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# Visual Culture Archaeology: A Criti/Politi/cal Methodology of Image and Identity

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This study argues the efficacy of the phenomenological cultural work of a visual culture archaeology that liberates a political and critical identity, resistant to domination, authoring social change and its own agency through multiple and incommensurable positions. Built on Foucauldian premises, visual culture archaeology is developed as a methodology for discursive un-naming and renaming and emerges from the inherence and attenuation of inscripted meanings in the reinterpretation of identity during a postmodern confluence of ideas and images. The hybridized representation of the African American in Western visual culture has been unique in the effort by some to define us over significant periods as less than human, less than American, or less than statistically significant in the purpose to maintain an unequal relation of economic and political power. This article continues the author's effort to establish the efficacy of a poststructural and poetic aesthetic in qualitative research writing.

*Keywords:* image politics; critical race theory; performance studies; autoethnography

## Inverse Archaeologies

> Blackface performance is a paradigmatic instance of the disdained and fugitive figure popping up on the dominating culture's center stage. It is a theatre of interpenetration, sponsored by the dominating culture, in which both the fugitive and the dominant culture agree to understand the motley figure is impossible to seat or resolve. Blackface fascination shows a miscegenated culture becoming aware of itself. It makes theatre out of mingling selves trying to understand their inversions.
>
> Lhamon, 1998, pp. 131, 132

To be critical is to be political. Criticality is an interrogation of power that affords the insertion of subjective desire, namely, the desire to name thyself. To be critical is to insert a new dialectic into an ongoing discourse, making apparent that which had previously been marginalized, unheard, untouched, unseen. I speak now of border crossings and the contention such trafficking brings as hegemony attempts to reinforce its boundaries. Art educator Charles R. Garoian offers a perspective on the border between hegemonic knowledge containments and new and

subjective knowledge embodiments, describing the polemical space of contention as a limen, a place where bolt cutters have opened the frontier fences, "a threshold, a border, a neutral zone between ideas, cultures, or territories that one must cross in order to get from one side to the other" (Garoian, 1999, p. 40). Contention is the seedbed of politics; acts of contention find ways of eluding the sociocultural border patrol, infiltrating a liminal space that is "unstable, indeterminate, and prone to complexity and contradiction" (Garoian, 1999, p. 40).

Garoian (1999) expounds on the political nature of the sociocultural limen, a place where persons and positions are named and un-named, identifying it as a contentious place, a place of natural tension between what critical pedagogist Henry A. Giroux (1995) has described as "the trauma of identity formation and the demands of public life" (p. 5) and therefore an arena of reflexive critique wherein various forms of cultural work (traditions, beliefs, fashions, talk, works of art, and social practices) are made performative.[1] The trafficking of embodied contentions, where identities are understood to be both/and rather than either/or, are juxtaposed within a polemical space where "meaning is contested and struggled for in the interstices in between structures" (Conquergood, 1991, p.184). The performative sociocultural site of contention is also then the criti/politi/cal identity.

Garoian (1999) suggests liminal zones of contention to be a desirable state, each resisting and challenging "normative instructional strategies founded on Cartesian-based subject-object binaries, the rationalism of the Enlightenment project, and the positivism of modern art and science," working together to reclaim body and self as "political site," and "the principle means by which spectators/students become critical thinkers and participate in society as critical citizens" (Garoian, 1999, p. 43).

According to Garoian's (1999) argument, when zones of contention become pedagogical strategy, educational enterprise takes a decidedly postmodern turn as spectators/students are taught how "cultural identity work functions politically to achieve agency within schooled culture (p. 44). The teacher is transformed into the "liminal-servant," teaching students to "think and act critically in classrooms, to challenge the historical and cultural assumptions that they are taught in schools, at home, in the church, in the media, and in other sites where their identities and expressions are at risk" (Garoian, 1999, p. 49).

> Critical thinking is not intended merely to improve test scores; it is not task, discipline, not culture specific. Instead, it enables students to cross historically and institutionally determined disciplinary and cultural boundaries to gain multiple perspectives and to participate in the discourse on educational content. Under such circumstances, classrooms are transformed into liminal spaces, sites of contestation where the struggle to learn takes place as the politics of learning is challenged with the interpersonal, interdisciplinary, and intercultural perspectives that the students bring to the school. (Garoian, 1999, p. 49)

Visual culture is also a seedbed of contention and of politics, a metaliminal space, unstable, indeterminate, and prone to complexity and contradiction. Art

educator Kerry Freedman (2003) contextualizes visual culture as "inherently interdisciplinary and increasingly multi-modal" (p. 2); Freedman also notes that "visual culture images and objects are continuously seen and instantaneously interpreted, forming new knowledge and new images of identity and environment" (p. 3). Visual culture — experienced "in classrooms, museum galleries, community centers, people's homes, on the street, and in movie theaters" (Freedman, 2003, p. 2) — includes "the fine arts, tribal arts, advertising, popular film and video, folk art, television and other performance, housing and apparel design, computer game and toy design, and other forms of visual production and communication" (Freedman, 2003, p. 1). Constituted of the flotsam and jetsam churning within the metaliminal space of visual culture are the amalgams that take harbor in the human psyche as a representative self-image.[2]

The presentation of self-image is the performative aspect of identity, the variant of the existential self put forward to state the case for our difference and/or our sameness, our independence and/or inclusion; a representative self-image is performed self-consciously. Sociologist Stuart Hall is quoted as suggesting the following:

> We . . . occupy our identities very retrospectively: having produced them, we then know who we are. We say, "Oh, that's where I am in relation to this argument and for these reasons." So, it's exactly the reverse of what I think is the common sense way of understanding it, which is that we already know our "self" and then put it out there. Rather, having put it into play in language, we then discover what we are. I think that only then do we make an investment in it, saying, "Yes, I like that position, I am that sort of person, I'm willing to occupy that position." (quoted in Drew, 1998, p. 173)

Representative image making may also involve the agency of constructing oppositional images and gestures — the construction of an other-image as opposed to self-image — although for the very same purpose as suggested by Hall, that of excavating an identity and surveying a site conducive for identity development and social positioning. However, these latter construction sites are complexly performative, with some representing themselves in a position framed by the incommensurability of a horde of juxtaposed "others." At the same time, those hordes are free to manage the indictment of "otherness" with the presentation of extranormative figures of self, selves that transit quite easily in meanings — and possibilities — outside of the representative center, beyond the periphery of popularly desired identity and self-image.[3]

When T. D. Rice first assembled the 1836 blackface minstrel show[4] *Bone Squash Diavolo* from various American folk and popular sources, the blackface performers were intended to enact "an identification of whites with blacks . . . simultaneously to engage and to understand the belittling of blacks" (Lhamon, 1998, p. 139).

> Performers could represent, and publics understand, blacks as childlike or stupid. And they might construct their own whiteness as the polar opposite of what they were rehearsing as blackness. Thus, while the minstrel mask encouraged identification, it also [simultaneously] encouraged racialist differentiation. (Lhamon, 1998, p. 139)

But far more complex a phenomenon is what English professor and popular cultural theorist W. T. Lhamon, Jr., calls the "genealogical freight train" integral to each representational performance of Blackface minstrelsy over the passage of time. Lhamon (1998) notes that in any given performance, "this past inhered in the images of the present even if they were not always seen there, and they became part of the future" (p. 140); the following excerpt of his research on Blackface performance through the Jim Crow era and into contemporary contexts warrants being quoted at length:

> Before U.S. whites started inscribing, painting, and staging black talk, song, and dance at the end of the eighteenth century, slaves had long been performing public put-ons of whites. The cakewalk is probably the most familiar example. The John Canoe revelries of Jamaica and coastal North Carolina are a second example. A third is the needling songs that punctuated cornhuskings. Together, these and their sibling gestures amount to a highly formal and elaborately conventional form of resistance. . . . These were not revolutionary actions, to be sure. They were recalcitrant. They operated within a pattern of absolute authority that was fortified by the ruling ethnographic allegory. This allegority draped the life of working people, of every hue, during the nineteenth century.
>
> The way they worked under that blanket — within it without being of it — was impressive, and their achievement was large. These recalcitrant patterns found free space for their audiences. They kept alive a critique of the dominant culture. . . . Like those who danced for eels along the New York wharves, these performance patterns folded African form into the midst of Euro-derived festivity. This interleaving arranged and nurtured a space of display within the traffic of the dominating community. It also made the strategies of camouflaged black recalcitrance accessible to disaffected white publics — like those gathering in U.S. cities in the 1830s. Thus, the earliest white imitations were of performance gestures that included preexisting black imitations of whites or, at the very least, of African-American cultural combinations. That's why a dizzying series of inversions works through the simplest minstrel re-presentation. (Lhamon, 1998, p. 140)

The performance of Blackface by White cultural workers within the narrative construct of the arbitrary dominance of one group over another and the representation of an oppositional African American body, language, and gestures for a public audiences may thus be seen as a "shifting intersectional space or node of multiple formations" in play (Scheurich, 1997, p. 169), reconstituting typologies of African American social identity, conflating it with the construction of Whiteness as a discursive social position yet always retaining renegotiated traces of previous representations of African American social identity (Lhamon, 1998, p. 108).

But Lhamon's citation of critical achievement in the previous extended quote is a reference to the performance of Blackface and the oppositional African American by African Americans themselves. Although American music historian William J. Mahar (1999) notes that antebellum Blackface minstrelsy performers employed burnt cork makeup primarily as "a disguise for white performers who chose parody and burlesque as techniques to satirize majority values while still reinforcing widely held and fairly conservative beliefs" (p. 1), it eventually became

so typical a practice for African Americans to perform in Blackface that in the years subsequent to the Civil War, "nearly all commercial blackface troupes consisted of black performers in blackface" (Lhamon, 1998, p. 120). Within the narrative trope of the Biblical character Cain as an allegory of the marked man and the resonance of that story with that of the position of the Blackfaced Black man, Lhamon (1998) argues the following:

> Vernacular performers who were transmuting folk gestures into a popular culture fit for its era were anticipating by a century and a half the sorts of social analysis that now seem persuasive to many of the fields contributing to cultural studies. In their blackface masking, early minstrel performers were showing to themselves and to their heterogeneous audiences the processes of social control that were gripping them. They were making dramatic the corporeal inscriptions, the disciple and surveillance, the hegemony and habitus which Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu have since made proverbial. In the space of the songs and plays that raised Cain, the background assumptions and codes became apparent and plastic. In the space of the performances that raised Cain, players and publics found room to manipulate their basic assumptions. (p. 127)

Art educator Dipti Desai's (2000) discussion of the politics of representation in multicultural art education underscores "the power of dominant forms of representation to make marginalized groups see themselves as 'other'" (p. 116). Here, I would like to point out that just as crucial, and perhaps more remarkable, is the power of recalcitrant forms of representation to be insinuated back into dominant forms, to gestate there until new ideations of other identity are popularly embraced and co-opted by a dominant culture that once shunned overt familiarity with the other.

What makes any and all such remediation of representation so remarkable? Desai (2000) defines a representation as "a historically determined construction that is mediated by social, ideological, and cultural processes and not as a reflection of reality" (p.115). According to Desai, all representation constructs new meaning, and no representation, whether, visual, textual or verbal is neutral (Desai, 2000, p. 115). In a surface continuum of representations, every representation yields a sudden variation in surface, contour, foundation, structure, and orientation. If "colonization's violations are manifested at the level of the psyche, thus constructing particular subject positions" (Desai, 2000, p. 116), then the most jagged and unstable terrain for the construction of an identity is within the subject position signified as "object" — object of commodity, object of exploitation, object of contempt. Hegemony also colonizes representations, co-opting all action and agency from the colonized; the colonized are forced by the dynamics of subordination to perform as though perpetually acted on, without agency, without license, without access to meaningful representation . . . even that of self-representation.

On the other hand, to contest the marginalization of self within hegemony, to contest the displacement of personal agency over to the dominant agents in society,

the subject position must speak for itself, of itself, by itself. To do so, if I may borrow from current vernacular, is to represent. Psychoanalyst and philosopher Frantz Fanon (1967) once observed the following:

> Willy-nilly, the Negro has to wear the livery that the white man has sewed for him. Look at children's picture magazines: Out of every Negro mouth comes the ritual "Yassuh, boss." It is even more remarkable in motion pictures. Most of the American films for which French dialogue is dubbed in offer the type-Negro; "Sho' good!" . . . Yes, the black man is supposed to be a good nigger; once this has been laid down, the rest follows of itself. To make him talk pidgin [in vernacular dialect] is to fasten him to the effigy of him, to snare him, to imprison him, the eternal victim of an essence, of an appearance for which he is not responsible. (pp. 34, 35)

However, when the subordinated re-present, they also reposition themselves apart from a location of disenfranchisement, alienation, and social invisibility. We recapture responsibility for our appearances. If others fail to recognize me except in stereotype, the only solution left to me is "to make myself known" (Fanon, 1967, p. 115). In the contest to retain or obtain power — to control the political means and distribution of representation — there is a push and pull. The re-presentation of representation, especially self-representation, performs a coup over the dominance of forced inscriptions. Frank Kermode describes a systemic "conflict between . . . proprieties and the mutinous text of interpretation" (cited in Mitchell, 1981, p. 83). Even so, once the power to rename is attained, there will be a reaction that attempts to capture power once again for the hegemony.

Every re-presentation of representation establishes new parameters, new cornerstones, new landmarks — a new sense of place, or overarching meaning. A representation, for the purposes of the remaining discussion, is the juxtaposition of related and/or disparate sets of meaning that opens a berth for the accrual of a new meaning in the gaps where the joints do not entirely dovetail. Meanings juxtaposed re-present themselves until they are interstitially made sense of, with gaps or hidden cavities of sense serving as the locations in which peculiar concepts may further attach themselves so that the same stuffed animal in a bag that carries sweet memories of home to one only brings trash day to mind for others. Or consider: Marlon Brando in a leather jacket. Cool. Now envision Marlon Brando in a tutu. Marlon Brando has accrued an iconic status in the performing arts; a leather jacket is a form of clothing that has associative meanings, contexts, and applications; so does a tutu. Each juxtaposition — Brando in leather versus Brando in drag — acts as a representation; however, the ideas and emotions that align with the two Brandos representations diverge strikingly.

Taking our suppositions a step further, if our representation of Brando in leather is succeeded by a re-presentation of Brando in drag, genealogical baggage will carry over to the ensuing representation, as when Robert De Niro played a psychologically damaged mobster in the 1999 comedy *Analyze This*. Humor was mined from the pop cultural archaeology of numerous De Niro portrayals of psychologically damaged mobsters that absolutely horrified us. To represent meanings that inhere

from the past in the body of a new representation involves "some act of violence or decontextualization" that reduces aspects of preexisting representations of those meanings to "partial characteristics" (Desai, 2000, pp. 115-116). Yet it is on top of the ruins and debris of preexisting meanings that new cities will be built; moreover, dig deeply enough into a site of representation and the remnants of all previous cycles of representation will also be found there. Indeed, the old cobblestones of an abandoned matrix of meanings have often already been unearthed and are now mortared into the foundation wall of an ensuing cycle of representation.

The identity of those imbricated meanings are always then in the process of construction and deconstruction, compounded matrices of sliding signifiers coming to rest in new positions of utility — a poststructural phenomenon. Postmodernisms have arisen — postmodernisms of identity and of methodology working in concert to form new knowledge from the multiple inversions possible during the postcolonial struggle to destabilize and reinterpret entrenched narratives of dominance and subordination. A discussion of the license and agency to tear down and bury, to dig out and reveal, or to build atop and make a home and a name for oneself will be the thrust of the remainder of this article.

## Unearthed Archaeologies

The politics of dominance and subordination being what it is, it should not be surprising that the African American community as a whole is positioned to have very little impact on the work of academic theorizers and the traditional research community. Frankly,

> a large chorus of scholars of color . . . have contended that dominant group epistemologies and methodologies — the epistemologies and methods themselves and not just "bad" applications of these epistemologies and methodologies—tend to distort the lives of other racial groups. (Scheurich, 1997, p. 142)[5]

Furthermore,

> the range of epistemologies that have arisen from the social history of whites "fits" whites because they themselves, the nature of the university and legitimated scholarship and knowledge, and the specifications of different research methodologies are all cultural products of white social history. . . . The negative consequence for scholars of color, however, is that they must learn and become accomplished in epistemologies that arises out of a social history that has been profoundly hostile to their race and that ignores or excludes alternative race-based epistemologies because mainstream research communities have assumed that their epistemologies are not derived from any particular group's social history, i.e., are free of any specific history or culture. (Scheurich, 1997, pp. 142-143)

The archaeology of U.S. race relations and power politics is inscribed beneath the skin of African American sociocultural embodiments.[6] An archaeology is a complex multiformational array of category linkages, which constitutes the deepest

epistemological (ways of knowing reality), ontological (assumptions on the nature of reality), and axiological (ethical valuations of the categories comprising reality) for a particular culture. Drawing heavily on Foucauldian premise, critical theorist James J. Scheurich (1997) portrays the United States as an archaeology where

> there is one culture . . . that has dominated and continues to dominate significantly though not completely, several other cultures (archaeologies), which in their attempts to survive both work to maintain their own archaeological integrity and create hybridic spaces of interactional overlap. (p. 167)

Scheurich labels these subliminal archaeological arrangements as "formations" within the greater formation of the dominant archaeology. His argument is that "human life occurs within and in terms of archaeologies" (p. 169):

> Thus, while the archaeology of the dominant group is the most influential one, the most privileged one, such that all of the other formations exist in relation to and "within" it, all people, both those of the dominant formations and those of the non-dominant ones, are constituted by their multiformational positionality. (Scheurich, 1997, p. 169)

No individual speaks the governing positional archaeology into being. Rather, the archaeology, discursively perpetuated, is the antecedent of the individual's subjectivities and his or her epistemological, ontological, and axiological realities. The archaeology of U.S. social and cultural relations subordinates the significance of the African American. Speaking for myself, however, I wrest back the agency to respond to discourses that deign to represent me, and I reconstitute those properties that seek to reduce me to certain and intractable abnormality.

I am theorizing a visual culture archaeology, that is to say, a noun, a multiformational power arrangement that is manifested in the visual culture, a pastiche of dominant group image making and the images of nondominant subgroupings, hybridic at times, subliminal at times, always interactional, all images contesting for preeminence and position in the constitution of the national and individual identities. This theory comes as the result of an exercise, an interrogative dialectic between my own nascent research interests and James J. Scheurich's (1997) postmodern methodology for approaching the analysis of the traditional policy studies problematic, typically encompassing the following: "(i) descriptions of social problems; (ii) discussions of competing policy solutions; (iii) considerations of general implementation problems; and (iv) evaluations of particular policy implementations" (p. 95). The dialectic I am establishing is transgressive, yet expository, making plain my implicit argument that the dominating regularities of Western modernity are interrogated quite effectively from positions along its margins, marginalia folding inward to become the nuclei for anomalous configurations of identity and methodology.

Scheurich (1997) is careful to emphasize that his work is the emergent development of significant interactions with the early works of Foucault (1970, 1972, 1974) and that he does not pretend to have correctly "interpreted" Foucault,

claiming rather that this "new way of thinking about social and education policies and the social and education problems that the policies are meant to solve or alleviate" emerged from a process of repeated readings (Scheurich, 1997, p. 94). Reflecting in later passages on the development of his new methodology for policy studies, Scheurich concedes that

> policy archaeology, as a method for identifying social regularities, is itself emergent within a particular historical period [the postmodern]; consequently, historical changes may lead to the decline and disappearance of policy archaeology as a relevant methodology. (p. 101)

Scheurich (1997) concedes that his efforts will prove fleeting, and so must I. In time, what I have gathered in these pages will eventually pass into obscurity. Knowledge is impermanent, as are our bodies. In service to this effort to explore a landscape of imbricated body types, I will employ a similar style of interaction as that explicated in the endnotes of Scheurich's groundbreaking work. Scheurich refers to his usage of quotes from Foucault in which he makes bracketed substitutions, folding over Foucauldian propositions into his "new" methodology. New knowledge is folded up with what was, what is, and what might have been. Scheurich admits that such substitutions will obviously change "the particular meaning" of Foucault's original statements but argues that doing so does not "change the more general meaning as it might be applied to [his own] topic" (p. 114).

> Palimpsestically, I have overwritten my own set of substitutions on top of Scheurich's careful interrogation of Foucault, with the intent to further messy up the integrity and fixity of modern, qualitative research writing. I add to this interrogation a sidebar of poetic dialogue to circumfuse the margins of qualitative research into my interrogation of Scheurich's interrogation of Foucault's interrogation of modernity. Laurel Richardson (1997) describes the "poetic representation of lives" as that which "reveals the process of self-construction, the reflexive basis of self-knowledge, the inconsistencies and contradictions of a life spoken as a meaningful whole" by a poem that has the simultaneous quality of acting as a whole to make sense of its parts while it as a whole can be experienced through its parts or subtexts (p. 143).

I must echo Scheurich's caveat: I do not claim to have correctly interpreted either he or Foucault. However, correctness is not the intent of postmodern inquiry but, rather, the deconstruction and reassembly of possible meanings. Scheurich lists four arenas in his policy studies methodology that I have in turn co-opted for the purposes of my own interrogation. Repiecing together preexisting texts and artifacts to make meaning is a characteristic common to all archaeological digs.

### The Social Construction of Modern Identities

> Instead of accepting a [modern identity] as an empirical given, this arena questions or brackets this givenness. Paraphrasing Foucault . . . "(t)he tranquility with which . . . [modern identities] are accepted must be disturbed." (Scheurich, 1997, p. 97)

Visual culture archaeology refuses the acceptance of modern social identities as natural occurrences. Rather, it examines closely and skeptically the emergence of any particular identity within the modernist paradigm. What makes the emergence of normalized and stigmatized identities possible? How did a particular social identity come to be seen as either a normal or modern identity? Why do some social identities make reappearances, demonstrating altered states of marginalization?[7] By what process does a marginalized social identity gain the "gaze" of the state, and of the acceptable society, and thus "emerge from a kind of social invisibility into visibility" (Scheurich, 1997, p. 97)?[8]

Foucault (1972) went further to inquire, "How is it that one particular statement [i.e., a modernist discourse of social identity in this case] appeared rather than another" (p. 27). What anchored it as a modern identity at the time it was first manifested? Visual culture archaeology proposes that modern social identities are social constructions. As a method of inquiry, it critically examines the social construction process — how the modern identity and, in contrast, the marginalized identity have both been made "manifest, nameable, and describable" (Foucault, 1972, p. 41).[9]

Accordingly, the practice of visual culture archaeology operates counter to both traditional and postpositivist methodological approaches and begins its overview of features and artifacts prior to the emergence and public acceptance of a normalized or stigmatized social identification.[10] Visual culture archaeology seeks to carefully scrape and expose the layers of broadly antecedent social processes rather than searching for simple causality. Identities are constituted of manipulable materials that are both representative and discursive; "social problems" are given names and identities so that they can be easily marked, shunned, and ostracized from the body politic, the body popular, so that problems can be attributed to outsiders, to those lacking the requisite politics or popularity or physiognomy or speech pattern. Visual culture archaeology studies the "numerous, complex strands and traces of social problems, prior to their naming" as marginalized identities (Scheurich, 1997, p. 98).[11]

In examining the naming process, visual culture archaeology "critically probes why and how these strands and traces congeal (become manifest) into what is thereafter labeled" as a particular normalized or stigmatized social identity (Scheurich, 1997, p. 98).[12]

But visual culture archaeology is not the historical study of the emergence of a modern discourse on particular social identities. Archaeology can be understood as what Mahon (1992) has characterized as the analysis of "the historical a priori" (p. 60).[13] Foucault (1989, p. 45) himself never intended the construal of the term *archaeology* as a form of historical analysis. This fact, however, does not preclude historical texts, artifacts, or iconic events from the purview of visual culture archaeology as a methodology. Scheurich (1997) is careful to note that, "(o)ne of the prominent features of Foucault's archaeology has been the retrieval and presentation of previously ignored but provocative historical documents that he then used as 'evidence' in the arguments he made" (p. 98).

It should be clarified that a review of the entire history of a particular social identity is not necessitated by a visual culture archaeology investigating the formation of the normalized and marginalized social regularities.[14] For instance, the focus of this article has been limited to the intersection of European and non-European bodies, "or, better, the constitutive grid of conditions, assumptions, forces which make the emergence of a [normalized identity], and its strands and traces, possible — to investigate how a [normalized identity] becomes visible as a [socially acceptable identity]" in response to modernist binary assumptions (Scheurich, 1997, p. 98).[15] Visual culture archaeology, as per my overwriting of Scheurich's overwriting of Foucault, investigates

> the conditions necessary for the appearance of a [modern identity], the historical conditions required if one is to "say anything" about it, the conditions necessary if it [the modern identity] is to exist in relation to other [discourses]. . . . (Foucault, 1972, p. 44)

Consequently, a modern identity

> does not wait in limbo the order that will free it and enable it to become embodied in a visible and prolix objectivity; it does not pre-exist itself, held back by some obstacle at the first edge of light. It [a modern identity] exists under the positive conditions of a complex group of relations. (Foucault, 1972, p. 45)

Drawing on Foucault, visual culture archaeology "tries to establish the rules of formation [of modern identity and its contemporary reinterpretations] in order to define the conditions of their realization" and depict the matrix of juxtaposed relations that make a modern, or Western, identity and its contemporary postmodernist reinterpretations possible (Foucault, 1972, p. 207).

### Identifying the Matrices of Social Normality

This particular arena of visual culture archaeology posits that there are intractable grids or matrices of "regularities" — socially acceptable narratives of identity, in this case — that are "constitutive of the emergence or social construction of a particular [identity]" as a modernist discourse (Scheurich, 1997, p. 98).[16] These regularities constitute what is labeled as a modern, Western identity or labeled as a subaltern, undeveloped, or antiquated (postrelevant) sociocultural identity. These regularities are a complex set of relations, also constituting the range of acceptable interpretations of Western identity and its alternatives. This arena of visual culture archaeology bases itself on the assumption that modernist discourses of social identity "do not achieve their visibility or recognition or status as [socially acceptable identities] in an idiosyncratic or random or 'natural' fashion, but . . . [by] the interactive intentions and actions of consciously involved social agents or groups" (Scheurich, 1997, p. 99).

Visual culture archaeology reveals that there is a grid of social constructed narratives that together constitute what becomes "socially visible" as an acceptable identity, as a range of credible reinterpretations of a normalized identity and as a range of visual shortcomings inhibiting social acceptability. Visual culture archaeology proposes that it can identify these grids or matrices of social constructed narratives; its methodology is politicized by its ability to render the normally invisible visible. A discursive stance that positions an element of difference as antiestablishment, and/or victimized by the establishment, and/or separatist from the establishment can invisibly also serve to reinforce the modernist discourses of progress and positivism by peripheralizing one's politics within the framework of the West's grand narrative.[17]

Foucault declares that

> unknown to themselves, naturalists, economists, and grammarians (of the [Modernist] age) employed the same rules to define the [discourses] proper to their own study, to form their concepts, to build their theories. It is these rules of formation which were never formulated in their own right, but are found only in widely differing theories, concepts, and [discourses] of study, that I have tried to reveal, by isolating, as their specific locus, a level that I have called, somewhat arbitrarily, archaeological (emphasis added). . . . I have tried to determine the basis or archaeological system common to a whole series of scientific "representations" or "products" dispersed throughout the natural history, economics, and philosophy of the [Modernist] period. (Foucault, 1970, pp. xi-xii)

Foucault argues that scientists in varying disciplines of inquiry delineate their objects of inquiry, form their concepts, and build their competing theories using the very same modernist material. Scheurich (1997, pp. 98-99) proposes that the same matrix of socially acceptable narratives constitutes widely diverse and seemingly antithetical sociocultural identities and that visual culture archaeology can identify these narratives and their discursive agencies. This is the second arena of visual culture archaeology.

Visual culture archaeology suggests modernist narratives and their discursive agencies "are 'productive' and 'reproductive'" in the sense that modernist discourse constitutes "what is socially visible or credible," but the discourses do not literally create the norms of acceptability (Scheurich, 1997, p. 100). Instead, they constitute what is socially selected and validated as "real" or "relevant." Yet even socially accepted narratives change and disappear as a society's demographics alter over time. New narratives emerge. In the film *The Matrix*, a scene near the end of the film depicts the moment the lead character, Neo, becomes the One, the prophesied leader of the rebellion against machines that dominate and exploit humanity. In that scene, when the invisible, all-constitutive, and omnipresent matrix becomes apparent, Neo's limitations are produced into evidence even as Neo is being reproduced to become the One without limitations.

Scheurich (1997) notes that "all social [narratives] are particular to particular time periods within individual societies" (p. 101). Visual culture archaeology posits that it can not only identify a given grid of socially accepted narratives but

also delineate shifts in the regularities that shape the emergence of narrative reinterpretations. A poststructuralist approach assumes that such regularities are not the same throughout all generations of a given society, or hegemony.[18]

### Socially Transgressive Interpretations of Identity

This arena involves the study of how possible interpretations or reinterpretations of identity are proliferated and altered within matrices of socially accepted narrative meanings.[19] Matrices of social accepted narratives and their discursive agencies similarly constitute ranges of acceptable and unacceptable sociocultural persons and positions. It is notable that this shaping and reshaping is not necessarily the intentional or conscious activity of cultural workers and researchers. The grid of modernist narratives and their discursive agencies are "deep structures," similar to language usage, and will evolve so that certain usages become obsolete, as others become vernacular, as others become subversive.

Walter Truett Anderson (1997) claims that "personal identities would be hard to locate without the network of symbols within which we are defined and the internal monologue with which we continually remind ourselves who we think we are" (p. 263).[20] Psychologist Howard Gardner (1995) points out that a transgressing story "must compete with many other extant stories; and if the new stories are to succeed, they must transplant, suppress, complement, or in some measure outweigh the earlier stories, as well as contemporary oppositional 'counterstories'" (p. 14). The ranges of new identity narratives are developed as proliferations inserted and differentiating within the interstices of familiar binaries: good and evil, strong and weak, normal and abnormal, and so forth. Homi K. Bhabha (1994) notes the hybridity inherent within these solutions:

> The access to the image of identity is only ever possible in the negation of any sense of originality or plenitude; the process of displacement and differentiation (absence/presence, representation/repetition) renders it a liminal reality. The image is at once a metaphoric substitution, an illusion of presence, and by that same token a metonym, a sign of its absence and loss . . . [a] shifting boundary of otherness within identity. . . . (p. 51)

### The Study of Visual Culture

This arena of visual culture archaeology examines the function of conventional and postpositivist cultural and social identity repositionings within the larger Western visual and popular culture. I am theorizing a visual culture archaeology, that is to say, a verb, a navigation of the multiformational power arrangement that is manifested in the visual culture, a navigation that functions to reposition dominant group image making and the images of nondominant subgroupings, repositioning the preeminence and position of image-making exemplars in the constitution of the

national and individual identities, repositioning meaning and identity within the larger Western visual and popular culture. Thus, it is important to question the action of visual culture representations, how they occur, and what their effects are. Visual culture is a phenomenon of Western culture.

> Western hegemony was further manifest in works of art and literature depicting the non-western world, in which fresh impressions mingled with medieval fables and notions drawn from the Bible and the classics. In painting, poetry, theatre, opera, popular prints, illustrated magazines, novels, children's books — a broad range of imaginative work — non-European worlds were represented as part of European scenarios. Scientific observation and fiction were interwoven as in Orientalism, and took shape in paintings and novels as well as in scholarly works on Asia and the Middle East. In the course of the nineteenth century, along with western expansion, methods of image-production were developed that included photography and later film. Cheaper methods of printing contributed to the wider circulation and popularization of images, which were also used in advertising and packaging. Many of these images, the harvest of five hundred years of western expansion and hegemony, are still current. (Pieterse, 1990, p. 224)

In 1927, French graphic designer Paul Colin published a limited edition of 45 lithographs made of dancer Josephine Baker and her revue in Paris, when the French fascination with American jazz musicians and dancers was at its zenith. The portfolio of lithographs, titled *Le Tumulte Noir*, depicted raw lines of energy in a simple three-color format that seemed only to heighten the popularity of the images and the revue, both of which sold out. But what was this tumult being reviewed? Paul Colin's images are frenzied figures. They do not behave with propriety. They are sensual, singleminded, and unashamed. With the limbs of their bodies' suggestively splayed, the vast pucker of their leering red lips, and unabashed eyes scandalously confronting their audience, these figures are marked as fetish objects. Captured on stage, they capture the audience's attention.

It should not be overlooked that by the early 20th century and during the 1920s, France had established itself as a major imperial power, with a large part of their colonial empire located in West and Central Africa and several of the Caribbean Isles. It was largely due to the political instability of mainland France during the 1950s that many of the Francophone colonies were able to push for their independence. Thus, the French were familiar with acts of domination regarding arrays of mysterious black bodies, fully believing in their own political, intellectual, and biological superiority and their right to capture and frame their nationality with these "less than normal" bodies as they saw fit. Because artist Paul Colin believed he had likewise captured the talented dancer and performer Ms. Josephine Baker on paper, he would ultimately claim that it was he who "invented" the popularity of Ms. Baker (cited by Barnwell in Powell et al., 1997, p. 86). What Colin actually did invent was yet another caricature of the danger and allure of the seething black body as Western fetish.

In a 1945 lithograph by John Woodrow Wilson, we see representation of a shift in archaeological regularities caused by the national labor shortage during World War II.[21] Once excluded from factory jobs and shipyards, Wilson depicts of a Negro who now contributes to the collective war effort and brings home a paycheck through his own industriousness, as is made visible by the Boston Navy Yard identification badge pinned to his coat. Inserted by Wilson into the narrative of locomotion and progress, this unidentified Black man gazes at us, informing us of his self-awareness in the midst of other seated passengers, mostly women left prohibited from contributing to war effort in the foreign theater; our man is seated next to a woman with a fidgeting little girl on her lap, a woman who sternly avoids giving him her attention as she stares out the window on her other side; our man is flanked by women who whisper together in the seat just behind his. No matter. Our man is only concerned only with his newfound visibility, choosing to contribute to the nation and creating his own agency by confronting the viewer rather than to be yet again ignored. John Woodrow Wilson's own agency as an artist is also reflected in this contribution to the visual culture of the United States, causing us to focus our gaze on the fluctuating schema of African American identity.

In the theater of multiple selves, simultaneous possibilities, the gallery of reinscribed images becomes ground for newly enunciated, inaugurated complexities (matrices) of identity. In the case of John Woodrow Wilson, the careful rendering and interpellation of new self/representative complexities challenges previous validities that named and sealed borders and boundaries. His is a reiteration of Paul Colin's visual culture that performs to transgress, transgresses to redeem the possibility of the unknown, unrepresented, unthought identity from "the pathos of cultural confusion," turning theoretical illegitimacy "into a strategy of political subversion" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 62). Theoretically, no African American male in 1945 could be this contributive, this proud, this confrontational. Theoretically, African American males, both subjects and artists, should only have been a mass of pathology.

Revisited self-imaging in visual culture may be taken then as an agent of social change. Repositioning self-images allows a body of knowledge initially outside the scope of our discourse of identity to be incorporable into our familiar archaeologies. As I delve beneath the surface of inverse and unearthed and self-referential archaeologies, each image re-presents me in the process of construction, deconstruction, and juxtaposition — I am therefore a hybrid and poststructural phenomenon. African Americans have oft led poststructural lives long before the term was first coined and research first written.

## Transgressive Archaeologies

The final section of this article begins with a journal entry, a report of an aesthetic incident in early January.

## *1/7/05*

This morning I was standing inside the station house of the Fanwood New Jersey Transit station on the Raritan line. It is bright, after a rainy, cold, unpleasant day yesterday — the remnants of a Midwest snowstorm that laid down a swath of 1-foot deep snow across the country but missed us here in Union County, New Jersey. The day is overcast nevertheless. As I begin writing this I am in motion, carried on my way to work at Columbia University's new elementary school.

But a few minutes ago I was standing inside the Fanwood station house with the train soon to arrive; that is when the following incident occurred. I was vaguely aware of a short wide-bodied woman, not more than 5'5" tall, standing almost directly in my line of sight, about 12 feet in front of me, outdoors beyond the pane of glass. She was wearing a full-length black leather overcoat, that spread down past her hips to her calves, black suit pants, black flats, and two black leather carrying bags slung over each of her shoulders, one bag slightly smaller than the other. From where I stood, her face was not at all visible, just a wedge-shaped shock of hazel-colored hair with lots of damaged ends. The woman, clearly her way to work in New York, was waiting at the platform's edge.

But what sharpened my perception of her was the large stain that swept across the back of her leather overcoat. It swept down like the slope of a mountain, from an apex just beneath her left shoulder blade, down across her back, down the silhouette of her left side against the bare gray bushes across the tracks, across her buttocks, down to a base line at about mid-thigh. Had she just sat down in some putrid liquid on a bench? Was she unaware or unconcerned that she had left her home in a damaged coat? I doubted both possibilities. She was dressed too sharply, with too much self-awareness. That's when I noticed that the stain was moving.

I then took a third look, the second look being that in which I first noticed the stain across the back of the woman's overcoat. Now on this third look, I realized that the movement I perceived appeared to be the twiddling a pair of almost imperceptible thumbs. When I, on the next successive look, extracted from the glazing a set of disembodied hands, I realized that I had been watching a layering of perceptive events — that of a reflection of a woman sitting approximately 12 feet behind me on a bench inside at the far end of the station house superimposed across the black overcoat of the woman directly before my line of sight on the other side of the glass. The hybrid apparition became more and more detailed — the longer I looked, the more I could see the play of light on the rolling suede folds of her camel-colored jacket, pushed beneath the subtly shifting weight of her hands in motion. The headless and legless body fragment revealed its contours, its depth of field, its archaeology, only where its reflection fell across the black overcoat; there was an illusion of its presence, albeit grossly incompatible, within the borders of the stout woman outside at the platforms edge, motionless, staring intently down the track, watching the triangular array of approaching headlights grow larger. Two women, immediately oblivious to one another, were also simultaneously apparent, inextricable from one another.

As I blended present wonder with pondered reflections, in that proximal zone between here and there, between that which stood before me and that which sat behind me, I saw the faint traces of other bodies all waiting for the same train, all occupying the same dimensional space as I; correlations of my spatial awareness sketched on the cold glass; a succession of slides replaced with each new look; a Zoetrope; a persistence of vision. At some point I was able to complete the rest of the body of the thumbed body fragment itself. However, this and other shapes not directly overlaying the black overcoat did not yield their forms easily; they taxed my perception greatly. Such is the nature and rigor of all re-search.

All of these looks, these rapidly proliferating hybridities in perception and meaning and understanding, these searches, took place in a matter of seconds. In the next few minutes, I continued to replay perception, reenact new tracings, reinterpret movements. The blast of the arriving commuter train tore through these layered veils of visual research as the train pulled in to the station; I boarded the train, took out my laptop, and began to transcribe the aesthetic experience of these brief seconds of perception slowly over the next two or three days.

Rethinking our presently supporting archaeologies is admittedly a difficult proposition. And yet growth is contingent on our success in this effort, lest we be stricken by the failure of perception that conforms archaeologies of identity to names and labels, and constricts larger social narratives to stereotype. Literary theorist and cultural critic Homi Bhabha (1994) writes: "We may have to force the limits of the social as we know it to rediscover a sense of political and personal agency through the unthought within the civic and psychic realms" (p. 65).

Latin American scholar and cultural critic Gerard Aching (2002) asks of Aldrick, the protagonist of Earl Lovelace's novel about Trinidad and Tobago's carnival, why would this character want everybody to see him "after he had gone to the trouble of creating and wearing his dragon mask" (p. 1) ? I would argue that the reason for this is that the carnival mask and performance — the minstrel mask and performance — serve not to hide but to un-name and alter; not merely to create alterity, but to insert new names, to infiltrate and change meanings, to hybridize with each restatement as does the child playing out a role once and again, adding nuance and depth and understanding; as does the jazz master unfolding variations on an instrumental phrase throughout the raucous night; as does John Woodrow Wilson, sketching a lithographic mask over the wildly complaisant nigger of popular lore, indicating instead a man simply at peace with himself. Masking, the poetics of un-naming — along with mimicry, the act of reinscription, resemblance, re-naming — together become strategies for the re/in/itiation/auguration of cultural tropes, yielding critical differentiations with each performance, giving up the ghost, manifesting the apparition and growth of mutations to a sign's morphology.

Aching (2002) speaks of the existence of "rigidly bordered visual regimes" organizing social hierarchies into relations of power and contestation, social visibility, and social invisibility:

> These issues concerning ways of (not) seeing and strategies of (in)visibility have in turn led me to explore the historical development and cultural contexts of particular visual regimes (structured ways of seeing) and visual politics (the enforcement or rejection of specific visual regimes) in the texts that I examine. . . . For if it is at all possible to claim that rigidly bordered visual regimes exist, then these frontiers easily disintegrate when we ask very basic questions about viewing subjects, such as, who sees, who fails to see, and who refuses to see? (p. 5)

Aching (2002) employs the terms *masking* and *masking practices* "to invoke a broader and deeper understanding of the antagonisms that produce situations of social (in)visibility" (p. 4). Within masking and performative practices, in the act

of un-naming and renaming, manipulations of prefabricated "truths" also hold latent bits of self-knowledge that have been held for a time unperformed. Injecting that self-knowledge into political enactments affects the (re)development of social archaeologies.

When the invisible mask their invisibility, un-naming assignments of social insignificance, the nullifying effect is to draw attention to a performance of contestation, a re-naming of visibility and significance, in the very act of apparition. The apparition of a new name may very well exist as fettered or marginalized self-knowledge before attaining its social visibility. Renamings are preceded by un-namings. As Bhabha (1994) observes,

> what is at issue is the performative nature of differential identities: the regulation and negotiation of those spaces that are continually, contingently, "opening out", remaking the boundaries, exposing the limits of any claim to a singular or autonomous sign of difference — be it class, gender, or race. Such assignations of social differences — where difference is neither One nor the Other but something else besides, in-between — find their agency in a form of the "future" where the past is not originary, where the present is not simply transitory. It is, if I may stretch a point, an interstitial future, that emerges in-between the claims of the past and the needs of the present. (p. 219)

This article is itself a representation of self-knowledge — and an interrogation of the discursive power to name and define acceptable research. The quality of this knowledge, written from the position of an African American scholar, struggles to reinterpret narratives of dominance and subordination. I perform as a man of both Western and African, Black and White descent. This article is itself a performance of in-betweenness — and an interrogation of the discursive power to name and define acceptable research.

## Notes

1. Performatively reconstituted knowledge — whether traditions, beliefs, fashions, talk, works of art, or social practices — are able to reconstitute knowledge content primarily because each liturgical, storytelling, or embellishing event juxtaposed with previous references of similar meanings to relocate identity in positions across the existential continuum. Hence, the performance of any cultural work becomes a praxis, a navigation technique, for transposing versions of personal identity within its social and temporal contexts.

2. Representations, describable (as noted by Freedman, 2003) as pastiches (Barthes, 1974) or collages (Clifford, 1988) are

> made up of and refer to a combination of possible meanings, rather than a single, unified, intended meaning . . . [which are] interpreted and loosely attached to signs that people construct and informally teach each other in order to facilitate communication. (Freedman, 2003, pp. 13, 14)

3. The identity is not a form in itself but a shape-shifting arena of possibilities bounded and intersected by altering scripts making sense of our existential experience. According to Julia Kristeva, "a text works by absorbing and destroying at the same time the other texts of the intertextual space" (cited in Marshall, 1992, p.130). Identity can thus be understood as an ongoing interpretation, the (de)centering (and sometimes dizzying) action that proliferates an expanding urban sprawl from diverse and loosely associated neighborhoods, streets, and centers — ultimately collapsing into disrepair. Identity is thus continually overbuilt; the cobblestones, foundation walls, and broken shards that are left beneath the surface architecture tell as much about the character of the city's development as what is publicly exposed.

4. Blackface minstrelsy was an American popular culture and market-driven commodity that "borrowed from a variety of English, French, and Italian musical, dramatic, and literary sources imported into the United States as part of a concerted effort to establish some sense of cultural parity with European society," presenting "appropriated elements from African American and Anglo-American musical and cultural practices and re-present[ing] them initially to primarily urban audiences" (Mahar, 1999, pp. 1, 2).

5. I understand the term *racial groups* as part of the modernist discourse of differentiation. I do not advocate its usage. There are racial groupings because we speak of them. But there are other possibilities.

6. The thrall of human identity embodies knowledge that it captures as salient, emblematizing that knowledge in the form of representative traditions, beliefs, fashions, talk, works of art, and social practices, incessantly reconstituting that knowledge (and identity as well) through the agency of performatives.

7.
(Re)Appearances
Disturbances are required.

8.
Skepticism undermines modernity,
the progression of certainty
halted by the unwanted question:
Who am I?
Who we be?

9.
Powers have located our movements,
Suddenly we appear —
where did we come from?

10.
Premodern, postmodern,
African-American,
the Western conundrum.
Honey in the carcass of the lion.

11.
Marked,
our confinements naming
us, the inhabitants of pathology,

our trangressions re/de/fine us,
our questions reposition us.
    12.
Self-portraits
probing the hegemony
now congealing a response:
I am a new movement;
we are your postmodernity.
    13.
Interpretations
of your evidence,
your documentation,
depict our advantage;
an inversion of the page,
then giving
my own response.
    14.
(Re)constituting the conditions
of first literary appearances,
tempest-tossed in object fear of
the Black Plague's return, of
long winters without fires, without caves
old fear embedded in dogma
new fear recycled in visual culture
retraced in rapid-eye dreams.
Embodiments walk the earth in plain sight,
America's mythical reality:
King Kong's painted revelers
now as Ace Ventura's tormentors
Tarzan's happy savage subjects
there on T.V. again in paid advertisements to feed the poor Somalians
watching sweet Mammy
as dependable Oprah reappearing
watching Sambo
as Jimmy jive-time Walker.
    15.
The rules of our formation are in place;
We relate to them now in order to disturb them:
Oprah is richer than Mammy;
Jimmy is funnier than Sambo;
Africans are not all dying.
    16.
The foray up North
into new factory jobs

common schoolhouses
through the old politics
left the back door open
into Harlem
to serve the public good
to (re)constitute self-image,
making everyday postmodern appearances.
    17.
The souls of black folk once
sold minstrel songsheets and nightclub hopping,
now sells hiphop chic,
bad-boy sports and casual misogyny,
multiculturalism and P. Diddy mobility,
gold monogrammed caps and low-rider pants,
gangstas and six-pack muscularity,
and the unacceptability,
that still makes perfect sense to the nation.
    18.
Illegitimacy constructed the Negro mystique
and perpetuates its market base,
our edginess,
keeps us dangerous,
roped into contracts
and sold to the masses,
the souvenir body parts of Modern assumptions.
    19.
Cutting through the fences;
night shifting inquiry into morning's remnants
spontaneous theories and local refrains,
both/and, neither/nor
street entertainments and porch conversations
the prescient shards of the old containments
driven into the heart of the predator,
from within the cavity,
pressing hard against plate glass certainties
still reflecting the identity of those once kept.
    20.
'Twas a mess of interrogations,
killed the beast;
the questions of coronets
the protest of comedians,
scumbling the outlines,
erasing the hard cartoon.
"Who am I?" says the saxophonist's layered brushstrokes.

"Who we be? "intones the printmaker.
"We are the transgressors," responds the freestyling audience.
"We be the devil's music."
And so we hold our names to be self-evident
as the place-holders for our next appearance.
    21.
Reappearing,
in the old photos in shoeboxes
the corners of cracked dresser drawers
on closet shelves, in attic trunks
in frames adorning faded wallpaper
furtive constructions
paper and performable
smudgeable, expendable things
self-images (re)inserted
into the bestiary.

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