that I've been given, both class and race, which separates you from this huge, liberal intelligentsia. (Smith and Dodd 2000: 36)

In the world of literary and cultural studies, the swarm of interest for certain female figures, such as Toni Morrison, Zadie Smith or Meena Alexander, is particularly notable. Picking up on the extent of the attention paid to Zora Neale Hurston, Michelle Wallace presents a vivid picture of what we are in the middle of. She notes that there is a 'traffic jam' of intellectuals engaged in the analysis of the work of Hurston, who, 'like groupies descending on Elvis Presley's estate', are engulfed in 'a mostly ill-mannered stampede to have some memento of the black woman' (cited in DuCille 2001: 234).

Speaking of academia, bell hooks notes that the 'courses I teach on black women writers and Third World Literature are overcrowded, with large waiting lists' and the students are mostly white and privileged (1991: 131–2). Shedding further light on how 'minority discourse' has become 'a hot topic' in the West (Chow 1993: 109), Ann DuCille notes the shift from how 'black' women had to struggle to get black feminist texts on the curriculum or the bookshops to a situation where now:

Within and around the modern academy, racial and gender alterity has become a hot commodity that has claimed black women as its principal signifier. I am alternately pleased, puzzled, and perturbed – bewitched, bothered and bewildered – by this, by the alterity that is perpetually thrust upon African-American women, by the production of black women as infinitely deconstructable 'othered' matter ... Why are they so interested in me and people like me (metaphorically speaking)? Why have we – black women – become the subjected subjects of so much scholarly investigation, the peasants under the glass of intellectual inquiry in the 1990's? (2001: 234).

Sonia Boyce, Zadie Smith and Ann DuCille pick up on how a very specific speaking subject position is made available for racialised minority women. They are expected to impart words of wisdom about alterity, or, as Smith says, class and race. This is a very particular speaking position; the utterances of these people are linked to their bodily existence. Their voices are anchored to what they are seen to embody. This is a burden and a connection that is not the first consideration that comes to mind when a white male body speaks, writes or creates. He just speaks as a human, because race and gender are ex-nominated from his bodily representation. While we can no doubt show how this universal figure

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of a human, who is commonly assumed to be speaking from nowhere is speaking from somewhere, as an embodied being (in terms of nationality, gender and class, for instance), he nevertheless occupies a position of privilege of invisibility.

The visibility of black women is thus of a very specific sort. Their contributions are sought and illuminated, but in limited ways which circumscribe what they have the authority to speak of. They are offered the floor to speak of marginality. The invitations are thus coming in today, but so often they are to fill specific 'ethnic slots'. One enters as a racially marked speaker. As space is opened up, in the same gesture it is closed down under the rubric of a strait-jacket. Taking a critical look at the terms in which one is able to speak within academia, Spivak has noted the existence of a kind of 'benevolent imperialism' that enables her to speak as an Indian woman today. She notes that 'A hundred years ago it was impossible for me to speak, for the precise reason that makes it only too possible for me to speak in certain circles now' (cited in Landry and Maclean 1995: 194). She is invited to speak almost as a gesture of charity and guilt; organisations want to make room for women of the third world – only, however, as specific types of speaking subjects.

The restricted grounds from which women of colour within academia are enabled to speak can become especially apparent when they go outside the remit of 'benevolent multiculturalism' and write about mainstream subjects that occupy a central place in the academic hierarchy of knowledge. This more generalised form of speaking becomes particularly problematic if the idioms one uses are a touch unconventional. Spivak situates the highly publicised critique of her book *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999) by Terry Eagleton as being directed from a position that is uncomfortable with the fact that the texts she engages with 'are not confined to Third World women and yet I don't write like Habermas in drag' (Spivak 2001: 21). In other words, she speaks of culture, power and literature (mainstream subjects) without becoming a clone of the white male speaking/somatic norm in academia. She argues that her presence in academia is troubling because:

I am a woman and as it happens a woman of colour who does not remain confined to the modes of discourse that she is allowed to engage in – speaking about women and speaking about Third World women and speaking about our victimage. That's fine. If a person such as me de-anthropologises herself and reads the great texts of European tradition in a way that does not resemble the general rational expectations way of reading then she is punished. (2001: 22)

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Whom and what people can speak for is a revealing measure of hierarchies of inclusion. Spivak is steeped in European philosophy and literature, she translated Derrida's tome *Grammatology* in her mid-twenties, and still attempts are made to bludgeon her into speaking about 'her sort' and specific corners of the world. Within the writing of social and political theory, the white man rules, he is still central. Within feminist theory, the white divas have a monopoly over its oration. Women of colour struggle to get into this central ground. They are certainly invited to speak but the queen bees of feminist theory remain white. Structures of whiteness pervade academic and political relations. They have a huge bearing upon who has the authority to speak and in what capacity. There are normative figures who manage to escape racial marking and can thus speak generally, even while they don't escape gendered marking. Their racialised particularity, however, remains invisible precisely because it is the norm. For the woman of colour, as Spivak found, the slot that is made easily available for her is one where she offers herself as an anthropological spectacle. There is a vast open space from where social documentation of oneself or the so-called communities one comes from can be provided. The room for self-commentary is especially forthcoming when the testimonies are able to induce pity, tears or, more recently, a celebration of diversity.⁶ There is a particular propensity towards hearing *her* speech from this selective vantage point in all fields, whether politics, literature, academia or the arts.

There are clear parallels between academia, other professions and the art world, where 'black slots' are made available in what Eddie Chambers has referred to as 'the logic of closure, exclusion and guarded tolerance inscribed in arts institutions and the gallery circuit' (1999: 6). In Chapter 3, it was noted how Lévi-Strauss was totally at a loss when he found an 'Indian' sitting in New York library with a Parker pen in his hand. The disorientation he suffered at seeing a member of a group that had been the subject of his academic fieldwork out of the field, so to speak, and now sitting in a place of knowledge, from where the white, Western scholar has looked at and studied 'Other' cultures, was, as noted by Rey Chow, a case of the natives not staying in their frames. That is, the categories through which Lévi-Strauss had seen and located the 'natives' he studied were burst apart by the sheer presence of the 'alien' figure in the library. Chow goes on to note that today, within the academy, scholars from countries outside Europe and North America are specifically sought by faculties, especially within the discipline(s) of Area Studies in the US. She comments on the dynamics of the selection process, by reflecting on a faculty research committee that she was

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participating in at the University of Minnesota, in the recruitment of a specialist in Chinese language and literature. It is not often academics, or in fact other professionals, risk being branded as renegades (Bourdieu 2001), by going public with what is discussed, behind the scenes, during the course of a recruitment process. Chow offers a rare glimpse of what goes on behind the doors of the selection procedure. For this reason it is worth quoting her observations at length:

A candidate from the People's Republic of China [PRC] gave a talk that discussed why we still enjoy reading the eighteenth-century classic *The Dream of the Red Chamber*. The talk was a theoretical demonstration of how no particular interpretation of this book could exhaust the possibilities of reading. During the search committee's discussion of the various candidates afterward, one faculty member, an American Marxist, voiced his disparaging view of this particular candidate in the following way: 'The talk was not about why we still enjoy reading *The Dream of the Red Chamber*. She does because she likes capitalism!'

This colleague of mine stunned me with a kind of discrimination that has yet to be given its proper name [...] Communist beliefs became the stereotype with which my colleague was reading this candidate. The fact that she did not speak from such beliefs but instead from an understanding of the text's irreducible plurality (an understanding he equated with 'capitalism') greatly disturbed him; his lament was that this candidate had betrayed our expectation of what Communist 'ethnic specimens' ought to be.

[...] In the case of the faculty search at Minnesota, what I heard was not the usual desire to *archaize* the modern Chinese person but rather a valorizing, on the part of the Western Critic, of the official political and cultural difference of the PRC as the designator of the candidate's supposed 'authenticity.' If a native espouses capitalism, then she has already been corrupted. An ethnic specimen that was not pure was not of use to him. (1993: 27–8)

Here we see how employees are called upon to be 'ethnic' in very specific ways, ways which do not in a straightforward way come out of the anthropological archive, but are rather intermeshed with other schools of thought. In this case the anthropological is interwoven with certain versions of Marxism, and its vision of what the subaltern is, or rather should be. When they don't fit into reified notions of the ideal type, they evoke deep disappointment.

Today it is not unusual to see the 'native' sitting in libraries, writing with Parker pens and making public speeches. However, on what subject s/he is expected to carry authority is still coupled with the specific signature s/he is encouraged to bear. There are racialised genres and conventions

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which effect the ways in which people are heard – self-testimonies, Third World and urban revolutionary zeal, anthropological details and community representation. These slots (speaking positions) are much more easily available to them than the position of the ‘mainstream’ (universal), which is a position they constantly have to struggle to enter. And in fact when they do they are much more acceptable if they tone down their concerns and speak/mimic the accepted legitimate language in these circles (see Chapters 6 and 7). But even if they are willingly or unwittingly social clones they will always be dogged by the burden of doubt and the tendency of infantilisation. After all, their racial particularity vies with the empty universality of whiteness upon which the position of speaking for everyone is premised. Reflecting on being a black academic in Britain, Felly Nkweto Simmonds notes, ‘In the final analysis, I might be an academic, but what I carry is an embodied self that is at odds with expectations of who an academic is’ (1997: 228).