

Reasserting Humanity Through the Liberatory Gaze

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Abstract

The act of critically looking can be a method used to consider alternative ways of conceptualizing marginalized cultures and ethnicities. By engaging in a series of inquiries about the subject of an image, the spectator can form a more comprehensive representation of the subject, thus preparing post-secondary students to discuss and interpret visual culture. From the perspective of an African-American female artist and educator's travels to Brazil, this work proposes that a self-reflective educator's personal narratives and insight can assist in creating an arts-based critically-thinking learning atmosphere. Such an atmosphere encourages students to move beyond the realms of their cultural experiences by utilizing a pedagogy that troubles social power relations and the narratives students may have been taught and socialized to internalize.

Reasserting Humanity Through the Liberatory Gaze

The spectator's gaze can be used to create alternative stories that humanize marginalized bodies. The purpose of this work is to help educators and students to push their reflective practices and apply those critical thinking skills to interactions with individuals. By creating alternative texts, students and educators restructure arts spaces and make their interactions with images a political act. Such acts are border crossing opportunities for spectators to bring to the center those who stand socially, politically and economically on the periphery. Liberatory practices work in defense of marginalized people by defending and proclaiming their humanity.

Using Barthes' (1977) theory of the photographic message, this work discusses how deciphering the double meaning of photographs and text critiques the objectification of a Black female subject within a 19th century Brazilian photograph. Barthes explains his theory in relation to journalism photography where the image is privileged and seen as factual evidence that substantiates information contained in accompanying text. Conversely, Barthes argues that this former image-text relationship has been inverted and the value of the text supersedes the image and can alter how the viewer connotes the photograph. This juxtaposition of image and text and recognizing how one informs the other may be most apparent in museums and galleries. However, in these spaces the image is not supplemental but the main focus. The theory of the photographic message explains the importance of considering the text used to describe the image and where the artwork resides in order to understand how text can transform the meaning and purpose of the image.

I am interested in how Barthes' (1977) connotation procedures can assist viewers in thinking deeply and broadly about the potential intent of the creator/artist and possible unintentional meanings of the artifacts and contemporary artwork. Within many cultures, race and gender can represent ahistorical "universal" signs. Blackness and womanhood (together and separately) have unique narratives. Often those narratives are fixed ideas of Blackness, womanhood, and/or Black womanhood. However, using Barthes' connotation procedures as a framework, we can question the supposed universal understandings of Afro-Brazilians and other women of African descent and use the process for other seemingly natural signs of identity and history. Here, the goal is to use Barthes to reimagine representation that asserts humanity.

Liberatory Gaze with Artifacts

I will revisit a photograph I experienced entitled *John Arthur Gomes Leal Ferreira Villela with the Wet Nurse Monica* (1860)¹ in the *Museum of Man in the Northeast* (*Museu Do Homem Do Nordeste*) in Recife, Brazil. (From this point forward, I will refer to the photo and the female subject as "Monica"). The *Museum of Man* is a compilation of archives from three formerly separate museums, each with a designated space: The Museum of Anthropology, the Pernambuco Museum of Popular Art (MAP), and the Museum of Sugar. The purpose of the Museum of Sugar collection is to demonstrate the interconnections of the social challenges, agricultural process, and technological innovations related to sugar production in the region. However, these archives appear to attempt to re-present Brazilian chattel slavery under the auspices of sugar production. Paintings of Africans laboriously producing sugar with salvaged industrial tools of the time period and a wall dedicated to chains and metal restraints forced upon African bodies speak of the brutality of the institution without its designated space being overtly named as such. This seemingly covert maneuver is apparent

with the placement of this large imposing photograph of Monica, a Black woman and John Arthur, a young white boy.

To discuss the messages within this piece, the image and text must be analyzed. Barthes (1977) asserts that a press photograph carries a message with two distinct elements: the image and the caption. Among those two elements are two types of messages: denoted or “literal reality” (p. 17) and the connoted message which communicates society’s norms. The image works as a rebus with its own language independent of the image’s production [“structural autonomy” (p. 15)] or how the image is received by the viewer. Describing the basic material and visual elements of the photo is the denotation process which is the first step in the signifying practice. For *Monica*, the denotation is a photograph with an estimated size of thirty-six by twenty-four inches displaying a seated Black female figure in a dress with a small white child standing next to her.

Meaning does not *reside in* this photograph. It is *constructed and produced by* a signifying practice that “makes things mean” through a language system (Hall, 2000, p. 24). The meaning is in its symbolic function because the image stands for (or signifies) a concept outside of itself.² We use this signifying practice to generate representations. Representation “is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language. It is the link between concepts and language which enables us to *refer to*” things (p. 17). The meaning of a sign is constructed and fixed by a code. Meaning is dependent on varying culturally-based codes and the relationship between a photograph (signifier) and its meaning (signified) is arbitrary. As a result, from culture to culture, meaning can never be truly finite or universal.

Connotation is the second stage of the signifying practice. The connotation procedure describes in order to “change structures, to signify something different to what is shown” (Barthes, 1977, p. 19). For the connotation procedure, we use the first set of signifieds gathered from the denotation process: A full body sepia photograph of a seated older Black woman dressed in elegant European clothing with a young white boy standing to the right of her. The assumed universal meaning of women and children would tell us that Monica and young John Arthur connote maternal love or an intimate union of sorts. The second set of signifieds are linked to the first –the domesticity of Black women during Brazilian slavery in the mid-19th century. When joined, the two sets of signifieds produce a more elaborate message: Enslaved Afro-Brazilian women were well-taken care of, loved by the children they nursed, and were a necessary and accepted part of White Brazilian households.

We also take into account the title of the work because, for Barthes (1977), the image is in communication with the caption. They work together but are separate. The photo is a “continuous message” (p. 17) always offering information without a fixed code. Because of this “analogical plentitude” (p. 18), interpretations can be endless. To satiate the desire to decode, viewers use “a stock of stereotypes” (p. 18). Barthes’ work questions cultural assumptions and values contained in “universal” cultural signifiers and seeks to expose their manipulation and unnaturalness. These assumptions can be understood as myths.

Denotation is pure objectivity. According to Barthes (1977), the image is the perfect objective analogon for reality. Connotation is not immediately comprehensible like denotation. In order to effectively “read” an image, the viewer must be conscious of the signs within the image and the codes created from each of those signs. The challenge of objectivity is that it becomes vulnerable to mythical interpretations. Barthes explains that

cultural myths are “second-order signifieds” (p. 25) or connotations which impose bourgeois values on image consumers. In Brazilian political, fictional, and abolitionist literature, Afro-Brazilian women’s enslavement was romanticized for the upper-class literate public. An example is a story of an enslaved wet-nurse who is denied access to her newborn child as a punishment from the plantation owner. When given a white child to breastfeed, instead of hatred and revolt, she adores it as if it were her own (Roncador, 2006, p. 56). According to Roncador, the myth of the Afro-Brazilian wet-nurse or Black Mammy “served the sociologist’s goal of advocating in favor of the presence of Black slaves and, in particular, the wet-nurse’s role in the plantation owner’s home” (p. 63). As a result of the invention of photography and the mass circulation of photographs, the image of Afro-Brazilian wet-nurses served as one of the most effective tools in the construction of “a benign view of slavery in the old sugar plantations” (p. 63). We can assume that Monica was denied care of her own children to take care of young John Arthur, the plantation owner’s offspring. Historian Luiz Felipe de Alencastro (1997) describes Monica’s photo as

[t]he image of a paradoxical union but admittedly so. A union founded on love in the present and past violence. In the violence that split the soul of a slave, opening the affective space being invaded by the son of his master. Almost all of Brazil fit this picture (pp. 439-440).³

Alencastro tells us how visual culture can signify information beyond its visual limits.

Barthes (1977) uses six structural terms for the connotation process that will assist in further investigating those limits: trick effects, pose, objects, photogenia, aestheticism, and syntax. Of the six, “pose” and “object” are most useful for this example. Barthes encourages us to question what the subjects’ poses say about their relationship. Monica’s piercing stare is toward her spectator. While she sits next to a standing young child, her body language implies that the child’s affection for her is not reciprocated. The child embraces her while her arms remain in her lap. She faces forward as the young child’s body is turned toward her.

Using a Socratic method to push students away from stagnant and trite cultural narratives of Blackness, womanhood, and the institution of chattel slavery, teachers could help students to consider the state of many Afro-Brazilians in the 19th century, the culture and traditions Monica and other Africans brought to Brazil, and the body language in the photograph to generate alternative narratives for enslaved Black women. These critical perspectives of the educator and student spectators should be used as teachable moments. Students learn to discuss art in a more comprehensive way that constructs numerous potential narratives for the subject of the artwork in hopes that the student spectators transfer those humane narrative possibilities to real bodies. For Monica, this critical gaze enables the construction of an inhumane narrative about Black female subjects within artwork. How might we consider Monica’s gaze as the grounding of an alternative text? She was the caretaker of her enslaver’s child. The child that embraces her will mostly likely be the future enslaver of her children. Yet, the livelihood of this child is dependent on the nutrients from her body. How might that make her feel? Since she is a wet nurse, that means she was once pregnant. Was her child neglected in order to feed her enslaver’s child? Did being a wet nurse limit her abilities to be a mother again? How do her gaze and a critical analysis of the image help us to consider alternative texts?

Second, Barthes (1977) asks viewers to give importance to the objects photographed. But in this example, it is the objects surrounding the image that assist in disrupting the myth. Objects are “accepted inducers of associations of ideas” (p. 22). Therefore, because Monica’s image is surrounded by chains used during enslavement, the myth of the faithful “slave” with unyielding maternal love is subverted. The willing “symbol of unconditional fidelity and absolute servitude to the master’s class” (Roncador, 2006, p. 56) within 19th century Brazilian literature is no longer a fixed code. Taking the pose, objects, caption, and historical context into consideration for interrogation, we are able to disrupt the myth.

Unsettling myths is dependent on the spectator’s knowledge of the signs. “The link between signifier and signified remains...entirely historical” (Barthes, 1977, p. 27). Barthes argues against the assumption that there are natural trans-historical feelings and values connected to images unless those values and feelings are given contextual specificity. The signification process resolves the “contradiction between cultural and natural man” (p. 28). The process of finding the continuous code(s) connotation would be to “isolate, inventoriare and structure all the ‘historical’ elements of the photograph, all the parts of the photographic surface which derive their very discontinuity from a certain knowledge on the reader’s part, or ... from the reader’s cultural situation” (p. 28). The reader gathers information from the image and the associated text, then attempts to create meaning from these two forms of communication based on his or her knowledge.

The photographic paradox is the co-existence of the two messages: the code-less image and the coded text accompanying it displace the image’s assumed neutrality. It is through the “mode of imbrication” (Barthes, 1977, p. 20) that we are able to attempt to comprehend and take apart the photographic paradox. Within this paradox Barthes privileges words: “the image no longer *illustrates* the words; it is now the words which, structurally, are parasitic on the image” (p. 25). For *Monica* the text not only informs the viewer of the relationship between Monica and young John Arthur, but (in relation to the objects surrounding the image) gives us clues about their tenuous relationship. The text rationalizes the image.

Two elements of this practice are particularly important: semantics and the gaze. Primarily, students are to question the semantic choices used to describe the subject. Although the word “slave” is not used in the caption for the photograph, viewers are to interpret Monica’s position as a slave. “Slave” is often used to identify those transported from Africa to the Americas. But the term does not allow for alternative texts. It is not “problem-posing” (Freire, 1970/2010, p. 84) or demythologizing but rather finite. Historian Deborah Gray White (1999) asserts:

The increased focus on brutality and resistance has shifted the historiography and language of slavery. African and African-American women were not born degraded but rendered so by enslavement...The noun “slave” suggests a state of mind and being that is absolute and unmediated by an enslaver. “Enslaved” says more about what *happened* to Black people without unwittingly describing the sum total of who they were. “Enslaved” forces us to remember that Black men and women were Africans and African-Americans before they were forced into slavery and had a new and denigrating identity assigned to them. “Enslaved” also nudges us to rethink our idea about Black resistance under slavery (p. 8).

Word choice affects students’ understanding (or misunderstanding) of cultural groups. Therefore, phrases such as “bonded African,” “displaced African,” or “enslaved African” are

ways for students to see that their occupation or the product of their circumstance does not determine their identity. In addition, including “African” in the term reminds students that people like Monica came from a variety of nations with previously established knowledge and traditions.

The goal of Socratic “problem-posing” methodology is to bring the subject’s humanity to the forefront. Using the term “Slave” does not allow for the conceptualization of shared power, rather, it reemphasizes the economic power and imperialistic force of certain European entities of that time period. That continued emphasis allows for what Wynter (2003) calls an overrepresentation of the “Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom” (p. 260). By asserting the Black subject’s humanity, students begin to unsettle the “Western Bourgeois conception of human” that was the foundation of “colonial difference... on which the world of modernity was to institute itself” (p. 260). By scrutinizing the word, we scrutinize the labels and the histories attached to the word, and we allow for a theoretical revisionist history through an arts-based liberating practice. It is important, though, that the educator does not mislead students into believing they, alone, have the power to liberate. They are simply acknowledging the humanity already present. This recognition is the *liberatory gaze*.

The liberatory gaze is similar to bell hooks’ (2010) *oppositional gaze* in that they both confront domination and trouble myths. Hooks asserts that “by courageously looking, we defiantly declare... Even in the worst circumstances of domination the ability to manipulate one’s gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it, opens up the possibility of agency” (p. 116). The oppositional gaze “looks” to document and looks to assert agency by claiming and cultivating “awareness” (p. 116). It works to remove us from the confines of “normalized” socialization that detract us from the possibilities of “border crossing”⁴ (i.e., purposefully and critically stepping out of our cultural comfort zones and into others’).

The liberatory gaze actively looks and interrogates to change reality. It is an act of resistance that re-humanizes the subject in the face of images and structures that attempt to marginalize, dominate, and exclude. Here, the liberatory gaze critiques the stares of Monica, the child, the photographer, and the photograph’s intended audience. It requires students to look at Monica in her historical context and to consider her mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual state in order to create alternative narratives that take into account the oppositional gazes of the marginalized.⁵

Franz Fanon (1967), an Afro-Caribbean psychiatrist and the seminal theoretician of postcolonial politics, culture, and identity, offers a narrative expressing the power of the gaze. Fanon, explains an encounter with a European child:

“Look, a Negro!” It was an external stimulus that flicked me over as I passed by. I made a tight smile. ‘Look, a Negro!’ It was true. It amused me. “Look, a Negro!” The circle was drawing a bit tighter. I made no secret of my amusement. “Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened! Frightened! Frightened!” Now they were beginning to be afraid of me....My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, re-colored, clad in mourning in that white winter day. The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly; look, a nigger, it’s cold, the nigger is shivering, the nigger is shivering because he is cold, the little boy is trembling because he is afraid of the nigger, the nigger is shivering with cold, that cold goes through your bones, the handsome little boy is trembling because he thinks that the nigger is

quivering with rage, the little White boy throws himself into his mother's arms: Mama, the nigger's going to eat me up (pp. 113-114).

Fanon (1967) contends that colonized people are forever "overdetermined," "sealed in objecthood" and "...abraded into nonbeing." He asserts that Black people are at a disadvantage when trying to develop a bodily representation that removes the colonizer-imposed objecthood. The Eurocentric creation and perpetuation of Blacks' subjugated status and Blacks' internalization of this inferiority have created a compromising position for Blacks as the definer of Blackness without enough agency to disconnect themselves from their empirically derived overdetermined state (pp. 109, 12-14). Fanon's theory of the overdetermined state functions similarly to Barthes' myths. Both relay assumptions of cultures contained in signifiers. To be overdetermined is to be always already: always already understood, spoken for, abilities and values always already predetermined. It is blanketed assumptions that cover ethnicities, cultures, or other groups of people. Fanon addresses the specific signifier of Blackness.

Ahmed (2004) uses Fanon's (1967) experience as a way to describe the power of the gaze during an encounter of bodies where the misreading of the "other" is done from the surface of the body. As affect moves among bodies, it incites emotions from the spectator and the subject being gazed upon; in fact, affect is a way to describe the conscious or unconscious transfer of emotions from one body to another (Fanon's body incites fear in the child; Fanon feels the child's fear, and his body responds with anxiety). These emotions, fostered by previous knowledge and/or assumptions about the subject being gazed upon (the child believed that Fanon was dangerous), can predetermine how the spectator will interact with the subject. As stereotypes continue to be associated with bodies (e.g. danger and fear with Black males), affect circulates and produces emotions that accumulate over time.

According to Ahmed (2004), the traits and emotions connected to the stereotyped body become reinforced. Because of the repetitive circulation of affect, the attributes the spectator places on gazed-upon subjects become what Ahmed calls *sticky*. This stickiness is what makes stereotyped bodies overdetermined. The contrived and ahistorical characteristics learned by spectators (the child) become stuck on real bodies (Fanon and other Black men). For the child, the gaze removed Fanon's humanity and became an observation of an overdetermined state of objectification. Putting artworks in context, like *Monica*, serves to avoid such assumptive encounters among learners, artworks, and the bodies those artworks may represent.

According to Fanon (1967), overdeterminedness forces Blacks to live triply as "the evanescent other, hostile but not opaque, transparent, not there, disappeared" (p. 112). My narrative as an African American female artist and educator who relates to *Monica* and can express a narrative of an overdetermined existence offers a perspective that can construct alternative texts for the dominant Eurocentric narrative placed on works containing non-European subjects. Standing in front of the photograph looking at *Monica* looking at me, I felt "a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness" (Du Bois, 1903/2003, p. 9). At that moment, I understood that *Monica* knew she had to be able to see herself through the eyes of others who look at her in "amused contempt and pity," (Du Bois, 1903/2003, p. 9) but also had to recognize that abolitionist literature, other media outlets, and her enslaver's perception of her are not accurate. Although Du Bois's (1903/2003) double-consciousness is helpful here, it does not take gender into account: I felt not just a two-ness standing there, but a three-ness. I am an African North American woman, and she is an African South

American woman whose authentic narratives keep us grounded, but we must navigate through spaces that do not acknowledge our authentic intersectionalities (Crenshaw, 1991).⁶ A gaze from the perspectives of the intersections of Blackness, womanhood, and (North and South) American identities follows Dubois' (1903/2003) theory of double consciousness. These identities represent the paradoxical interaction of "[three] souls, [three] thoughts, [three] unreconciled strivings; [three] warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (p. 9). Both of our societies require us to be "continually accompanied by [our] own self image," within an allotted and confined space controlled by what hooks (2004) calls an "imperialist White-supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (pp. 17-18).⁷ A liberatory practice asserts humanity in response to such hegemonic forces.

Such a practice is based on Freire's (1970/2010) *problem-posing education*, which utilizes a Socratic methodology of teaching that encourages students to think beyond dominant narratives. This process of the liberatory gaze is a way to expand upon ideas that assist in preparing students to read, comprehend, discuss, and interpret visual culture. In an arts-based problem-posing practice, the educator would not simply tell the students the date and title of the work and identify Monica only by her occupation as an enslaved woman. Instead, through a problem-posing practice, students look intently with great curiosity, interest, and wonder to recognize that her body may have been enslaved, but physical enslavement is not an automatic reflection of her intellect and abilities.

The image of Monica is the myth of Afro-Brazilian womanhood. "As with every myth, that of the Black Mammy has the task of hiding a reality under a false pretense of visibility" (Roncador, 2006, p. 65). She is central to the population gains and the livelihood of Brazil, yet she is rendered insignificant by her overdetermined state. Gonzalez (2008) sheds light on how the Afro-Brazilian female body encompasses a unique position of duality: visible yet invisible. Afro-Brazilian women are inconspicuously rendered as central to the maintenance and creation of Brazil's diverse society, while conspicuously presented as objects of sexual desire and servitude in domestic life and popular culture. "Combined with the pervasiveness of anti-Black aesthetics in popular culture," Gonzalez notes, "this has resulted in a negative imprint on Afro-Brazilian female bodies" (p. 223). This "imprint," like Ahmed's "stickiness," causes overdetermination. It is an imprint of stigmatization the child saw on Fanon, and it is how certain Brazilian literature presented her. "The degree to which miscegenation is at the core of national identity has made Afro-Brazilian women the necessary physical providers of pleasure, comfort, and wombs...Afro-Brazilian women are positioned as 'the altruistic caretakers' of White Brazilians, rather than full citizens and equal participants in Brazilian national culture" (Gonzalez, p. 223).

The regurgitated story of a downtrodden, passive, bonded existence without fluidity, change, or exceptions disallows her authentic story from being considered. Monica may not incite fear (like Fanon and the child), but feelings of pity, shame, worthlessness, dehumanization, and paternalism often associated with slavery can be transferred from her image to other Black female bodies by the spectator. Our ability to recognize those affective feelings is associated with our consciousness. Thus it is important for educators to understand that consciousness is multi-leveled and unique to each person. Acknowledging this helps us to understand and determine goals for the classroom, our students' perceptions, and the material we choose to introduce.

Liberatory Gaze in Contemporary Art

Several contemporary artists create alternative texts for overdetermined bodies, such as Catherine Opie, Shirin Neshat, Wangechi Mutu, and Kara Walker. Their theoretically multi-layered works offer insight into their multi-consciousness, and their images are a manifestation of ideas that allude to looming socio-political issues. Of these, Walker's work aligns particularly closely with Monica, as her inspiration is formed from stories like Monica's: "Through her works, we come to reconsider how representations of Blackness are a reflection of (art) history –a fabrication informed by fantasy, fascination, nihilism, narcissism, and pathology" (Joo, Keehn II, & Ham-Roberts, 2011, p. 36). Works such as *Cut* (1998) can be interpreted as alternative narratives of enslaved women's resistance to slavery. In Walker's paper-cut silhouette style, *Cut* presents an African American woman jubilantly suspended in the air with a razor blade clinched in the left hand and two broken wrists with blood spewing from the openings. Other works use descriptive titles pulled from actual events, such as *Bureau of Refugees: May 29 Richard Dick's wife beaten with a club by her employer, Richard remonstrated –in the night was taken from his house and beaten with a buggy trace nearly to death by his employer and 2 others* (2007), referring to events outside of the artwork. Walker explains, "One theme in my artwork is the idea that a Black subject in the present tense is a container for specific pathologies from the past and is continually growing and feeding off those maladies" (Joo et al., p. 222). Here Walker asserts that the Black body is a "container" for static and pathological narratives that support the White supremacist patriarchy power structure. Circulation of these imposed pathologies is how they continue to grow, feed, and remain "stuck" on contemporary bodies.

By implementing the liberatory gaze, we invoke plurality in our reading of images. In Walker's manuscript "A Proposition by Kara Walker: The object of Painting is the subjugated Body," the painter is the colonizing entity. Her questions of "How do Paintings understand the concept of liberty? And who will teach them?" reflect the practice of the liberatory gaze upon the subjugated overdetermined body. She likewise asks:

Can this canvas, sub-subaltern that it is [yes, and worse, inanimate object], give voice to its own needs? Where do paintings locate themselves in a universe of objects and ideas? ... Do all paintings contain within them the damaging history of their captivity or can they, like victims of state-sponsored suppression and violence, resist the systemic damage that has been done to them? Paintings need allies, they will need influence (Joo et al., 2011, p. 40).

The liberatory gaze is a look of resistance. It is a resistance that works to change present and past falsities/realities. To educate a generation of artists and appreciators of art is to have them recognize that contemporary art work involves contemporary art practices from both artists and spectators. Accordingly, both students and educators must employ theory, writing, history, and other elements in order to comprehend fully the breadth and depth of old and new images.

As an African American educator in a majority European American context, I work to express my alternative texts to students so that they will have the opportunity to question possible limited narratives about me, people who look like me, and others who don't look like them. I have recognized that exposing my mainstream post-secondary students to alternative texts for multicultural subjects shakes their world in ways that, for many of them, hasn't happened before. I challenge them to stop the dilution of multicultural subjects

(e.g., *just Black, just Native, homosexual, or poor*) just as I do not accept their position of being *just White*. They are thus required to be exposed to and use new perspectives for seeing themselves and those around them, and they aren't quite sure what to do with their new found perspective.

The liberatory gaze resists conscription into overdeterminedness for all marginalized subjects by consistently finding entryways to advocate for the marginalized subject's empowerment through empowering words. It resists the "Imperialist imperative" (Joo et al., 2011, p. 39) that limits the complexity of marginalized bodies with pathologies. The liberatory spectator and educator critique the myth of overdeterminedness and require its removal. The liberatory gaze "unsticks" the disguise through an analysis of stereotypical narratives. It considers the authenticity of who Monica was or may have been.

That students recognize and advocate for Monica's (and other multicultural subjects') authenticity is crucially important to the problem-posing pedagogical practice of the liberatory gaze. However, educators must exercise caution. The students' gaze should not simply replace the Eurocentric upper-class male gaze the image was intended for. We do not want to encourage a paternalistic gaze, one that looks with "contempt and pity" (Dubois, 1903/2003), p. 9). Its antonym, the liberatory gaze, pushes students to "imagine a painting [or any medium] using the raw flesh of itself as a savage instrument for change" (Joo et al., 2011, p. 40). It demands that artists and art educators require nothing less than their students' work to contribute to the morality of society and not to paralyzing benevolence.

But educators' efforts to avoid the paternalistic gaze and provoke critical-thinking arts-based pedagogy must be deliberative and must value our varied consciousnesses. An educator's personal narratives and unique insight can provide a basis for a holistic and multi-faceted learning atmosphere, but the educator must be willing to be self-reflective. Educators have to be able to determine their gaze, confront limited perspectives, and embrace their multi-consciousnesses. It's an ongoing, ever changing learning process for willing participants. As educators insert themselves into the curriculum, they can assist students' in their border-crossing learning experience. This process is often most productive with artists who vicariously take their observers on a journey of inquiry and social discomfort through visual and performative experiences: Kerry James Marshall, Coco Fusco, Guillermo Gómez, Wafaa Bilal, James Luna, and Michael Ray Charles are just a few more ideal candidates. As we challenge ourselves, we challenge our students in the hope that we all challenge the world around us.

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Endnotes

¹ *João Ferreira Villela Artur Gomes Leal com a ama-de-leite Mônica*

² Concepts are mental representations of things within our mind that allow us to interpret the world. The system of representation consists of different ways of organizing and creating relationships among individual concepts (Hall, 2000, p. 17). Signs are words, sounds or images that carry meaning for the concepts and conceptual relationships in our heads. Signs are up for interpretation through individuals' unique conceptual maps. "The relation between 'things,' concepts and signs lies at the heart of the production of meaning in language. The code connects meanings to signs via language and is grounded in culture. The process which links these three elements together (code, sign, and concepts) is 'representation'" (p. 19).

³ See Alencastro (1997) for original Portuguese version.

⁴ Giroux (1991) offers readers a process called border pedagogy that analyzes how educational institutions regulate moral and political "norms." Border pedagogy digs deeper into what multiculturalism has the ability to interrogate: "Whose history, story, and experience prevails in the school setting? ... [W]ho speaks for whom, under what conditions, and for what purposes" (p. 507)? Giroux argues, "Students need more than information about what constitutes a common culture, they need to be able to critically assess dominant and subordinate traditions so as to narrate themselves" (p. 508). He continues to say that students need to

understand how cultural, ethnic, racial, ideological differences enhance the possibility for dialogue, trust and *solidarity* [emphasis mine]....The pedagogical and ethnical practice which [he is] emphasizing is one that offers opportunities for students to be border crossers; as border crossers, students not only refigure the boundaries of academic disciplines in order to engage in new forms of critical inquiry, they also are offered the opportunities to negotiate and translate the multiple references that construct different cultural codes, experiences and histories. (p. 508)

⁵ bell hooks (2010) argues that for African Americans, from childhood to adulthood, the gaze is political, and the mass media have given a new level of power to the gaze. Reflecting on her childhood, hooks argues that the gaze was controlled by parents who chastised children for looking adults in the eye and by law enforcement who arrested Black men who, by Jim Crow law, could not look at White women in fear of being lynched for "eyeball rape." The gaze equated to punishment for certain groups of people, and the punishment was administered by those who had the power to gaze at will. For hooks, agency becomes the center of power. Hooks discusses how cinema provided a way for spectators to freely gaze upon widely circulated taboo and tolerated images in the United States mass media. There were images of bodies (such as White women) that could not be gazed upon in reality. The repression of the African American gaze, according to hooks, produced an overwhelming desire to look. The gaze became a stare of resistance used to change reality, a resistance she called the "oppositional gaze."

⁶ See Crenshaw (1991) for more information on the politics of intersectionalities of race and gender.

⁷ My narrative and Monica's show that our multiple consciousnesses have been created in response to discovering that it is necessary to learn how we see ourselves and how the world conceptualizes our presence. Such acknowledgment allows for a multi-angled perspective that can disrupt the looming hegemonic patriarchy. For a more in depth explanation of "imperialist White-supremacist capitalist patriarchy," see hooks (2004):

Nothing discounts the old antifeminist projection of men as all-powerful more than their basic ignorance of a major facet of the political system that shapes and informs male identity and sense of self from birth until death. I often use the phrase 'imperialist White-supremacist capitalist patriarchy' to describe the interlocking political systems that are the foundation of our nation's politics. Of these systems the one that we all learn the most about growing up is the system of patriarchy, even if we never know the word, because patriarchal gender roles - are assigned to us as children and we are given continual guidance about the ways we can best fulfill these roles. Patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence (pp. 17-18).