Editor's Preface: Coloring

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Christopher Ciocchetti

Editor's preface: coloring

Greetings, once again, from the Bluegrass!

It is with great pride that I announce the publication of disClosure's 7th issue. Originally founded in the spirit of presenting social theory from multiple perspectives, each with varying methods, concerns and presuppositions, disClosure has remained true to its founding spirit. This time we've focused our attention on the issue of coloring. Not only does this issue include articles from scholars with focuses as diverse as contemporary art, pre-constitutional history and classic texts from the decolonization in Africa, interviews with top race theorists in English, Philosophy, Psychiatry and History, and poems evoking the experience of "being raced" from Rick Santos, Michael Caufield, Hilda Llorens and Phil Jenks, we have included two pieces with substantial visual components. Kathleen Adrian, in her article "The Decentralization of Subject in African American Feminist Photography", carefully examines the work of Lorna Simpson, Carrie Mae Weems and Clarissa Sligh, and, with all due appreciation to the artists, we have included copies of the analyzed works so the reader can better understand, evaluate and experience Adrian's work. This issue also presents our first full-length photoessay, where Hipólito Rafael Chacón gives a brief tour of the work of the prominent African-American artists Derek Webster and Mr. Imagination. As the photographs will show, though these men do not consider themselves professional artists, they can make quite a presentation.

When our theme for this issue, race, appears before the national
consciousness, it appears as recent and new, with pressing demands of the greatest urgency. With the “O.J. trial”, the Clarence Thomas hearings, and attempts (both successful and unsuccessful) to overturn affirmative action and other “race-based policies” in California and Texas, this issue of disclosure is an immediate response to our rapidly changing times. But if we retract from the heat of these moments of crisis or triumph, and reflect on our history, we can see, without difficulty, that we are dealing with an issue as perennial as any in the human experience. Questions of who we are, what we are doing, what we will leave behind and what must be resisted have repeatedly been cast in racialized terms. Individuals’ actions, intentions and the course of their lives are repeatedly displayed upon a racialized background. It is this combination, the timeliness and the timelessness, universality and particularity, the common and the unique aspects of the issue of race that prompts our meditations here.

Kathleen Adrian begins our meditations by focusing our attention on the artwork of three female, feminist African American artists: Lorna Simpson, Carrie Mae Weems and Clarissa Sligh. Adrian shows, through close analysis, that these three women produce art that depicts and challenges racism, sexism and other aspects of a culture that is both dominate and oppressive. While these artists do not try to “begin anew”, with a clean slate, they do not merely allow themselves to be controlled. Instead, Adrian shows us how these artists are struggling to revise old representations of race without erasing them.

Our interview with Linda Alcoff sees many of the same themes as central to an understanding of race. In the course of her conversation with disclosure, Alcoff, like Adrian, raises the issue of the difficult task of resistance and reconstruction of racialized identities. For Alcoff this issue poses metaphysical and epistemological questions. These questions, as well as thinkers such as Marx and Hegel, lead her to look at the role community and recognition play in creating and recreating experiences of race, especially in the case of biracial identities.

Christina Taylor continues our theme of resistance and reconstruction with a close look at female identity as it is represented in the Native American community. Specifically, she considers the case of Nancy Ward, who is almost the only woman recognized in pre-constitutional Cherokee history. Taylor uses this unique case to illustrate a broader pattern: the interactive relationship between stereotypes, individuals and groups. The texts of certain stories can become influential and solidified in the creation of both individual and group identity, and often research by social scientists merely reinforces these stories; however, Taylor reflects not only on Nancy Ward but on how race and gender are

arranged within retellings of her story.

Meritocracy is the focus of our interview with Christopher Newfield. He expands on his argument that liberal “meritocracy”, which pervades so many of our institutions from corporations to public schools, enables Americans to despise overt racism but support racist results. Race is made invisible, thereby erasing the possibility of seeing racism. Newfield discusses how the socio-cultural construct of whiteness, though often invisible, must be struggled with and redefined if we aspire to racial equality.

Illustrating a similar theme, Hipólito Rafael Chacón presents us with the work of Derek Webster and Mr. Imagination. These pictures define their creators as distinct. They draw up images that only a few years ago would have been marginalized, trivialized or ignored. So, naturally, neither of these men considers himself an artist in any traditional sense. Their work displays a spiritual past that they hope to preserve as well as their strong sense of the potentialities of art. Art, for these men, serves to heal past abuses andruptures, preserving the past while enabling one to go on.

David Roediger moves our meditations onto the theme of whiteness and labor. Engaged in theorizing about concrete struggle, Roediger focuses on racialized representations of the interests of the low-income. Roediger’s analysis of whiteness as working class political agency poses some interesting questions about the relationship of race to class, the kinds of economic change that can alleviate class, as well as racial, discrimination, and the actions that will effect these changes.

Roediger’s discussion found race mobilized in a concrete struggle against repression, much as it is again in Anthony Spanakos’s essay on Frantz Fanon. Spanakos explores Fanon’s notion of the Other as a canvas upon which one’s own identity is drawn. This concept has lead to epistemological difficulties for Fanon, difficulties that have their roots in Marx and Hegel. Spanakos argues that these difficulties can be eliminated, or at least reduced, if we see Fanon as endorsing a dialogue between self and Other rather than engaged in a dialectical struggle. Interpreted in this manner, Fanon’s understanding of race and identity can prove quite useful for social understanding.

Our final meditation on the subject of race is our interview with Jane Flax. Flax brings together all of the issues we have considered so far in a current, legal setting. She discusses how Anita Hill encountered race during Clarence Thomas’s senate hearings, confronting both representations and concrete struggles in an attempt to see these influential hearings in the context of debates about U.S. identity. The racialized citizen takes center stage as we close our meditations in this, our 7th issue.
With that brief overview the contents of this issue completed, I'd like to take a moment to mention the future of disClosure, rather than its past or present. The subject for issue 8 will be peregriNations, an examination of nationality; however, in order to pass from conception to press we rely on the material support of our subscribers. So, if you subscribe to disClosure, thank you. Please, encourage your friends, colleagues and libraries to subscribe as well. If you don't subscribe, please, consider doing so. You support will clear the way for many issues to come.

As always, this journal would not be possible without the help of many individuals. I would like to thank Lorna Simpson, Carrie Mae Weems, Clarissa Sligh, Mr. Imagination, Derek Webster, Bruce Burris, Christina Godsey, Małgorzata Gośka Grabowska, Susan Zavoina, Wang Bosheng and Ayelet Zohar for the artwork that colors this issue. John Paul Jones, III, Peter Mortensen, Wolfgang Natter and Theodore Schatzki, as the journal's faculty advisors, have each supplied crucial advice and support. Without them, there wouldn't have been issues 1-6, not to mention the 7th. Our funding has generously been supplied by the UK Vice-President for Research and Graduate Studies, the UK College of Arts and Sciences, Committee on Social Theory and the UK Student Government Association. Their support is irreplaceable. Finally, and most importantly, I'd like to acknowledge the members of the disClosure editorial collective, to whom the credit for the production really belongs. It is their efforts and decisions that made this journal what it is. I would especially like to thank Carl Dalhman whose technical experience and knowledge of the history of fonts made computers the useful tools we all knew they could be.

Lexington, Kentucky.
January, 1998

Rick Santos
Searching for Identity around the Globe
poem

Yes, I was born in this country
BUT WHAT ARE YOU?
My parents are Brazilian;
I am Brazilian

BUT YOU WERE NOT BORN HERE
WHAT ARE YOU?

I was born in New York
Soy americano

There is no such a thing as a half-Jew
Your mother is Jewish, you ARE Jewish
don't let anybody tell you otherwise

The male God of Catholicism orders you to
follow you Father's religion
So, technically (and whether you like it or not)
You ARE catholic

Caught in between the middle of a war of ideologies
& identities
i AM continuously forced to choose one
inextricable dimension of my?SELF over (an)other.

Rick Santos is in the comparative literature department at Binghamton University in New York.
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