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種族 / 性相的身體與視覺性

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中文摘要

本研究計畫將從身體與視覺的觀點，來探討種族與性相這兩個不論在知識生成還是實際操作上都相結合的文化型構，在具體交接時產生的複雜情境與相關問題。此處所說的「具體」交接，明確指的是：在一方面，作為種族標記的身體，如何因為種種緣故，產生了與性相有關的意含；而作為性相焦點的身體，在另一方面，又如何總是蘊含著種族的面向。這兩方面都共同指向相關文化中，對於自我身體的理想化意象，也就是所謂的身體美學，與現實中的種族身體相對照的問題，於是所謂的「劣等」種族也是因為他們不符合一種看似客觀的「形體美」的標準；然而同時，對於「非我族類」的種族身體的想像，卻又始終沾染著濃厚的性別與性相意含，譬如某些與種族有關的身體特徵（如膚色）被認為在性方面是特別具有吸引力（或是令人感到排拒的）。然而這些關於種族／性相身體的意象以及隨之衍生而來的慾望（或是沒有慾望），都不是發生在一個透明的「真實」環境之中，而總是透過種種媒介，尤其是現代以來日趨重要的視覺媒體，包括原有的雕塑繪畫與新興的攝影電影等。因此對於上述相關問題的探討總是必須從相關身體呈現的視覺性角度切入；事實上，或許也正是現代性對於視覺典範的重視，開啟了身體作為如此多方決定的交接場域，這當然就是種族與性相結合所從來的文化深層機制。

關鍵詞：種族、性相、身體、視覺、美學

Abstract

This research project, exactly as its title proclaims, aims at exploring the body and visuality of race and sexuality. It is now

generally agreed that the modern constructions of race and sexuality, as two discrete categories as they seem, actually share some common origins in the cultural configurations known as modernity. And one of the most significant origins shared by the two is science, along with its inbuilt visual paradigm. For not until the modern put so much emphasis on visuality had race as we know it today—as a “scientific” system of human classification based on scrupulous attention to such physical features as skin color, hair, and facial characteristics—emerged and became established as one of the most common conceptual schemes. And sexuality, ever since its modern appearance, has also been an idea very much focused on the visual aspect of body. This is why the body may act as a perfect site for a particularly embodied exploration of the complex but interesting issues arising at the intersections of race and sexuality.

However, the critical concerns of the present project are not so grand as the above framework suggests; instead, they are very concentrated and specific. Namely, the body as both racial and sexual stands as the main focus of the project in the following two lines of exploration. First, how do the racial inscriptions of body become sexualized and assume erotic valences as either desirable or repulsive? And second, how do the sexual body contain racial implications in its linking of (sexual) desirability with (racial) superiority? These questions have as much to do with the body ideals (i.e. aesthetics) as with real bodies either on the dominant or

the subordinate sides. Yet at the same time, the visual aspect of all this cannot be over-emphasized. For none of the bodies that figure in our daily activities of racial differentiation and sexual interactions exist in a transparent world of “reality”: they are always already mediated, especially through such visual media as sculpture, painting, photography and cinema (in the comprehensive sense of moving images, so including TV and video). Therefore, the issue of visibility is actually the project’s constant concern throughout its critical examination of the racial/sexual body.

Keywords: race, sexuality, body, visibility, aesthetics

報告内容

“Body” is no doubt the center of attention in any discussion of race or sexuality, as the very epistemology of race and praxis of sexuality are built and acted upon this corporeal materiality. Yet probably due to this very materiality, whose intractable omnipresence is forced upon us by being bewilderingly *there*, “body” seems particularly inclined to elude theorization as an analytical category. However, recent burgeoning of critical discourse on the subject has gained some ground by facilitating various possible perspectives of analysis. And the present study hopes to make a contribution by focusing on one particularly specific aspect of “body,” namely the sexualized racial body or, conversely, the racialized sexual body.

What I mean to examine by this pair of

conversely phrased terms is the interpenetration of race and sexuality as manifested on the body that is deemed as desirable. More concretely, this refers to two related facts. The first, much more well-known than the second, is what can be called “sexual exoticism,” that is, sexual interest in the racially othered with the other’s raciality being the main trigger for desire (or, conversely, the total *lack* of sexual interest in anyone racially othered). The second, less commonly acknowledged, is how our conception of the sexual body is always already racialized, as can be validated by a critical examination of the cultural standards of physical beauty (or, for that matter, ugliness).

However, the relation between the two of this converse pair is not really symmetrical as it seems, as the (de)sexualization of racial body involves more than racialized standards of *physical* beauty, even though the latter is no doubt a major constitutive part of the former. Thus analyzing the latter in effect acts as a concrete step towards a more thorough understanding of the former, and this is exactly what the present study aims to achieve. This is also where the issue of visibility comes in, not only because any talks of physical beauty are predominantly visual, but also because the modern age—the very age that witnesses the now familiar constructions of race and sexuality—has been characterized by the unprecedented domination of visibility (Mosse), not least in the various media of visual representation. Therefore, to be exact,

the object of analysis in the present study lies in a critical examination of the hegemonic construction and propagation of “whiteness” as the standard of physical beauty, mostly through its concrete embodiments in such visual media as the sculpture, painting, and more recently, photography and cinema.

The first aspect that deserves to be looked at in this examination is the modern revival of interest in the Greek sculpture, as inaugurated by Winckelmann, for he has eagerly promoted a seemingly transcendental but actually race-specific ideal of bodily beauty through his enthusiasm for the Greek sculpture. Drawing on his contemporaneous “Enlightenment” ideas on race, Winckelmann believes that “the Eurocentric white Greek ideal was closest to the original type of humanity, to the ideal human being as it emerged from the hands of God, while other racial types were deviations from this model” (Potts 160). Yet as Alex Potts incisively points out, Winckelmann “frames his argument in abstract aesthetic terms rather than in those of the more explicitly racist anthropological theories current at the time [. . .]. He attempts to argue that such features as the slanted eyes of the Chinese and Japanese, the relatively flatter nose of oriental peoples, the relatively larger lips of Negroes, were inadequate because they were not in conformity with the principles of unity and symmetry that should govern the shape of an ideal face” (160-61).

It is precisely this universalist discourse of “aesthetic objectivism”

deployed by Winckelmann that requires critical deconstruction to reveal its cultural specificity and explore its possible ambivalence, for this discourse has a masking effect of naturalization that has made it highly influential. Not only do visual representations of (ideal) human bodies in modern age—that is, in paintings and photographs—tend to closely follow the paradigms of composition, proportion, etc. as set out by the Greek sculpture. The standards of beauty as represented by it actually trickle into the everyday talks of ordinary people, as they praise someone with a handsome face as “chiseled” and someone with a perfect body as “like the bronze statue.”

As photographic images, both in its static and kinetic forms (the latter, of course, is cinema), become truly prevalent in our contemporary culture with capitalist commercialization, the glorified visual representations of “whiteness” firmly establishes its hegemonic status and broadly spreads its influence around the globe as never before. There are two essential points worthy of attention here. First, the illusionistic nature of photography and cinema blinds us to the possible manipulation of the seemingly neutral apparatus, which, as Richard Dyer insightfully points out, could be set in the first place to racially inflected demands; thus the inbuilt prejudices need to be addressed. Second, the fascinating glamour and bewildering obsession surrounding the iconography of super stars in films as well as models in fashion clearly act as the

central mechanism for this global hegemony of visibility; thus a psychoanalytical understanding of “stardom” is also required.

Yet the point of mapping the modern visual hegemony of whiteness does not reside merely in dissecting the elaborate mechanism that promotes a conspicuously racialized standard of beauty. What also deserves attention is the occasional representation of non-white bodies through this very system, not as deformed contrast but as embodiment of either the classical ideal or the iconic stardom. Those are particularly interesting cases that should be interrogated for the possible ways in which they conform or pose challenges to the hegemonic regime of racial aesthetics. For example, Robert Mapplethorpe’s controversial photographs of “black men” provides just such a rich case for ambivalent readings. Besides, recent developments in postcolonial critique render possible the artistic reinscription or downright subversion of the hegemonic visual regime. Works that belong to this category should also be submitted to close readings that are capable of foregrounding their alternative visions.

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