

Mug shot: Transraciality – Analysing the race with race in art

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Abstract: In the present article, we analyse the concept of transraciality in art, especially within the performance field, by connecting it with its firestorm manifestations in the modern society. Is transraciality the new frontier in public acceptance or just pure utopia? We'll talk about our findings by focusing on some pertinent artistic examples and social behaviours. Focusing on the *homo fignens* as a part of the postmodern deconstruction of the human being, we reach the expending community of persons with mixed background and their interactions with art or the public perception. Hollywood stereotypes, cultural appropriation methods, race bending, collage and pastiche, all form the list of tools we operate with. Furthermore, we'll focus on media cases involving raw definitions of transraciality, also on some pop culture examples, trying to connect their meanings with theatricality and the theatre/the stage phenomenon. The anxieties of a potential post-racial society put pressure on how we want to be seen by others and break the rules of racial differentiation. The enormous growth in self-consciousness opens a gate for alterity/otherness.

Keywords: transracial, post-racial, skin, theatricality, identity, bovarism, cultural appropriation

In this article we analyse the concept of *transraciality* in art, especially within the performance field, by connecting it with its manifestations in modern society. We won't resume our strategy to a philosophical or psychological point of view, but we will try to draw permanent analogies between "trans" and "race", interrogating the significance of this hypothetical artistic subject. Seeking the meanings of *transracial* we encountered a certain insufficiency in dictionaries, the word being absent in most of them, while those trying to define the concept resume to "something/someone *extending across two or more races.*"

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This definition clarifies some aspects of our exploration, but explains neither an attempt to change *race* or fight against its features, nor the genesis of this phenomenon. We immediately started thinking about children born in mixed families, but usually that is called diverse racial background, not *transraciality*. To enhance our research across this fresh concept, we open a large field of raw subjects, and try to pave the way for future investigations by *altering* the meanings of *transraciality*.

Race is just a subtype of the only living human species, the *Homo sapiens*. In all subclasses, there are a few differentiating characteristics, due to the exposure to different climatic factors over the years and the separate evolutions of the four main races: Caucasian, Mongoloid, African and Austronesian. Many sub-races are catalogued, and also the majority of possible mixtures have names in different languages: Mulatto, Zambo etc. Thus, a *multiracial* person is not a rare sight in our world these days and has his right place in society. Research in heredity / genetics regarding the races shows us that intellectual capacity, life expectancy and social skills are not influenced by the racial factors.

Post-racial behaviour and the artist

To begin with, we will focus on some media cases involving *transraciality* and later we'll try to translate its meanings by connecting them with *theatricality* and the stage. Is *transraciality* the new frontier in *public acceptance*? There have been a few examples of "race bending" throughout the past centuries and the majority were seen as eccentricities, but never has such a strange pursuit on changing the deeper meanings of the skin emerged as in present-day. The anxieties of modern man put pressure on how we want to be seen by others, transforming many physical characteristics. An enormous growth in self-consciousness opens a gate for alterity/otherness. Claude Levi-Strauss says that: "Identity always gives birth to alterity." (Levi-Strauss, Claude, 2014)

In the beginning of the 20th century, human attraction towards the exotic was right away put into display (the human zoos, some circus companies etc.), but today is evaluated from a racial point of view, or the *politically correct* one. Race is not seen as an oddity anymore. Nonetheless, our common sense concerning race is often blurred by some kind of ancestral order that puts it into question. The fascination towards "the other" makes people act wrong, assuming the risks of *racial metamorphosis*. *Race*, to some extent, gives human beings the impression of the possibility of choice (a false one), or of a birth-given "right" (see all the fascist and racial ways of thinking). Adjusting race is a utopia and a danger.

Race segregation has seen some of its worst manifestations during the last centuries, leading to personal tragedies, civil rights transgressions and trans-national racist views. Nowadays, after the end of slavery, the eventual collapse of the Apartheid, the famous anti-segregation actions in the USA (the *Selma to Montgomery Marches*, the *Greensboro sit-ins*) or the great leading figures such as Martin Luther King Jr., our society has brought *race, racial speech and social injustice* into attention to a remarkable extent. World has entered a *post-racial* society, not yet cleansed from racial views, still working its way through some conventional beliefs.

Famous people with mixed race backgrounds, let's call them *multiracials*, have been taken much more into consideration by the general population over the last few years. Therefore, the term entered mainstream vocabulary, reforming the concept of identity. Writer Alexandre Dumas (the father) could be an earlier example, but nowadays we have many more: Barack Obama, Mariah Carey, Alicia Keys, Lenny Kravitz, Keanu Reeves etc. This is not a remote community, but an expanding one, encompassing singers, actors, public figures and even presidents. Its development is due to our modern society's freedom of moving, or, as some think, to the freedom of choosing whom to love and have children with. Even the concept of family is now regarded through the lens of feelings, not through the social class criticism of the past centuries. The presence of more numerous mixed-race families is a natural course given by all of the above. But there can never be a 50/50 attitude towards *biraciality/multiraciality*, due to the exposure to *racial ambiguity*, living for a longer period in one of the communities, or due to cases of intolerance. Studies suggest, in the majority of examples, discrepancies in one direction, a more pro-white, pro-black, pro-(x race) attitude. A child is always extra-captivated by one of his parents' race, thus his inner racial balance becomes uneven. Somehow, he "acts" to a higher degree one of the two races, thus staging his own life, by choosing "who" and "what" to play. Compared with an actor, he is a very special breed, having the possibility of choosing his masks and making its own images of reality.

In media, pop-star Michael Jackson was and, to some extent, even after his death, still is suspected of turning himself into a white man. Nonetheless, he always stated that he suffered from *Vitiligo*, a dangerous skin condition. Jackson's disease was subject to many conspiracy theories, due to his growing popularity. After becoming whiter every day, he grew obsessed with surgical interventions in order to pursue a more Caucasian look, and, as we all know, that didn't turn out very well. The nowadays pop stars obsessed with bleaching their skin represent another observable and hot topic. Take a look at, for

example, Beyoncé in 2005 and in 2015. We will find a far whiter woman, as in many other cases (Rihanna, Nicki Minaj etc.), and the number is increasing. Does their work in artistic environments diminish the gravity of their skin bleaching actions? The stage has its own set of rules, the ambiguity being one of the strongest weapons of any performer. Believing to be cursed by geography, some choose to emphasize part of their racial features to reach goals. Others take into consideration provocative body actions to promote themselves and their most beloved works. Stage actions are forms of survival, artists producing with their exposed body, gender, or with the epidermis regularly causing transgressions.

The Dolezal case

The newspapers' titles at the beginning of the 2015 summer were filled with Rachel Dolezal's name, a white woman who reached the top of the hierarchy in the *National Association for the Advancement of Colored People* in the USA, while willingly posing as a black woman. The social media have immediately burst into flames after the leak of this awkward case scenario. The woman stated that she identifies herself as black female and defended the manner in which she acted by making public her past in a mixed race family. But, as we can see in the picture beneath, she is a pure Caucasian woman that voluntarily got a lot of tan. Of course, her life was strongly influenced by black culture, having step siblings and an African-American husband and studying at the historically black Howard University. Many consider that the Dolezal case should be marked as a diagnosable condition, based on her tendency to absorb something not rightfully hers, and spending almost an entire career hiding the fact that she was a white person. Dolezal freely distorted the truth about her race because it furthered her job-related goals, doing that by claiming *transraciality*, her black face probably emerging as a hidden ego. All this can be understood by need to be accepted inside a community, not by a strong inner feeling or some kind of a birth right.

Throughout history, people have identified with other *races* only if they have socialized with their representatives for a large period of time or grew up in a specific racial environment. In some cases, due to adoption, people may feel more comfortable around those of a distinct race. They usually have mannerisms or paradigms of speech that we have been socially expecting to belong with another race. The mixed-race families bring a large amount of struggles for a child, Rachel Dolezal playing the card of the dysfunctional family she allegedly had. If we assume Dolezal is right and *transraciality* becomes a modern social revolution "hit", or a possibility for anyone, we must also assume attainable and justified differences between races. And that is, first of all, a racist statement in an apparently racial free world.



Fig. 1: Rachel Dolezal, NBC NEWS, 2015

One's sense of self has a lot of power becoming artistic by cross-fertilization between art and life. Gesturing the body, self-fetishization and performing the skin is a step further in the artistic field, increasing awareness of identity. Commenting on Plato's tough views on art and its apprehension of reality, David Novitz asserts that the general opinion about art and reality, but not the true one, is:

"Art [...], is about the real world, refers to it, and so must be different from it."
[Novitz, David, 2001: 69]

We also think that the real world comments on art or is changed by it. The Dolezal case could be just a first real example (definitely not a positive one) in what will become a fashion very soon by translating life into art and performing racial transgressions.

Mimesis and cultural appropriation throughout the world

The dilemma of dealing with this *transracial* moral crusade is quite a burden, racial disguise having so many embellished shapes. What about South Korean women trying to get more European features by adjusting their "imperfect" features or African women ramping up their Caucasian characteristics to get

married faster? More and more, human mentalities challenge their limits regarding the race, this topic being influenced a lot by the media. The rise of surgical interventions to “slightly” change racial features is going through a real boom nowadays. Countries like South Korea have an alarming increase in the numbers of people changing their racial features. People of the 21st century living in developed countries know how they want to act socially and are willing to take risks by playing with the limits of their allegedly judgmental environment.

Able to develop meaning, art has always had an eye for racial inheritance and all its chains of interactions. Some great artists, like Paul Gauguin, were fascinated by other races, and their works were influenced by a large amount of ethnic elements. Nonetheless, that was the beginning of the 20th century and not the year 2015. Still, Gauguin did not claim to be Tahitian. The nowadays artistic speech has to learn how to be moderate and respectful - or is art completely amoral? We can be inspired by the things that separate us, not being allowed to bend the rules too much and steal the characteristics of “the other”.

People find solace in the arms of role-playing, a few in a safe environment like the theatre stage, others in real life. Performance artists mix those two things together, bringing on stage or in a museum real (non-fictionalized) persons, interacting with them, or just allowing themselves to be interrogated in a number of artistic actions. They try to be relevant to the challenges of the modern world. *Race*, in terms of what we do and how we act, is essentially a social construct, but definitely there isn't such a thing as being born in the wrong race. Even theatre's tutelary god, Dionysus, a hybridized character, half-man, half-god, was called *Eleutheros* (the Liberator), promising his followers a kind of freedom by lying and pretending to be another, thus by acting. Theatricality is based on role-playing, impersonating and acting. The Michael Jackson case, or, to some extent, even the Dolezal situation, remind us of the bovaristic behaviour, seeing bovarism as:

It is a conception of oneself as other than one is to the extent that one's general behaviour is conditioned or dominated by the conception; *especially*: domination by such an idealized, glamorized, glorified, or otherwise unreal conception of oneself that it results in dramatic personal conflict (as in tragedy), in markedly unusual behaviour (as in paranoia), or in great achievement.
(<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bovarism>)

The *mimesis* is strongly infiltrated in the bovaristic way of living and in the actor's craft/art. The bovarist character conceives their self as another, the actor being a moving identity in his quest for stage characters, used and professionalized

to be a *homo fingens*. The main difference between the two types is that the bovarist fakes his identity for himself, the actor doing it for others (*to be* versus *to act/to represent*). Having a fictionalized destiny, the actor/artist has a critical empathy towards the object of his imitation, being saved by theatre from his latent bovaristic behaviour, thus: "The will of the bovarist is a damaged one." (Cuibus,-2011)

In addition, to a certain degree, *transraciality* merges with *cultural appropriation*. Therefore, we ought to bring up this secondary subject into discussion. For some, it seems as if only people of colour have a unique culture, while white people always try to steal it. The inherent advantages white people have due to skin colour are a hot topic in our society. Nadra Kareem defines *cultural appropriation* as:

Taking intellectual property, traditional knowledge, cultural expressions, or artefacts from someone else's culture without permission. This can include unauthorized use of another culture's dance, dress, music, language, folklore, cuisine, traditional medicine, religious symbols, etc. It's most likely to be harmful when the source community is a minority group that has been oppressed or exploited in other ways or when the object of appropriation is particularly sensitive. (Nadra Kareem Nittle, racerelations.about.com)

If we take a look at Hollywood stereotypes, we'll find many *cultural appropriation* methods in that environment, some morally objectionable. The Acceptance Speech at the 45th Academy Awards of Sacheen Little-Feather, sent there by Marlon Brando to reject the prize on his behalf, is a famous example of boycotting a ceremony in protest of the treatment of Native Americans by the movie industry. But Sacheen often goes by the name Maria Cruz and she is, surprisingly, a *multiracial* person, with Native American and European ancestors. Thus, her presence at the Academy Awards as an "Apache" was just part of the truth. Anyway, that moment was of significant importance for how Native Americans were seen on TV and in movies in that period. In Marlon Brando's powerful statement, the pop music industry immediately saw the opportunity to make a music hit, therefore Cher had a number one song that same year, called *Half Breed*.

Preserving culture does not mean keeping it away from others, but being able to make it our own and apply it in different contexts. This signifies teaching it and sharing it with those who are not familiar with its features. The dominant white culture from the western world takes Black, Latino, Indian and many other ethnic backgrounds as an opportunity to steal.



Fig. 2: Backstage at the 1973 Oscars: Sachiin Little-feather holding the speech Marlon Brando had asked her to give. Associated Press
The singer Cher in her Video "Half Breed", 1973

But culture, and furthermore skin cannot be owned, not by art, not by pop culture and surely not by society. Taking bits of "ethnic" behaviours doesn't mean white people are the only ones that mix up everything else. To hijack someone's cultural background is to pretend it is the way you truly are, to take it from the real context and transform everything for your own personal use, by destroying fundamental characteristics and keeping only what serves you. Thus, *transraciality*, as Rachel Dolezal sees it, is even more dangerous than *cultural appropriation*, because it pretends it's a birth right. Eduardo Arroyo sets the limits of the *appropriationist technique* in art history:

But when did artists first apply this appropriationist technique? If we take a generous look back into the past we shall discover that in one way or another, artists have always appropriated the work of others, that of their contemporaries and, of course, that of their predecessors, as summed up by Eugenio d'Ors in his famous assertion that "in art, what is not tradition, is plagiarism." (Arroyo, Eduardo, 2009)

TRANS beyond race

If people believe they need to identify as a certain ethnicity in order to be allowed to adopt aspects of that culture, no wonder some start to think of themselves as *transracial*. It is not hard to imagine why an insecure person

would start seeing *transraciality* as a good way to be accepted in society. Still, unlike *gender identity*, *racial and cultural identity* depends on where and how we are raised.

Talking about *transraciality* makes us immediately think about *transsexuality*. The two terms are significantly contrasting. People who identify as *transracial* shouldn't be compared to those who label themselves as *transsexual*, as racial perception and identity are in fact subject to social learning and not to physical characteristics. Scientists say genders have slightly different brains, thus being sexually dimorphic. Those who identify as another gender typically have differences in their brains, in the regions associated with sexuality. The cerebrum of a *transgendered* person resembles more that of their identified gender than the one they were born with. Breaking gender barriers is something we tend to put in the post-modern blender of our society. Going back to theatre and the performance arts, they seem the perfect environment to break any barrier. *Transgender* characters have claimed the stage and came there to stay.

The issue of *transraciality* could easily be fixed if people were more encouraged to safely explore multiple cultures, without feeling constricted to their own. Instead, they should not need to identify themselves with a different ethnicity in order to adopt traditions and lifestyles that fascinate them, and thus giving birth to very strange situations in public perception. We believe it is wonderful to maintain a strong connection with the culture you were raised in, especially while being exposed to a stronger and more dominant one, but this should not turn into cultural segregation. For a diversified Europe/America, with fundamental characteristics that are driven by diversity and freedom, trying to transcend race is very inappropriate. This also applies to the rest of the world, to various degrees. Most traditions fail to maintain their original significance anyway, even inside the community that created them. A varied environment is even more dangerous for their possible loss, and thus some cultural boundaries are to be kept.

Questioning the possibility of transraciality in art

Could *transraciality* be accepted in society/art? It is already present in our communities, trapped between conservative beliefs. If black persons take on mannerisms that society deems as Caucasian, could we call that *transracial*? However, in the middle of a group structure, there are daily changes in the self-centered models and almost anything could be broken. Humans tend to *mimic* behaviours they like, thus bringing the issue of a natural state of

theatricality, something present from children in the most remote communities, to the upper classes of western societies. People are allowed to act, as long as their actions don't harm other persons. The *transracial* self could be made in a collage technique or even by pastiche. In the famous book "*The moustache of La Gioconda*", Eduardo Arroyo perfectly defines the differences between collage and pastiche, something we find of significant importance in our thesis in which we analyze the race on race in art:

So, what is the difference between collage and pastiche? Simplifying greatly, I would say that collage is synthetic, constructive and positive (in other words, it is a technique of production), while pastiche is analytical, destructive and negative (in other words, it is a way of unmaking what has previously been made). In point of fact, I could have avoided listing these antithetical differences between the one and the other if, simplifying the issue even more, I had limited myself to affirming that collage is a mean of artistic creation, while pastiche is simply an annulment-relativisation of art by means of the greatest of modern resources-irony. Likewise, making the issue more personal, I could perhaps make the problem even clearer by pointing out that collage was invented by Picasso, while pastiche was invented by Marcel Duchamp. In spite of the reductionism I have employed to settle the issue at stake, I hope it is clear to all that collage is a technique while pastiche is a stance. (Arroyo, 2009)

The ever increasing volume of racial related topics is partly due to a liberalization of speech. Our world has its future tied up with beauty and powerful images in this profound aesthetic time we live in. *Corporeality* (manifestation of the body) is perpetually changing, and the public perception is always drifting in many limbos. *Transraciality* interrogates the artist's behaviour and how he could benefit from a reconsideration of the body, for a better collective perspective in audiences. To take a leap from the body of the performer to the public and back is to focus on the roughness of art and its major goals.

For example, fashion is dominated by white models, in both men and women clothes areas. Even in Asia, the majority of "big" fashion weeks are overshadowed by white figures. The nature of values is relative, making *transraciality* a possible option in arts and in the artistic logic. Fashion has always broken the rules of sexes and now is starting to break those of *race* by hybridizing cultural references. Japanese girls called "sweet Lolitas", mixing up Victorian clothes, geisha traditions and the so-called "cute kitsch" are famous examples. The contemporary Afro-centric fashion promoted first by the TV icons of the 90's and now brought up by the African born designers make a significant impact. The *Duro Dress* and the contemporary *Sapeur* characters

mix up traditional European fashion taste with African history. Ambiguity is pushed to its limits by make-up and clothing. We hardly identify genders nowadays, maybe tomorrow *race* will be something difficult to recognize.

Returning to stage (an almost mythical space with its own special laws), is *transraciality* something to be explored within this scheme? Examples of non-Caucasian racial features among the famous theatre plays are very rare. Othello is almost every time played by a white actor with brown make-up. Not every country has an abundant black population, and therefore not a large amount of black actors. What about non-gypsy stage actors acting gypsy characters in a stereotype manner because it is "cool" and fun? The situations in which mocking the races and their cultural baggage is a main goal are a heavily used subject by playwrights, spreading angst in those hurt by these actions. Also, in pop culture, the *cultural appropriation* is something that drives artists to rather peculiar and shameful situations. We remember Cher's video of *Dov'è l'amore* (Italian title translated: *Where is the love*), with Spanish flamenco dancers "obviously" based in an Iberian space.

It brings to our mind one of the most well-known theatre examples of the past decades: Peter Brook's multi-ethnic *Hamlet* from the 90's, in an "exotic" period for the great theatre makers. Today, the newly casts, for example, in the UK, where it is recommended to have a mixed race theatre company, are a questionable and debatable subject. We don't think we could just erase racist behaviour by mixing up racial features in art and pretend it's enough. Is the *white guilt* in so many American plays a true belief of the average American? After the abundance of racist shootings in the USA in the past few years we assume that is false. Nonetheless, racial justice and equity could find their avatars on stage in the embodiment of the performer.

Theatricality is a form of survival; nevertheless, when wrongly used, it becomes deadly. Examples of behaviours involving *bovarism* are close to the pathological area. Theatre must be careful with its overused race "thing". Many acted unlawfully by making it a *crash test dummy*, and not really focusing on the emotional part of a potentially strong subject. Others tried to legitimize their inner self and militated for whatever right they feel appropriate, saying freedom is freedom no matter what. Now, we go back to the eternal subject of theatre prevalence: politics or aesthetics/story?

Critics talk about provocation; however, who's provoking who? Wounds in a society's heart are not easily healed, the way we used to behave being corrupted for so many years. The big wave of slave-themed Hollywood movies does not win any race with racial issues. Even though the initial shockwave has been diminished, a person like Rachel Dolezal will always put the blame in her options on a rightful "heartstorm", doing more harm by comparison with the movies.

In this paper, putting aside the reality of living examples, we are concerned with public responses to contemporary artworks that comment, interpret or draw upon racial symbolism, which have stirred up reckless passions. The bloody field of art's evolution goes far from a moral doctrine and is often surpassed by an artist unique judgment, or its inner stimulations.

For centuries, the white face of the actors was considered the basics of role-playing in theatre. Is there an evolution in the aesthetics of the theatrical face/body? Beyond the ethical problems of *transraciality*, to neglect or to praise the colour of the skin in performance arts is a free and yet not enough debated field. By exploring it, everything could turn out to be a sublime catastrophe, with *transraciality* becoming an over the top subject, or, like in the case of sexual freedom, will somehow find its timing and perfect way to get free without any "artistic" help.

Globalization and the need to perform and to be seen

Basic terms in Ethics and Aesthetics (the two appearing often together) are drifting like continents. Words, like people's imagination, never end their games, and where can one find a more appropriate playing field than theatre? It seems time is tuning out on the "fair", Caucasian, upper class performer, and the new publics want more "awkwardness"/normality on the stage, even though that is just one of the many mirrors of the world and the years we live in, jeopardizing almost everything we know about art.

Hollywood has relaxed its rules on casting over the years, Broadway and West End did the same, but what about the more traditional ways of making theatre, let's say the Eastern European rule of the director? Great directors in this part of the world are used to working with 100% white distributions, and when working in Western environment, they tend to use the same rules of the "exotic" or the "ethnic". We can put the blame on the majority of "big plays" that are Caucasian-centred, or the aesthetics of each director. But the racial point of view is still a strong one there. Globalization is seen by some as a possible threat to compact cultural mediums and the way people in those groups were thought to craft their art. Today, artists are judged by their working process, critics trying to find any potential exploitation methods. The *politically correct* policy grows in speech power and hides all these behaviours in shallow waters, never going to the more profound realities, let's call them *corporealities*.

What can we say about a very American artist like Robert Wilson, coming from a racially diverse society? His work is mostly done in Europe, a less blended racial community, his theatre being focused on image, not on the author or the text. In the majority of the American mainstream stage the author is the king. One of his particular theatrical features is that his actors' faces are

always white. The “deadly beauty” imagined by Craig and perfectly put into practice by Wilson does justice to any community with these mask traditions coming from the *Commedia dell’arte* or the Japanese *No* theatre? Surely it doesn’t. A better immersion of actors with a diverse racial background into the mainstream stage could come from a better knowledge of community theatre, or an abundance of new plays focused on mixed race families (a developing reality nowadays).

Theatre is, above all, about the human condition. On the other hand, some accept pure aesthetics, regardless of the artist’s care about *racial* problems. Those who played most with cultural appropriation and racial exchanges in their theatre work are Ariane Mnouchkine and Eugenio Barba. Their anthropologic reference points and statements could be, nowadays, interrogated by the arguments and the critical exposure of *transraciality*, in its hybrid limits or its war with identity. We must interrogate different types of theatricality to find the kind of spectatorship *transraciality* could address.

The very well-known and controversial British performer Stelarc operates a radical criticism of the pure human corporeality, the French artist Orlan accomplishing even more on this path. Stelarc’s work with his body versus the virtual realities of our days has challenged some of the most profound racial features, biased towards genetics. Orlan has gone further with her dangerous surgeries trying to resemble famous works of art, and thus changing her Caucasian appearance. Some people say we could objectify almost everything on stage, *transraciality* becoming a risk-taking topic in the quest for modern ways of fictionalizing the biography. If we zoom in this way of reasoning, we could see that over the past decades gender topics have become mainstream and less captivating for the public, as also happened with nudity on stage. Spectators want fresher subjects with new ways of showing them, topics that create a state of sublime discomfort. Howard Barker says (about literature) that people tend to react badly to great works of art in their first encounter. Could we apply that in performance arts?

The spectatorship nowadays. Changing the ways of theatricality

Analysing the young categories of audience, the spectators nowadays want to be provoked - the same persons “stolen” incessantly by movies or the internet. We suppose that people who choose to anxiously go to theatre, still want a rougher touch from the artists in front of them. Could performance craftsmen find in the raw subject of *transraciality* something valuable to put in their work?

Going “*far from the madding crowd*”, if we could say so, an artist could invent a personal micro-system in which he chooses freely the visual singularity he uses in his works. Someday, in the near future, regardless of how *transraciality*

will still be seen socially, performance arts, an even the more traditional theatre phenomenon will somehow focus on this subject and find a dramatic way of putting it on stage.

The *significant other* in this artist-*transracial* person relationship deserves a place in performance arts, even for a short amount of time, just enough for him to have a point in the witness stand. The tender and lacerating performer is long dead. Many generations fought for the right to have a voice and stood up to the excessive prejudice, and we should agree hearing the strangest of artistic voices, even though some might sound 100% crazy. The Dolezal case is sensitive to so many communities because she is not a dummy wax woman, but a rather empowering figure trying to find her true self using lies. The way in which Rachel Dolezal appropriated another identity is part bovaric, part ludicrous, thought that the Bovaric, if put in the right environment, could have theatrical meaning.

It is our misguided social construct of race that puts us all in the position of justifying and identifying *what* we are as opposed to *who* we are. In visual arts, many contemporary artists challenge *hybrid identity* in their work. Complex notions like *post-racial* appear in the artistic environment. The mainstream pop culture evolved in parallel with the visual arts field, but had the almost exact struggles. White rappers are no longer a strange thing (Eminem is white and he's one of the most famous) and race is used to sell commercial hits, as in the case of Michael Jackson, a person we already analysed. But still, that's a long way from how coloured people were treated many years ago. Racial commercials, so often used during the first half of the 20th century, showed us, for example, how soap could whiten the skin (image below).



Fig. 3: Two racial vintage commercials from “Black kids in vintage commercials” collection of Tim Urban

In the painting of the more recent years, one of the most powerful black voices, and an important figure of *transracialism* was Robert Colescott. In the 1997, Robert Colescott was selected to be the first African-American representing the USA at the Venice Biennale, where he brought paintings of figures with reversed racial features, strong political statements mocking black stereotypes. He brought laughter in his works, reinterpreting many famous creations done by his “whiter” predecessors.



Fig. 4: “Eat Dem Taters”, by Robert Colescott, 1975, Photography credit: Fred Scrutin
 “Natural Rhythm”, by Robert Colescott, 1976, Collection of Robert and Lois Orchard

Nayland Blake is another artist that has become a great example of humorous interpretation of race. In 2001 he appeared in a video with artist AA Bronson. They both had their faces covered with chocolate (Blake) and vanilla (Bronson). The two men had a very long kiss as the colours blended. They showed how in a hypothetical love environment one could dissolve any possible distinction between “black” and “white”, cosmetic and superficial marks put on race.

Race creates discomfort if used in some particular ways. But, as we stated before, discomfort can be the mark of a great artistic achievement. The “default ethnicity”, the white race, is also a big part of the *post racial* concept. It has become an interesting subject for artists in search of artistic extremities and extremes. As the figurative painting has had a revival in the last years, the face, regardless of race, has come back into painting. The looks into the Caucasian inheritance is large, because ethnical neutrality doesn’t exist. Adrian Piper’s works on *otherness* and *racism* are living proofs of the permanent fight against racial

behaviour, by constructing a cultural critique of skin stereotypes and acknowledging the legacy of slavery. For example, she stated in one of her controversial video installations from 1988 that white Americans might have some black blood mixed up in their veins, but her paradigms met objections from both critics and the general public.

Personality is created and recreated by others, those who, if we believe Sartre, are also our hell. This paradigm of biblical proportions in which people are allowed to mix their racial features brings only debauchery and insecurity. It also announces a change in the *dramaturgy of the body* by denying *personality* and creating puppets. Analyzing its effects in theatre shows us the changes in perceiving *transraciality* and how it should be performed. The phenomenon becomes exposed and we ask ourselves: could we talk here about a special type of spectator? When does *transraciality* become a special formula of *theatricality* and in what ways does it take the theatre into the future of performing arts? Could it change anything in our society or just bring a racial apocalypse?

The transracial behaviour is strongly present in nowadays music. We talked about bleaching actions of many pop stars and about Eminem's success in rap music, the greatest example in the recent years being Amy Winehouse, with her 50's black female diva appearance. She used many black related features and created a distorted apparition that won the public. Some say Iggy Azalea does the exact opposite, in a racist way of merging American Southern black features into her music. If it's not harmful to use *transraciality* to express one's creativity, we should allow its entrance in art.

In conclusion, *transraciality* exists in normal life and in all art fields, making its presence seen and accepted. It is a part of the postmodern deconstruction of the human being, the land where you can play with borderline personalities. We'll have to wait and see how *transraciality* will affect arts and society in the near future by focusing on a new *no man's land* that some call a *utopia of identity*.

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