Show and Tell: Passing, Narrative and Toni Morrison's *Jazz*

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Vikki Bell[1]

> 'Henry Lestory or LesTroy or something like that, but who cares what the nigger's name is. Except the woman who regretted ever knowing him at all and locked her door rather than say it outloud. And would have regretted the baby he gave her too, given it away, except it was golden and she had never seen that color except in the morning sky and in bottles of champagne. True Belle told him Vera Louise had smiled and said 'But he's golden. Completely golden!' So they named him that and didn't take him to the Catholic Foundling Hospital where white girls deposited their mortification.
> ... He had always thought there was only one kind - True Belle's kind. Black and nothing. Like Henry LesTroy. Like the filthy woman snoring on the cot. But there was another kind - like himself.'(Toni Morrison, Jazz, 1992:148-9).

> 'Please forgive me for having straight hair
> It doesn't mean there's another blood in my heirs
> ... before you can read me you've got to learn how to see me'
> (En Vogue, 1992)

In this lyric from En Vogue's track 'Free Your Mind', 'read me' refers to an aggressive criticism, much as the English expression 'to read the riot act', but the coupling of 'read me' and 'see me' in this lyric poses the question I wish to pursue in this paper - that is, the question of how to think the place of the scopic within an understanding of racism that has built its position in opposition to the legacy of classification by measurement. For where theoretical conceptions of racism have moved away from static notions of racial categorisations in order to consider the import of 'cultural racism', of language and textuality, the question of the scopic tends to be elided or reduced to an overworked and underdeveloped concept of the discursive. The question of the 'epidermal schema' of racial difference, as Frantz Fanon termed it (Fanon, 1967:112), the way in which skin colour enters an optical politics that makes it a resting place of political argumentation, tends to be avoided for the pitfalls such a consideration can entail. Another way of tackling this same issue, I will argue, is through Gilles Deleuze's elaboration of Foucault's concept of *dispositif* (a term translated as device, apparatus or deployment) in which he pauses on a consideration of 'the scopic' and which offers the opportunity to begin a consideration of the politics of colour. In

[1] With thanks to Katie Bell, to Paul Gilroy, and to Paul Bouissac and Daniel Defert, the organisers of the 'Foucault & Literature' conference in Toronto, October 1994, where this paper was first presented.

suggesting such a manoeuvre, one needs to be clear that the place of the scopic here is not a return or a reassertion of that which understandings of racism have critiqued, nor is it a simplistic reassertion of the importance of 'the body' or 'materiality'; such an abstracted notion as dispositif needs to be kept close to the considerations of the ways in which blood and race are put to work in historical situations - as Foucault hi mself muses toward the end of The History of Sexuality Vol 1 - yet 'the false promise of the visible' (Robinson, 1994:716) as a way of knowing (what?), as an epistemology, remains open for interrogation. Whilst colour may be 'seen' in some sense, 'race' is not; but in order to talk through the possibilities of thinking a politics 'about' passing as a cultural phenomenon, one needs to be able to have some frame of interpretation of these questions. The paper is given a focus within this over ambitious task by taking its route via an exploration of Toni Morrison's novel Jazz. The novel is well suited to this task given that in its several ways it underlines the point that we can re-tell our stories, and re-tell them differently. That that novel and En Vogue's 'Free Your Mind' have both appeared at the end of the twentieth century suggests the contemporary and pressing nature of the enquiry about how to address these questions of identity once the possibilities of simplistic categorisation are, happily, under threat.

Sociological accounts of identity have tended to make static the complexity and contingency of what we might term, recalling Paul Ricouer, the narrativisation of identity. The possiblity of telling over, of repeating the same differently, like jazz music - even the most scored 'improvisations' - illuminates the contingency of identity. Listen to a schoolgirl in Birmingham, England, talk about her friend:

> 'I've got a friend who's Black but some people mistake her for white, because she's mixed. They talk to her but when they know what colour she really is they don't want to know her. So it's not easy.' (Quoted in Osler, A. 1989:83).

It is how these tensions between seeing, passing and telling, articulated so starkly here, relate to the politics of 'race' and racism that is my concern here. What does it mean that in this quotation 'colour' is only *seen* and *shown* through the *telling* of a personal genealogy?

According to Deleuze, a dispositif is a 'tangle, a multilinear ensemble' with two analytical dimensions: curves of visibility and curves of enunciation (1992: 159-60). The web formed thereby means that the dispositif can create, sustain and cause the disappearance of objects, but not because there is a source of light making visible, nor because a standpoint 'allows' affirmations [enonces]. Rather, the lines of light and lines of enunciation open up, support or close off these objects. Thus dispositifs are not themselves subjects or objects, but 'regimes which must be defined from the

point of view of the visible and from the point of view of that which can be enunciated, with the drifting, transformations and mutations which this will imply.'(1992: 160). Foucault's genealogies can be thought of in terms of an 'untangling' of the lines within a dispositif, 'like drawing a map, doing cartography, surveying unknown landscapes'(1992: 159).[2] In this paper I want to suggest that the ways in which lines of enunciation and lines of the scopic interrelate need to be worked into understandings of questions of identity and racialisation (and I argue this against a rush to solve these issues through a privileging of personal narratives over and above a politics of colour and other visual cues) at the same time as these categorisations are refused as either a material basis of racialisation, as a way of knowing identity or as a foundation for an anti-racist politics.

* * *

In Toni Morrison's Jazz, as in En Vogue's lyric, hair becomes metonymically important within the politics of race.

> '[He was named] Golden because after the pink birth-skin disappeared along with the down on his head, his flesh was radiantly golden, and floppy yellow curls covered his head and the lobes of his ears. It was nowhere as blond as Vera Louise's hair once was, but its sunlight colour, its determined curliness, endeared him to her. Not all at once. It took a while. But True Belle laughed out loud the minute she saw him and thereafter every day for eighteen years.' (1992: 139)

The character Golden is born in 1870 or thereabouts. His light skin and his blond hair means that his mother, Vera Louise, decides to keep him and to let him 'pass' as white (but not as her son, because, as she was unmarried, she tells her new neighbours that he is an orphan upon whom she took pity, 1992: 139). That evidence of his black father (and her breaking of a taboo) will reveal itself on his body worries his mother, who shares the secret only with her maid, True Belle. When he is told his genealogy, at the age of eighteen, Golden reevaluates his experiences and his understanding of the ways in which people can be racially categorised: 'he had always thought there was only one kind... But there was another kind - like himself.'(1992:149). Golden ruminates on True Belle's care for him, that he now considers tinged with amusement:

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[2] Deleuze suggests that lines of force and lines of subjectification added further dimensions to the Foucauldian notion of the dispositif. It is not clear how these fit analytically with light and speech, since one suspects that they are containable as effects or creations of these former dimensions. That is, that certain forms of subjectivity are created, sustained or allowed to disappear through certain dispositifs, and that certain power relations are similarly created, sustained or dissolved. Nevertheless, Deleuze seems to argue that these are lines analytically level with visibility and enunciation and interwoven with these.

> ‘the woman who cooked and cleaned for Vera Louise; who sent baskets of plum preserves, ham and loaves of bread every week while he was in boarding school; who gave his frayed shirts to rag-and-bone men rather than let him wear them; the woman who smiled and shook her head every time she looked at him. Even when he was a tiny boy with a head swollen with fat champagne-coloured curls, and ate the pieces of cake she held out to him, her smile was more amusement than pleasure. When the two of them, the whitewoman and the cook, bathed him they sometimes passed anxious looks at the palms of his hand, the texture of his drying hair.’(1992:149)

The fear communicated between the two women’s glances is that his skin or hair will prevent his passing, that his body will be ‘read’ as telling a narrative surrounded by the powerful taboos of that time.

However, in order for him to pass, Vera Louise does not rely upon skin colour and hair texture; she dresses Golden ‘like the Prince of Wales’, in embroidered underwear bearing his initial, waistcoats with ivory buttons and expensive shirts, signifiers of a privilege that in that era would have marked Golden out as white. And to truly pass involved a question of behaviour and bodily movements. When Golden eventually arrives at the home he presumes his father’s, he meets a boy, Honor, who has come to tend to the stock. Honor

> ‘would have said ‘Morning’ although it wasn’t, but he thought the man lurching down the steps was white and not to be spoken to without leave ... ‘Hello’ said the drunken gent, and if the black boy doubted for a minute whether he was white, the smileless smile that came with the greeting convinced him.’(1992:156)

In contrast with this smileless smile that marks the performance of whiteness, Morrison gives us the smile of the black train conductor who relaxes his performance of blackness when he reaches the carriage that carries True Belle’s granddaughter, Violet, and her future husband Joe, to the city; he was ‘pleasant but unsmiling now that he didn’t have to smile in this car full of coloured people’, those with whom he didn’t have to ‘lace his dignity with a smile’(1992:30,31). His blackness is performed, then, only for the benefit of those that are categorised (by the spatial dimensions of segregated train compartments) as white.

The cameo appearance of the train conductor intrigues because he, and only he, actually *becomes* ‘black’ in terms of a time-based performance - the others are racialised instead by their location, even as this is always moving (along the railtracks) - and he does so not amongst those segregated as ‘black’ but *only* in order to enable those passengers categorised ‘white’ to become so. Perhaps more fruitful here than Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of

‘becoming’, or their statement that even black folk have to ‘become black’, is the scene from Richard Wright’s autobiographical Black Boy in which, as a young boy, he too is travelling in a segregated carriage with his mother. His consciousness of racial segregation is just emerging, and the white folk who he had thought ‘merely people like other people’, people who he had seen ‘upon the streets a thousand times’ (1945/1993:31), were now becoming a curiosity to him:

> ‘‘Can I go and peep at the white folks?’ I asked my mother.
> ‘You keep quiet,’ she said.
> ‘But that wouldn’t be wrong, would it?’
> ‘Will you keep still?’
> ‘But why can’t I?’
> ‘Quit talking that foolishness!’’(1945/1993:57).

The young Wright’s desire to ‘see’ white folk, however, is entangled with his struggle to understand the difference between seeing white and being white, between the ‘fact’ of whiteness - as a categorisation of skin colour - and the living of that socio-political position. According to his memory, the young Richard interrogates his mother:

> ‘‘Mama, is Granny white?’ I asked as the train rolled through the darkness.
> ‘If you’ve got eyes you can see what colour she is’, my mother said.
> ‘I mean, do the white folks think she’s white?’
> ‘Why don’t you ask the white folks that?’ she countered.
> ‘But you know,’ I insisted.
> ‘Why should I know?’ she asked. ‘I’m not white.’
> ‘Granny looks white,’ I said, hoping to establish one fact, at least. ‘Then why is she living with us coloured folks?’’(1945/93:57)

From the narrative it becomes clear that Wright’s grandmother could - indeed, could not help but - pass as white in the town in which she lived, for when she took Richard and his brother into department stores, eyebrows were raised; she was ‘as white as any Negro can get without being white’ (1945/1993:49). Wright’s mother insists on maintaining that her son’s question cannot be discussed; his grandmother’s colour is a question of nature and vision. Richard, on the other hand, knows that his mother is holding back, ‘not concealing facts, but feelings, attitudes, convictions’(1945/1993:59), knows that the world he is trying to understand is not simply about colour. He is aware that being ‘coloured’ might be a mode of living, even if his grandmother’s skin had always remained the same:

> ‘Did Granny become coloured when she married Grandpa?’

> ‘Stop asking silly questions!’
> ‘But did she?’
> ‘Granny didn’t *become* coloured,’ my mother said angrily. ‘She was *born* the colour she is now. (1945/1993:58).

With his mother’s attempt to halt the conversation by refusing the social and political implications of colour, the choices and movement that his grandmother had made, with her attempt, perhaps, to teach a mode of refusal by problematising the assumptions of the question, Richard is left feeling he’d been left out of ‘the secret, the thing’ that was somewhere ‘below the words and silences’(1945/1993:37).

Wright’s mother later explains his grandmother’s ethnicity ‘grudingly’: ‘she told me that Granny came of Irish, Scottish, and French stock in which Negro blood had somewhere and somehow been infused’ (1945/1993:58). This ‘explanation’ is one that works against Wright’s imposition of racial categories; it is a certain form of narrative, not unproblematic by any means, that refuses to talk simply in terms of colour and that tells a story that could not be read off the body. In Golden’s encounter with his father, being black is entwined with the question of ‘being a son’ - his father suggests that if one wants to ‘show’ one’s genealogy in the materiality of the body and to have a relationship based upon it, one has to embrace stories of blood, of history. Colour *is* seen but it can be seen differently depend upon its mode of presentation; in this sense, sight is discursively trained. If passing is the negation of a history, of a relationship, choosing involves a commitment not just to be seen, but to *act*. Golden’s father reproaches him, suggesting that Golden had come to spectate, to assess his father’s colour:

> ‘I know what you came for. To see how black I was. You thought you was white didn’t you? She probably let you think it. Hoped you’d think it. And I swear I’d think it too.’
> ‘She protected me! If she’d announced I was a nigger, I could have been a slave!’
> ‘They got free niggers. Always did have some free niggers. You could be one of them.’
> ‘I don’t want to be a free nigger; I want to be a free man.’
> ‘Don’t we all. Look. Be what you want - white or black. Choose. But if you choose black, you got to act black, meaning draw your manhood up - quicklike, and don’t bring me no whiteboy sass.’’(1992:172)

Here Morrison uses the tension between the terms ‘man’ and ‘nigger’ that she elsewhere dissects in Hemingway’s prose (1992, Playing in the Dark, discussing To Have and Have Not, p70-5). Aspiring to be a free man whilst also *being* black is the harder route, Henry is suggesting; but Golden’s success would be lesser if he achieves his freedom either by passing or

achieves it without being 'really' being black, that is, without *acting* and being *seen to be* black. The options offered to Golden by his father allow no mid-way stage, as the categorisation and the social organisation of that place and time dictated. Racialisation as Henry sees it is a binary division, but it is not, or not just, a question of colour, for the terms 'black' and 'white' are not about skin colour. Once Henry intimates what actually constitutes 'acting black', he suggests it is a question of *gender*: 'pull your manhood up'. Paul Gilroy has suggested that maybe such interconnections have been underexplored - that contemporary racialisation may be acted out through gender relations, especially in the arena of music and dance.[3] In Henry's ultimatum to Golden, he is suggesting that the acting out of a certain masculinity can carry a personal, racialised, genealogical story with it; one, moreover, that will mean that Golden is *seen* in a qualitatively different way (and, through him, his father Henry to be known or imagined in a different way). 'Race' involves, for Henry, a gendered self-stylisation, a mode of self-presentation that makes available a way of seeing his body as 'black'.

In Jazz Morrison is concerned with what moves people - desire, music, jealousy - as well as what they move amongst and between - the City/the rural/wilderness, black and white, sanity and insanity, human and animal - and the limitations of these movements. The movement to the city is characterised by the spacially segregated carriages which allow what had been common place to become a spectacle, between which only the conductor moves so that only he trespasses, only he gives us pause for thought on the sense in which racial 'appearance' is a performance which can be acted up or played down, that 'race' *moves* (even as it operates within attempts to contain a division which themselves, in turn, move). In the city, Morrison plays with the sense in which at the same time as there is the possibility of greater movement, of altering, of passing, there is still a track, but one that spirals rather than travels in linear fashion. In the city, the railway is replaced with a different form of track. Giving it an agency she denies her characters (Hardack, 1995:454), the anonymous narrator observes of the City: 'Take my word for it, he [Joe] is bound to the track. It pulls him like a needle through the groove of a Bluebird record. Round and round about the town. That's the way the City spins you ... You can't get off the tracks the City lays for you.'(1992:120).

Joe's tragedy is to 'hunger for the one thing everybody loses - young loving.'(1992:120). In the first paragragh of the novel, we are told that Joe had fallen for an eighteen year old girl 'with one of those deepdown, spooky loves that made him so sad he shot her just to keep the feeling going.'(1992:3). Dorcas, like Golden, was 'light skinned. Never used skin bleach.'(1992:201) and probably 'didn't need to straighten her hair'(1992:5).

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[3] The Black Atlantic, 1993

In the reverberations from Dorcas' death, the hair of her husband's deceased young lover obsesses Violet, who earns her living in the city dressing and straightening hair. It is Violet who befriends the dead girl's aunt, who decides to learn every detail of Dorcas' life and who even borrows a photograph of her to place on their mantelpiece for each of them to contemplate during their sleepless nights. Staring at this photograph of her husband's lover, Violet considers that

> 'not only is she losing Joe to a dead girl, but she wonders if she isn't falling in love with her too. When she isn't trying to humiliate Joe, she is admiring the dead girl's hair ... One thing, for sure, she needed her ends cut. Hair that long gets fraggely easy. Just a quarter-inch trim would do wonders, Dorcas. Dorcas.'(1992:15).

The only time that the narrative brings Violet face to face with Dorcas is at the young woman's funeral, when Violet's violence becomes another character, '*that* Violet', who 'walked about the City in her skin', and who pushes aside the ushers who surround the casket. The ushers 'saw the knife before she [Violet] did', and Violet is 'surprised to see [the blade] now aimed at the girl's haughty, secret face.'(1992:91). Richard Hardack has argued that Jazz renders explicit the implicit connection between the fragmentation of self that belongs to the Modernist tradition, violence and involuntary action. As Hardack points out, Morrison's characters do not control their actions, don't know the dance until they have danced it (1995:461); they are moved by desire, by the City, by a movement that 'knows': 'the train stops sudenly, throwing passengers forward. As though it just remembered that this was the stop where Joe needed to get off if he is to find her.'(1992:181). Joe's love for Dorcas is such that 'I told her things I hadn't told myself', his act of violence the perverse expression of his affection that moves him without his voluntary control:

> 'I tracked Dorcas from borough to borough. I didn't even have to work at it. Didn't have to think. Something else takes over when the track begins to talk to you ... if the trail speaks ... you can find yourself in a crowded room aiming a bullet at her heart, never mind it's the heart you can't live without. ... I had the gun but it was not the gun - it was my hand I wanted to touch you with.'(1992:131).

Violet, too, witnesses her futile act of violence as if she were watching some one else; the description is filmic, zooming in to the 'little dent under her earlobe', to the hands that 'were reaching toward the blade' then panning out to the scene of the fight in which '*that* Violet, unsatisfied, fought with the hard-handed usher boys and was time enough for them, almost.'(1992:91).

Hardack uses such moments in Jazz to argue that Morrison's message might be understood as the assertion that blackness has become the

'heuristic emblem'(1995:453) of an American modernity, that the disembodied experience of a double consciousness that is *American* psyche is rountinely projected onto blackness. The possession of the characters by abstracted agents - Nature, the City, music, even narrator-possessed - that Hardack highlights at work thoughout Jazz can be read, he suggests, as implying that black double consciousness 'updates, and for Morrison emerges coterminously with and is indissociable from, what Emerson and Melville perceived as a 'truncated society' of the walking wounded'(1995:452). Moreover, Morrison is also interested in how that projection falls away, how there comes a point at which the possibility of seeing bodies diffferently disrupts an attempt to understand them in terms of a discourse of race. That disruption is played out in the text of Jazz both in terms of the story that is told there, where the certainties of appearance are repeatedly questioned, and in terms of its mode of telling, where the narrator begins to doubt her ability to tell the story at all.

Whilst it is the blade that *that* Violet points at Dorcas' 'sleeping face' as if in a film, it is the scissors that Violet wishes to point at the young girl 'awake in the photograph' (1992:109), the girl her husband had killed just as Violet's own hunger had arisen: 'just when her nipples had lost their point, mother-hunger had hit her like a hammer. Knocked her down and out. When she woke up, her husband had shot a girl young enough to be that daughter whose hair she had dressed to kill.'(1992:108-9). Jazz returns repeatedly to hair and hairdressing, the site of an aesthetised drama of racialisation in which the hairdresser gives to another the possibility of a different appearance. Whereas Golden is born with the soft curls that enable him to pass as white, the hairdresser in the metropolis offers an elusive 'control' over appearance. But although the supposed anonymity of the city might seem to comply with the erasure of the process that alters appearance, the alteration does not take place without a spectator. In Kobena Mercer's discussion of the ambivalence of hair styles that appropriate, imitate and incorporate, he quotes Malcolm X's response to his straightened hair:

> 'My first view in the mirror blotted out the hurting. I'd seen some pretty conks, but when it's the first time, on your *own* head, the transformation, after a lifetime of kinks, is staggering. The mirror reflected Shorty behind me. We were both grinnin' and sweating. On top of my head was this thick, smooth sheen of red hair - real red - as straight as any white man's.'(1966:134-9, quoted in Mercer, 1994:115).

The 'secret' that becomes shared between Shorty and Malcolm X, or between the hairdresser and client, is paralled by that between the 'passer' and the spectator who 'knows' the story that the passer erases in passing. Not by any intuition on the part of those who belong to the group from which

the passer passes, as some have suggested (see Robinson, 1994 for discussion of this point), but by the simple fact of having been there, the hairdresser knows, because s/he effects the change. Her hair-dressing work makes Violet weaker; it had 'softened her arms and melted the shield that once covered her palms and fingers ... the City took away the back and arm power she used to boast of.'(1992:92); but the power that the hairdresser has is knowledge of the transformation. Isn't it the hairdresser to whom we tell everything, as if safe from the outside world, whose role it is to judge as we wish her to judge, but without abandoning a stereotypical high morality? When Dorcas' best girlfriend, Felice, speaks about the whole sorry episode, she describes Joe: 'I think he likes women, and I don't mean he flirts with them, I mean he likes them without that, and *this would upset the hairdressers*, but I really believe he likes his wife.'(1992:207).

Just like the hairdresser, the narrator of Jazz knows the stories, the innermost troubles, and she shares them, filling in details, perhaps a little differently each time, but without ever really giving the whole story in a way that could be repeated exactly as she told it; and initially, at least, as if she herself were not implicated in the telling. This distancing between the narrative and the narrator, however, breaks down in the novel, mimicking the way in which the music drives the dancers, the City moves their desires, the train draws its passengers along; the narrator becomes aware that her characters are not simply in her control, for there is an excess which she must take care not to deny. Ultimately, her characters turn her toward her own story, her own desires and disappointments, such that she ends the novel envious of the lives of the characters she has penned - 'I envy them their public love. I myself have only known it in secret, shared it in secret and longed, aw longed to show it'(1992:229) - much as Violet/Violent envies, despises, but also loves, the young woman whose hair she wishes to trim 'just a quarter-inch'. The narrator had been distracted by her love of the City (1992:220), had thought she was invisible, following her characters to 'gossip about and fill in their lives'(1992:220); but 'all the while they were watching me. Sometimes they even felt sorry for me.'(1992:220). The description, her narrative, she suggests, was not even accurate, was too quick to *see* her characters rather than be led by them in her telling of them. She berates herself for describing Golden in terms of race without recognising a more profound longing for authenticity that was not 'to do with the color of his skin or the blood that beat beneath it.' He wishes to be and live in this place effortlessly:

> What was I thinking of? How could I have imagined him so poorly? Not noticed the hurt that was not linked to the colour of his skin, or the blood that beat beneath it. But to some other thing that longed for authenticity, for a right to be in this place,

> effortlessly without needing to acquire a false face, a laughless grin, a talking posture. (1992:160).

Here the narrator suggests that the colour of Golden's skin describes nothing of the hurt that pushes him on in order to discover his father. The horse knew this better - 'steadily it plodded ... Get there, said it's hooves. If we can just get there.'(1992:160) - but the narrator, like his father would, had been quick to see colour and blood as the issue over and above what blackness meant in terms of Golden's reevaluation of his life.

Deleuze has argued that Foucault's notion of *dispositif* consists of lines - lines of enunciation, of the scopic, of power and of subjectivity. If we consider the deployment of race - an abstraction that always needs to be historically situated - we need to consider the relationship between enunciation, the possibility of speech opened up by shifts in discourse *and* the scopic - of seeing. The two lines are entwined. At the first meeting between Henry and Golden, Henry remarks - 'the man's gaze was like a tongue' (1992:169). But the link between seeing and enunciation can be too quickly collapsed in the theorising of racial categorisation, for a truly adequate conception of the discursive has to able to take on board this relation. Morrison's novel always returns us to the limits of passing, and it is this limitation that means the politics of colour needs to be taken seriously.

This discussion has attempted to raise the question of the colour within an understanding of race as discursive; but colour cannot be a beginning or an end point in an anti-racist politics. I have tried to suggest the ways in which although colour is seen, it can be narrated, presented and performed in ways that interact with that simple material 'fact' of skin colour. The assertion that it is a fact that racism occurs through non-discursive visual cues - witness the 'getting a taxi' accounts, or in racist attacks - fails to think through the ways in which that mode of action mobilises a narrative, or several narratives, that mean that bodies are seen discursively. Yet the moments that I have chosen from Jazz are intended to suggest the way in which Morrison does not allow a complacency around the materiality of the body, the sense in which although differing presentations affect colour, it is much more tenuous to argue that they *effect* colour. Rather, there are a whole series of movements - movements of allegiance, of desire, of fear - that make material. The 'scopic' is part of a deployment, and only ever a part of a greater complex. For Fanon, this complex meant that the corporeal schema, the 'real dialectic between my body and the world' was replaced by the moments that repeatedly used an external stimulus, that 'look, a Negro!' placed him:

> 'I could no longer laugh, because I already knew that there were legends, stories, history, and above all *historicity* ... assailed at

various points, the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema.'(1952/1986:112)

Without any pretensions to describe the processes of sight, one might argue that that which Hal Foster (1988) has termed 'visuality', what one is permitted to see and not see, is *seeable*, is punctuated discursively, seen to move as if it were one thing (the phenomenon of 'colour' for example), whereas it is actually puntuated by a rhythm that moves it and makes it matter, much in the same way as the characters in Jazz are moved; that is, it is broken up like the frames in a reel of film, broken up by the narratives, but *seen* as if it were one uncomplicated, natural, movement. In her discussion of the 'im/pulse to see', Rosalind Krauss writes of the zootrope: 'From outside the revolving drum, peering through the slits as they pass rhythmically before our eyes, we would be presented of course with a succession of stationary birds performing the majestic flexing of their wings in what would appear to be the unified image of a single fowl.'(1988:59). Fanon's use of the term historicity is also in a sense 'about' the way in which what is seen as one body is in fact made up of several bodies, entwined with various types of narratives. Vision matters, and makes matter, but it is not autonomous in its phenomenality.

In terms of an anti-racist politics, attempting to fix colour as if it were an autonomous fact that can be overlaid with political affiliation reduces the understanding of racism evoked to vision. June Jordan (1992) reflects upon moments of suspicion and racialisation based on visual cues; what is important about this essay, however, is that she goes on to undermine the notion that anti-racist politics can take up that moment of racialisation for its own, and to refuse the argument that racist suspicion can be given status as the truth of political identification. In other words, a reverse discourse is not necessarily an attractive or potentially successful political strategy. It may be near impossible to 'analyse' the moment and movement of racism in terms of its different 'dimensions' as if a concept such as *dispositif* can be somehow 'applied' to situations - and it is certainly unclear how such an analysis would be an effective political tool. However, there are moments when the question of the politics of the narrator, the one who tells, is placed in the highly political position of influencing how someone or something is seen; the political choices are about how one decides to introduce the rhythm or pulse that disrupts the 'flow' of vision and of understanding in order to problematise an indolence which pretends to know racism 'when it sees it'. Optical politics, if the term has any use, is the process of replacing the innocence of vision with a display of the process and import of 'visuality'.

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I want to end by returning to the comment by the schoolgirl quoted at the beginning of the paper in order to comment briefly on how the employment of the term *dispositif* distances itself from attempts to categorise as a way of

understanding racism, and in order to comment on the use of the term 'mixed'. The schoolgirl's language is a muddle of ways of categorising; she suggests that her friend is constantly positioned *mistakenly* as white - she is 'mixed', but 'really', she is Black. A recent award of compensation through the Race Relations Act also tugs at the ways race and colour are described: 'a white man who was called an 'idle black bastard' by a fellow worker because of his swarthy appearance was awarded £16,630 by an industrial tribunal yesterday'(The Guardian 16.8.95). The schoolgirl and the newspaper illustrate the sense in which colour rubs up against racism in a way that is by no means straightforward.

Golden's longing is to escape the need to choose that his father lays before him, to be able to be without the lines that the deployment of race places all around him. But forms of knowledge have attempted to disallow such a stepping outside. Knowledge attempts to include and to categorise, though the modes of classification have shifted over time and space, and been made to shift, there is an imperative to include all and every one within a closed set of terms. Whereas Golden is offered a binary choice, the schoolgirl employs the term 'mixed', even as she appears to maintain that such a 'fact' cannot be incorporated, literally cannot be lived, in a world that sees colour, not personal histories, on the skin. The bio-politics of race has involved an attempt to reduce what Bauman has called the 'scandal of ambivalence', for the 'typically modern practice, the substance of modern politics, of modern intellect, of modern life, is the effort to exterminate ambivalence: an effort to define precisely - and to suppress or eliminate everything that could not or would not be precisely defined.'(1991: 7-8). Being able to fragment is one of the primary ways in which modern practices of classification work. Older modes of sociological classification of race, just like administrative modes of classification, clearly highlight those attempts to eliminate ambiguity. 'The fiction of the census' writes Benedict Anderson, 'is that everyone is in it, and that everyone has one - and only one - extremely clear place. No fractions.'(1991:166). Recent work around a notion of hybridity, and on the nature of categorisation, has led to an interest in these classificatory systems as well as an interest in the phenomenality of those that can illustrate and disrupt the easy categorisations of racist thought and practice.

Just as the infamous body of hermaphrodite Herculine Barbin caused problems for the classificatory scheme of the doctors who stood over it, so there is a sense in which some category such as 'mixed' (as the schoolgirl uses it) or 'mixed race' disrupts a discourse that would see the world as divided into discrete races, with each person fitting neatly into one of the categorisations. One might pursue an analogy in which the demands for the 'truth' of Barbin's sex are paralleled with the demands to classify people according to 'race'. If '[t]he horror of mixing reflects the obsession with

separating'(Bauman, 1991:14), the concept 'mixed race' seems, at least at first blush, to proudly declare the breakdown of that attempted separation. As such, the notion 'mixed race' may be considered an attempt to recognise hybridity in a way that has a certain potential to disrupt racist discourses that attempt to situate and constrain people within discrete spatial and temporal dimensions.[4] Its usage declares a personal history and occupies an enunciative space - as a terminological resistance, it is oral/aural and not scopic - that has historically (by taboo, law, violence and other policing practices) been disallowed.[5] Where racism (operating as elaborated social organisation, bureaucracy or racial violence) demands a single and exclusive categorisation, the declaration of a state 'mixed race' illuminates the fiction at work.

Lest we are drawn too quickly into celebrating this concept as an unproblematic reference to an ontological state and a liberatory term of Bhabha's 'third space', however, one must note that the term 'mixed race' is also complicit with such a schema. Bhabha explains that 'third space' does not refer to a new discrete identity, but rather, to a more general process of 'cultural hybridity' that

> 'bears the traces of those feelings and practices which inform it, just like a translation ... [so that it] puts together the traces of certain other meanings or discourses [but] does not give them the authority of being prior in the sense of being original'(1990:211).

Bhabha's point is not about the creation of new discrete identities; on the contrary, it seeks to place a question mark over such an idea. To suggest that 'mixed race' people are located within the 'third space', therefore, would be a misuse of the term. His argument is relevant here, however, because it highlights the corollary of the term 'mixed race'. Despite the sense in which the term 'mixed race' might be regarded as celebrating diversity, it simultaneously continues a way of speaking that is ultimately conservative because it retains exactly the sense of prior 'originals' that Bhabha wishes to reject. Its meaning rests upon a discourse of prior purity that is central to a certain form of racism. Bhabha has argued that

> 'in any particular struggle new sites are always being opened up, and <u>if you keep refering those new sites to old principles</u> then you are not actually able to participate in them fully and creatively.'(1990:216, my emphasis).

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[4] The attempt to replace the term 'half-caste' with 'mixed race' is part of an attempt to discontinue the racist assumptions of the former term.

[5] Specifically disallowed through laws, and taboos, but generally disallowed through practices that force people to declare racial allegiance across strict boundaries and through cultural discourses surrounding miscegenation.

Wherever this category ‘mixed race’ *does* have meaning, one might be suspicious that it signals the continuance of the language of discrete races.

Certainly the usage of the term ‘hybrid’ in its earlier sociological usage has been put to work in the service of a language of discrete races. In the era in which the characters Violet and Joe reach the city in Jazz the urban sociologists of the Chicago School, gathered in the city to which Richard Wright fled seeking freedom, were contemplating the issue of racialisation. Indeed, Wright suggested that the work of these very sociologists enriched his attempt to tell his story and write about the environment that ‘battered and taunted me’: ‘the huge mountains of facts piled up by the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago gave me my first concrete vision of the forces that molded the urban Negro’s body and soul.’(1945:xviii). In many ways a radical member of this group, Robert Parks’ employment of the term hybrid operated, however, as though it were possible to contain the complexity of processes of racialisation and to develop a sociological understanding of the ‘mulatto or mixed blood’ as though there really were an unproblematically distinct class to be observed and docuumented, distinguished not by colour necesssarily, but by the personality traits which, he argued, separated them from the Negroes and the whites. In his essay ‘The Mentality of the Hybrid’ Parks argues that the mulatto has a ‘double inheritance’ - this time the term ‘double’ refering to the mix of a biological inheritance and a cultural positionality inherited from a racially divided world - that makes the ‘hybrid class’ more enterprising, restless, aggressive and ambitious than ‘the Negroes’(1931/1950:386-7). More intelligent, because more simulated by the ‘higher tension’ at which the ‘mulatto’ must live, the hybrid class, it is alleged, are oftentimes

> ‘sensitive and self conscious to an extraordinary degree. They do not have, on the other hand, the insouciance and naivete which makes the Negro invariably so ingratiating and agreeable a companion. Mulattoes, also, are keenly aware of the defects of the Negro, but because their status is so intimately bound up with his, they are not able to view these defects with the same objectivity and tolerance as the white man does.’(1931/1950: 387).

Ambivalence - in Bauman’s words, ‘the possibility of assigning an object or an event to more than one category’(1991:1) - exposes the classificatory and ordering functions of language. The creation of the category ‘mixed race’ is a response to an ambivalence created by a classification based on ‘race’; it is a ‘solution’ that creates but contains difference, that adds to but maintains the same schema of classification and the same discursive logic as the language of discrete races. Just like the term ‘hybrid’ was once employed, it can imply that racial classification

innocently adapts to understand a changing but objectively racialised world. The white man who Wright admired could also suggest that objectivity, the aim of his social science, was also the privileged position of the white man: ‘Mulattoes, also, are keenly aware of the defects of the Negro, but because their status is so intimately bound up with his, they are not able to view these defects with the same objectivity and tolerance as the white man does.’(1931/1950:387).

As a discursive solution, however, the term ‘mixed race’ does not operate in the same way as the terms that divide people according to colour; as a categorisation ‘mixed’ cannot be presented visually, for it requires a narrative. For that reason, it can be a place to begin to prise open a complex that elides colour and ‘race’ and to problematise a soicology that has traditionally avoided taking on board problems of objective description of ‘races’ by reverting to a social psychology. And one might use the notion of hybridity in its current formulation to push the argument that there is much *more* that needs a narrative, that phemonema that appear complete and static, easily understood, we would oftentimes do better to regard as movements, to puntuate with a pulse, and to witness there the deployment of techniques that have entangled the scopic and the enunciative, and through them, drawn in lines of power and subjectification.

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