Disembodiment and the Total Body
A Response to Enwezor on Contemporary South African Representation

Brian Keith Axel

Since the advent of democracy, and in opposition to it, the body is thus revitalized.
Claude Lefort, The Image of the Body and Totalitarianism

When a nation speaks — if a nation could speak — of integration, of unity in diversity, or of fissiparous tendencies, talk of the body, or the 'body-politic', is never far behind. And with it desire, prohibition, bondage, symptom and the rest. Hence the historical reproduction of the convoluted metonymical operation, which seems so easy to enact, by which the body is understood to stand in for the transcendental 'individual' subject, and the subject for society as a whole (body, citizen, sovereignty, The People).¹ It is a curious old story, one so pervasive and perverse, repetitive and obdurate, that disclaimers about 'metaphoric' or 'descriptive' reference seem to have little significance.² It is certainly interesting that an indissoluble conflation seems to have been put in place: categories of iteration, sites of liberation and domination, modalities of representation, etc. Of equal interest is that commentators of the left and right, if I may make such a distinction, have often been equally adept at deconstructing the body politic, only to put it, in all its totality, back within the frame of the nation — or, more precisely, to put the nation back into the confines of the body.

¹ The phrasing is Paul Silverstein's. See Paul Silverstein, 'Between Muhammad and Michael Jordan: Bodily Practice, Social Reproduction and Algerian Immigration in France', forthcoming.
I have been thinking about the relations of the nation and the body in my current work on Indian diasporas, cartography and visual representation. The recent critical writings of Okwui Enwezor, artistic director of the 1997 Johannesburg Biennale, have provided me with the welcome opportunity to address these issues somewhat differently. My reflections in the preceding paragraph stem from Enwezor's provocative contention: "The struggle (for the meaning of identity in post-Apartheid South Africa) hinges on who controls the representational intentionality of the body politic, especially its archives of images, symbolic and literal." It seems that, with its critics, South Africa, perhaps the quintessential 'new' nation, is in the midst of a struggle over the production of a new body — whole and thus, as Berlant would argue, penetrable — in which the 'Rainbow Nation' will reside. It also seems, to me, that, given the fragility of the South African situation and the possibility that its analysis may set an important precedent for theories of representation and identity politics, there is enough incentive to pay close attention to the trajectory of Enwezor's argument.

Enwezor is well aware of the import of this historical moment. This much is clear from the earnest tone of his argument, which is broad reaching — traversing problems of domination in the Apartheid state, of obstacles to the formation of the post-Apartheid 'Rainbow Nation', and of contemporary 'white' diasporic South African art production. A singular question resonates through each of these domains: "Who is included or excluded from [the] body politic and on what terms their admittance or exclusion ratified?" In these disparate domains, mediated apparently by the mobility and mutability of the 'black body', what is perhaps most fervidly articulated is the allegation that art made by 'white South African' artists not only mimics the contradictions of racist oppression, but also contains the symptoms and vehicles which perpetuate those very structures of violence and inequality. In Enwezor's terms, it is the 'white' artist's repetitive appropriation of the 'black body' which both belies such a continuity and offends the very project of the "Rainbow Nation". After a history of domination, in which "the white South African... has always been in control of how the eyes see and perceive the African", it is now necessary for the post-Apartheid "black South African... to retrieve his [sic] own body from the distortive proclivities of white representation". In short, Enwezor's argument is that one and the same unfinished battle has arrested both the progress of contemporary South African art and the ability of the post-Apartheid nation to "imagine" a new identity: "the ideological battle... over the control of the black body".

How to imagine identity 'in the present tense' of South Africa? Whither contemporary South African art? In conjunction with the question of the 'body politic', Enwezor frequently returns to, and conjoins, these two questions, demonstrating, in both domains, disapproval of representations which portray "the black body" as an object of "denigration and desubstantialisation", distortion, decapitation, and fragmentation. This opprobrium runs through many of Enwezor's writings. For example, in a review of a 1995 exhibition at the Whitney Museum in New York, Enwezor criticises representations of the 'black' body because "we come upon it as perpetual fragments; we see it as diminished, disembodied and homeless... a body that is never whole." Additionally, this opprobrium is related to a general theory of representation, for which the urgency of liberatory politics seems to justify the elision of any distinction between a literal 'black' body and the representation of a 'black' body, enabling the collapse of the function of representation into that of the

Enwezor's Third Text essay is a slight restructuring of an earlier essay, for which I will also give citations. Okwui Enwezor, 'Reframing the Black Subject: Ideology and Fantasy in Contemporary South African Art' in Contemporary Art from South Africa. Catalogue for an Exhibition (curated by Marith Hope), Oslo, 1997 (1997b), p 23. Following the editor's request, in order not to be excessively cumbersome, I am not providing footnote-citations for each quotation from Enwezor's works. I ask the reader to please consult these two respective articles.


representative. Hence, in the 1995 and 1997 essays, Enwezor introduces the opinions of concerned observers — observers who, looking at the art productions, "find it difficult to recognise themselves or their communities". These art products fail because they are representations/representatives which fail to 'speak for' the 'member' of the 'black' community who, within the context of post-Apartheid South Africa, Enwezor almost invariably defines as male.' On the basis of these propositions, I can't help but understand Enwezor's answer to the questions of the body politic, contemporary South African art, and imagining South African identity to be one which demands the portrait of a male 'black' body, whole, undistorted, and in exemplary form — a visual image that closes the gap between the kind of representation and the representation of kind, a representative that speaks for the Rainbow Nation.

**BODIES AND DISEMBODIMENT**

Let me try to work through the issues of representation which Enwezor raises in another way. I am at first reminded of Louis Marin's felicitous construction of an auto-erotic scene in which the Monarch contemplates a portrait of himself, uttering: "That is the King", "I am the King", "We are the King" — to which must be added "This is my body". In this scene, the subject must recognise himself in the representation. The portrait of the King, in this scene, is a presence in the same way that the Eucharist is the presence of Jesus. This redoubling of the royal presence, though, forms an irresolvable tension. Specifically, the presence of the 'individual' King, while necessary, also "renders the adequation unequal to itself". The "disappearance of the individual" is the condition of possibility by which the Monarch, inhabiting an eternal instance (of the portrait) and an infinite duration (of lineage), acquires "for himself a title that begins with a capital letter — the King".

My interest in invoking Marin is not to draw an equation between monarchical and democratic scopic regimes, but to suggest a historical point of departure for understanding the production of the image of the body concurrent with the advent of democracy and capitalism. It may be that "The Portrait of the King's Glorious Body" illuminates a structure of displacement and form of relation which, constituted historically prior to the apotheosis of capitalism, continue to be at work, but which have become, as Marx would say, "subordinated to [capital] and correspondingly altered in the mechanism of their functioning".

So, first the question of displacement. Marin suggests that when the King contemplates his own portrait, the mystery of royal power is constituted through a specific kind of displacement: not only of the "real referent", the referential body, but also of "real history" (a notion which undermines the eternal instance and infinite duration of monarchy). Yet, this displacement, emerging with a desire to see oneself as the absolute, is transformed when another spectator takes the position in front of the King's portrait, and herein lies a displacement and a form of relation between representation and subject which I will continue to interrogate. The distinction here — between the primal scene and the scene of subjectification, between the representation of a body and the productivity of representation — is crucial. Echoing Foucault's formulation of the "parade" in which "subjects" were presented as "objects" to the observation of a power that was manifested only by its gaze, Marin writes:

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6 Ibid.
7 Consider, also: "The colonised man is an envious man... he wants to write his own history, retrieve his own body", Enwezor, 1997a, p 6.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
12 Marin, op cit, pp 189, 207.
The spectator does anything but look at the King's portrait and is anything but a subject caught staring at the king. Instead, the spectator is the object of the Monarch's gaze, he or she is constituted by and subjected to this gaze, and thereby transformed into a political subject... The portrait of the King is theory of the King, it is the theologico-political theory of the royal body.\textsuperscript{13}

In other words, in the scopic regime of monarchy, the form of relation which concerns me is one in which the 'representation' constitutes the viewing subject, rather than its 'real' referent (the King?); and, conversely, the structure of displacement is one in which the subject is dialectically constituted by relinquishing the possibility of any self-governing property to the sovereign.

The scopic regime of Monarchy, though, is not the same as that under the social formations of democracy and capitalism, and it is clear that the explanation of the productions of the body and the subject cannot simply be transposed from one to the other.\textsuperscript{14} One way to begin to understand this may be to consider the ways in which the image of the body and the formulation of sovereignty have been reconstituted — a process which Claude Lefort has illuminated nicely.\textsuperscript{15} Moving from the conceptualisation of the king's body as a "double body... underpinned by the body of Christ"\textsuperscript{16} and "invested with... the idea of the unity of the body and the distinction between the head and the limbs",\textsuperscript{17} Lefort argues that the advent of democracy brings with it the destruction of the royal body and the decapitation of the body politic. Most importantly, though, democracy also, and perversely, inaugurates a "disincorporation of individuals", whereby the corporeality of the social is dissolved in the idea of universal suffrage.\textsuperscript{18} As a result, the image of the body under democracy — in which The People are sovereign, in which "society is supposed to coincide with itself" — is a grotesque: "An impossible swallowing up of the body in the head begins to take place, as does an impossible swallowing up of the head in the body. The attraction of the whole is no longer dissociated from the attraction of the parts".\textsuperscript{19}

Lauren Berlant has provided an important supplementation and critique of Lefort, in terms of a question of patriarchy and racism, which suggests a way to understand the problem of representations of the body under the social formations of democracy and capitalism.\textsuperscript{20} Writing on the interwoven logics of the commodity and citizenship, and specifically on the "erotic utopia of the female commodity",\textsuperscript{21} Berlant argues that the post-Enlightenment body politic is constituted in a "peculiar dialectic between embodiment and abstraction" through which "white male privilege has been veiled by the rhetoric of the bodiless citizen, the generic 'person' whose political identity is a priori precisely because it is, in theory, non-corporeal".\textsuperscript{22} This has important implications for the production of the privileged 'white' male body. But Berlant's insights are more concerned with the production of disparate female bodies. In order to avoid the "pornotroping of racist patriarchy", women must be submitted to processes of identification with a commodified image of the body politic which is constituted through fantasies of disembodiment, self-abstraction and invisibility. The nation-state, thus, demands identification with state disembodiment and in return provides women with an embodiment that is whole, a "prosthetic public female body".\textsuperscript{23} In this dialectical process of "double commodification" (which constitutes images of both the pornographic body and the prosthetic body), and in a regime which valorises "abstraction from the body's dignity", racially marked gendered bodies, as such, are "always-already-violated" bodies. The colonised female body turns out to be "hyperembodied", a "public

\textsuperscript{13} Marin, ibid, pp 199--200.


\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, p 302.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, p 306.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid, p 303.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, p 306.

\textsuperscript{20} Lauren Berlant, op cit.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid, p 178.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid, p. 176 (my italics).

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid, p 178.
embodiment [which] is in itself a sign of inadequacy to proper citizenship".  

The significance of Lefort’s and Berlant’s discussions can be spelled out in terms of a possible understanding of representations of the (whole) body as a problem of democracy. There are two points here. First, it is not merely that ‘representation’ constitutes the gendered and viewing subject. In producing the subject as a citizen with a whole body — a prosthetic body — strategies of national representation make it impossible for the citizen to coincide with its own disembodied sovereignty. Second, and conversely, the nation’s structure of displacement is polyvalent, an elaboration of which I cannot fully detail here (this includes the dialectical production of a series of prior self-governing subjects and bodies of difference which must then be transformed into commensurable entities, ‘citizens’). The point here is that the structure of displacement, which may be properly elaborated in terms of fantasy, is one in which the (‘individual’ transformed into a citizen gives itself up to its own (individual/embodied) sovereignty — yet ambivalently so, because the citizen, as embodied, constitutes a threat to collective/disembodied sovereignty. This formulation leaves to the side the very problem of the subject, to which I will return subsequently.

**IMPERSO-NATION**

I would like to begin my return to Enwezor’s argument by way of a recent essay by Jean Comaroff which may help to position his argument, and the preceding discussion, within a narrower set of debates concerned with South African identity politics. Comaroff’s work in South Africa, over the past three decades, has been greatly concerned with the contradictory processes of modernity, capitalism, and the post-Enlightenment nation-state which have complicated the confinement of the nation within the body. Borrowing from Salman Rushdie, Comaroff chooses an apt term to talk about the ambivalent relations of persons and collectivities, identity and citizenship, which constitute ‘the process of figuring the nation in exemplary human form’: Imperso-nation.

Comaroff (after Taylor, n.d.) opens up the problem of Imperso-nation by reflecting on the South African National Gallery’s 1995 exhibition in Cape Town, ‘People’s Portraits’, which was the cause of much controversy. She comments on two inimical styles of imagining ‘the people’:

One, expressing the gallery’s sense of South Africa’s new national cultural identity, consisted of individual portraits, representing the ‘people’ as a range of identities making up a multicultural aggregate. The second, faithful to the legacy of nationalist struggle, depicted a populace in its exemplary figures - heroes, martyrs, and ordinary citizens — all of them products of a particular political history.

Comaroff investigates the tensions embedded in this exhibition by first turning to the broader problem of the nation-state in the post-Cold War era. Her consideration of this historical moment is not a mere rehearsal of the proclamation, commonly articulated today, of the end of the nation-state. Indeed, she rigorously details the significant ways that today’s world has been transformed by multinational capital, the rise of a transnational monetary system, electronic media, and the growth of “planetary institutions, movements and diasporas”. Nevertheless, Comaroff asserts that this moment is to be understood in terms a specific continuity, a historical reconstitution of the contradictions of
modernity" by which the "cultural ideal" of the nation-state is now threatened.\textsuperscript{31} The point here is that this very process, which has compromised sovereignties in new ways and constituted a worldwide recession, was \textit{what made possible} the "unmaking of the Afrikaner state".\textsuperscript{32} "In South Africa, the long hard struggle for a European-style democracy finally triumphed at the very moment when the Euro-nationalist ideal, and the ideological scaffolding that held it in place, was destabilised on a worldwide scale."\textsuperscript{33} This situation pertains to the 'People's Portraits' exhibition in a very specific way. The exhibition's 'argument of images' may be understood in terms of the simultaneous production of 1) identity politics which, mobilised by assertions of difference, move within and across national borders, and 2) strategies of patriarchal governments which attempt to regain a position of sovereignty by "reasserting control and presence in registers they still command, from patriotic spectacles to biopolitics".\textsuperscript{34}

But the argument of images may also be understood as a product of a particular political history of the post-Apartheid state, which, surely, is related to these more general processes. Thus, Comaroff argues that the question of the two different styles of portraiture, and the debates surrounding the exhibit, also emerge from a history of confrontations specific to the production of the 'Rainbow Nation', the 'nonracial' ANC's post-Apartheid social democracy which attempts to "reconcile ethnic identity politics with a Euro-nationalist conception of civil society".\textsuperscript{35} This debate, which has wide currency in South Africa, is between two putatively disparate forms of nationalism, ethno-nationalism and Euro-nationalism, in which adherents of the former, often characterised as "primitive, fanatical and dangerous", accuse the latter of "mouthing global platitudes in defense of privilege, [and] espousing 'amorphous nonracism and common humanity' to protect neocolonial interests".\textsuperscript{36} The problem of these positions is not merely their essentialising strategies. Crucially, echoing Letort and Berlant, Comaroff points out that both positions, reproducing principles of racial and cultural difference, are constituted through an ambivalence immanent to the very desire of Impersonation, and perhaps indicative of certain formations of democracy — specifically, "a contemporary \textit{Heart of Darkness} horror: the nightmare of difference seeking to prevail by (literally) \textit{disembodying} humanity".\textsuperscript{37}

The specific ambivalence here, if I may extrapolate from Comaroff's argument as it relates to the 'People's Portraits' exhibit, must be made clear. There is a desire for the production of a portrait of the new South African body, the desire of Impersonation, which is based upon not only the as yet uncongealed 'community' of democratic society, but also the threat that the body poses for the post-Enlightenment formulation of humanity. Thus, what Comaroff calls the "portrait of the unknown South African" provides a point of scopic recognition of what 'is' absent (i.e., national integration) or what must be absent (i.e., the body which is a threat to disembodied humanity). Simultaneously, there is the perverse desire to see the \textit{disembodying} of humanity, the condition of possibility by which the 'individual' is transformed into a 'citizen'. In this case, the portrait makes present the very obstacle to the apotheosis of humanity, and, perhaps, reflects its impossibility. In brief, the 'People's Portraits' exhibition tells of a specific form of fetishism of the emerging South African nation. With these considerations, I return to a rhetorical question which Comaroff fittingly poses: "Is it any wonder, under the circumstances, that those entrusted with the nation's culture find it impossible to put a face on 'the' new South Africa?"\textsuperscript{38}
PUTTING SOUTH AFRICA BACK IN THE BODY

 Needless to say, as director of the 1997 Johannesburg Biennale, Okwui Enwezor was one of those entrusted with the nation's culture. From this position, he articulated a programme to facilitate the process of putting a face on the new South Africa or putting the Rainbow Nation within a new body — one which included producing a theory that reveals the control which 'white' artists apparently have over representations of the 'black' body (the argument which I detailed in my introduction).

 To return to Enwezor's 1997 articles, the programme included a call to action which, ironically, suggests a process of embodiment based upon disembodiment:

 Notions of whiteness have often constituted the terms of national identity and citizenship and must now be amended [or attenuated] and deconstructed in order to reconstitute the new image of the nation as something neither white nor black, but a rainbow of multiple reflections. 39

 For Enwezor, artists are in a privileged position to imagine, and to create images of, the new South African nation. A major obstacle has been the use, through "anxious repetition", of stereotypical and distortive images of the 'black' body — particularly "old photographic images of Africans" — in the work of 'white' artists. So too has been the "naive mockery" of the Rainbow Nation by some 'white' artists. Thus, given the history of control of representations by 'whites', in Enwezor's perspective the central concern for South Africa must now be "how images in a decolonising South Africa should look like, and who has the right to use which images, and what the authorising narratives ought to be". Enwezor concludes with a proscription: "[T]he less anxiously repeated the image [of the black body], the better the opportunity to find an ethical ground to use its index as a form of discursive address, for a radical revision, as well as to unsettle the apparatus of power which employs it for a structurally codified narrative of dysfunction."

 Thus, deferring the use of images of the 'black' body until some time later, artists may become servants of the state. And art productions, functioning as representations-cum-representatives, may speak for the new Rainbow Nation. This effectively would conflate any distinction between the representations produced by artists, and representations produced by that abstract entity, the nation-state — and so too any differentiation of subject-effects. Let me put this another way. The art product would become a substitute for the very thing it is supposed to represent (the putative presence of the national subject) in such a way that the represented 'reality' seems to speak: a movement, thus, from production of art to nationalist mnemotechnique. 40 And in speaking, the subject, contra Lacanian theory, would not be centred by the very nature of language (or vision), and its desire, the expression of national integrity, would be fulfilled. 41

 Yet, as it stands today, 'white' South African artists, according to Enwezor, continue to be in the service of a hegemonic anti-Rainbow Nation contingency. I would like to draw out Enwezor's propositions about this present state of affairs and distinguish their implications from the theories of representation and the body which I discussed in the preceding sections. The important point is that, in Enwezor's general theory of representation, representation does not

39 Enwezor, op cit 24. (1997a)
constitute a form of relation and a structure of displacement which produce an ambivalently constituted subject. Rather, to supplement what I have said earlier, as 'representational intentionality', representations made by 'white' artists form both a medium through which the character of a prior existing and total 'black' subject is distorted and, conversely, a vehicle by which the a priori self-governing properties of that subject are contained or repressed (and thus may be restored at a later date by the Rainbow Nation). Understood as a problem of intentionality, this theory presupposes an unambiguously purposive agent, the 'white' subject, which enacts and jealously guards the domain of representation. It is because of this that representations produced by 'white' artists, which apparently mock the 'Rainbow Nation', are "really" expressing the desires of a racist 'white' community, "a wounded whiteness" and "separatism under disguise".  


43 Enwezor, 1997b, p 30. This passage is changed slightly (changing the present to past tense) in Enwezor, 1997a, pp 15–16.

44 Comaroff, op cit, p 136.

45 One might note that Enwezor's reconstruction does not correlate to Breitz's mode of production. That Breitz does not utilise a computer to produce large seductive Cibachrome photographic prints, and that the splices are not 'refined', has important implications for an interpretation of the productivity of this work.

46 Consider Enwezor's words: "Surely one must allow that the subjectivity and desire of white women is much attached and closer to white patriarchy and its desubjectivisation of both black men and women."

47 Enwezor's use of Homi Bhabha is unclear. He does not show how Bhabha's theory of the stereotype, developed in an analysis of a historically specific form of colonial domination, might be transposed onto the questions of contemporary South African art. See Homi K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture, Routledge, London, 1994, pp 66–84.

THE RAINBOW SERIES

Enwezor finds this antagonism to the 'Rainbow Nation' exemplified in the work of Candice Breitz, whom he singles out for a three page discussion. In his review, Breitz's Rainbow Series — an example of the "anxious repetition" of images of Africans — is described by way of conjuring its possible moment of production: "She began by pulling images of 'white' women from pages of porn magazines. Then she cuts, rips and collages them with the most stereotypical images of bare-breasted and bare-footed South African women, in 'ethnic' garbs... taken from those tourist postcards familiar to frequent safari fliers... [These] are then spliced and scanned through the computer to produce large, seductive Cibachrome photographic prints." Enwezor reconstructs the artist's specific approach to the images of South African women as well, adding an interpretation of the representational intentionality: "Candice Breitz whitens them out, decapitates and attempts an unsuccessful hybridisation of the bodies of black and white women in a state of falsely mediated sisterhood." One may note the similarity of this comment to that aspect of the ongoing debate in South Africa, of which Comaroff makes mention, concerning those who pose an "amorphous nonracism and common humanity [in order] to protect neocolonial interests".

Enwezor's fetishistic imagining of the moment of origin of the Rainbow Series is dubious, and, indeed, it allows him to attribute an uncomplicated, and racist, intentionality to the artist. But what is most interesting to me is his secondary elaboration, or his 'critique', that the end product is an "unsuccessful hybridisation" which represents a "falsely mediated sisterhood". The three pages of his review are devoted to this apparent failure. For example: "These crude joinings, some of which conflate the bodies of prepubescent black children with those of leering and sexually exposed white women are meant to enact an analogy of equal relationship and compatibility at the site of representation." And rearticulated: "[Breitz's effort is to prove that] the bodies she so solicitously uses for her fictive narrative do indeed cohere." Following from this apparent neglect, Enwezor's main critique is not merely that "she simply couldn't or is unable to tell us just what makes these images congruent". Most importantly, the problem is that Breitz denies the "doing it for daddy" factor. In other words, gender is not sufficient to make 'black' and 'white' women equal because all 'white' women, as subservient to all 'white' men, have been integral to the "desubjectivisation" of all 'black' people.
Enwezor’s critique relies upon several premises, many of which I have noted earlier. We may add to these that, in order for his critique to work, it is necessary that: 1) a theory of stereotypes, does not apply to pornographic representations of ‘white’ women’s bodies; 2) gender includes, within it, sexuality, thus making commentary on the latter unnecessary; 3) an account of gender and sexuality need not consider the imbrication of class structures; 4) the goal of the artist for the art object is to achieve a totalised image (a smooth “joining”)?; 5) the function of art is to produce the art object; 6) the ‘intention’ of the artist can be retrieved; etc. Needless to say, the limits of each of these propositions have been demonstrated at length in recent scholarship.

Is Breitiz attempting to produce a successful hybridisation? Or, rather than a totalising image, is the artist offering a corps morcelé, a violently non-totalised body image, traversed by race, gender and sexuality? If this, indeed, is the case, it is in terms of the production of the ambivalently constituted subject, rather than of the art object, that this work intervenes, providing an important insight into the imbrication of sexuality, aggressivity and narcissism within the procedures of the South African nation (a supplementation to Berlant’s position discussed earlier). What might this image of corps morcelé represent? Or, in other words, what subject does this representation produce (if it does indeed produce anything)? Playing upon the spectre of psychoanalysis within forms of the nation and capital, perhaps the Rainbow Series is a ‘representation’ of the complex interweaving of masculine desire with the desire for integration which a racist patriarchal order constitutes. Perhaps, also, the Rainbow Series ironically re-enacts the peculiar dialectic of embodiment and disembodiment, or abstraction, integral to the production of the hyperembodied prosthetic public female body as a threat to democracy. Perhaps, also, the Rainbow Series constitutes a disruption of the commodified “woman as icon”, which, “displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men, the active controllers of the look, always threatens to evoke the [castration] anxiety it originally signified”. With the insinuation of racial politics into visual space, “a racial politics which is also a sexual politics”, Breitiz’s work potentially “reconfigures the relation of image to identity, of identity to its undoing”.

Yet, an understanding, such as the one I am suggesting, not only relies upon a concept of the subject as imminently divided; it also relies upon a notion of sexuality and aggressivity at the base of the theory of the historical production of the subject. Enwezor’s discussion, though, relies upon an understanding of the subject as, a priori, whole, and upon a theory of aggressivity detached from sexuality. Thus, in his use of the psychic as an analogue for the social, Enwezor achieves what Rose refers to as “a strange innocent of both the psychic and the sexual”. Enwezor’s analysis of the Rainbow Series ends up strangely desexualised. It is from this position that Breitiz’s “bisecting, colouring, whiting and ghosting out, morphing [and] collaging of the black figure within the field of representation... seem to have the common desire of enacting fantasies of whiteness, in which the black figure again returns for meditation as an anathema”.

SEXUALITY AND THE SUBJECT

Enwezor’s fetish for totality is troubling. And, it may be that his formulations of the categories of “the black South African” and “the white South African” recuperate the essentialism of a well-used binary. But what he is writing
against is a crucial and dangerous problem of racist oppression which necessitates careful analysis. The issues which Enwezor raises — concerning the stereotype, photographic media, exhibitions — draw our attention to historical problems of the productions of power and knowledge which traverse the practices of artists and nations, individuals and collectivities. It is here, though, that I find his theory of the subject, detached from a critical understanding of sexuality, to be a weakness and an obstacle. This theory, as it configures the notion of representation, may work against his own important goals and prohibit any fruitful historical analysis of racist oppression. Let me look at this problem in detail from another angle.

Enwezor elaborates his theory of the subject in three passages concerning "ideological fantasy" and the "Other" which are positioned in the introductory pages of his 1997 essays. I will consider these in turn. First:

To be WHITE in many senses is an ideological fantasy. It is a fantasy framed in terms of sociopolitical and historical meaning, while at the same time searching for stability in racial terms that are invested with symbolic signs, and positive values of origin, space and a sense of who occupies that space, who owns it, who lords over it, and for whose benefit it is worked.

"Ideological fantasy" is a central category in Enwezor's analysis and it is important to understand the way it works. For Slavoj Zizek, who is responsible for popularising the term, ideological fantasy is the "overlooked, unconscious illusion" which "is structuring our real, effective relationship to reality" and which "thereby masks some insupportable, real, impossible kernel". The problems with Zizek's formulation are many, and it is not my purpose to examine them here. Yet, I would like to note the aspect which Enwezor appropriates from Zizek: that ideological fantasy is an "illusion". This formulation relies upon what Laplanche and Pontalis call an "elementary theory of knowledge", and the distinction, associated with the work of Melanie Klein, of "conscious" (daydreams) and "unconscious" (phantasies), in which the latter are equated with "false perceptions". In psychoanalytic theory, such a distinction has specific implications which are extremely troublesome: rather than indicating the displacements which constitute the ambivalent subject, fantasy becomes a causative agent in symptom formations.

Yet for Enwezor, fantasy, although an illusion, is not unconscious but intentional. The way that this understanding of fantasy is translated into a theory of representation has much to do with the notion of ideology. For Zizek, ideology, interestingly, is itself a "fantasy-construction which serves as a support for our reality". For Enwezor, though, the concept has more affinities with one side of the Marx of German Ideology (rather than, for example, with the Foucault of Discipline and Punish or the Althusser of Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays). That is, ideology is the illusion created by the thinkers of the ruling class to dominate the working class (hence the concern with "who occupies that space, who owns it, who lords over it, and for whose benefit it is worked"). This notion of ideology keeps intact Enwezor's category of intentionality, the purposive agent. Thus, coupled with a notion of ideology, fantasy becomes an illusion, a tool which causes the perpetuation of illusory representations, and a tool which the 'white subject' uses to put in place an 'apparatus of power'. To return to the problem of Kleinian psychoanalysis, this apparatus is understood as a symptom of the nation's 'dysfunction'. What is at issue here is not a displacement of the immanently split subject, but a

55 I am hoping here to elaborate a point which Rasheed Araeen has suggested: "The issue here is not just of representation — who is representing whom — but about the nature of representation and its significance as a work of art. The work here cannot be looked at or legitimated only on the basis of the liberal notion of individual 'freedom of expression', which ignores both ideological and ethical issues" (1997: personal communication).

56 Enwezor, 1997b, p 21. See Enwezor 1997a, p 22, for a slightly altered version of this passage.

57 Enwezor's usage of ideological fantasy, though, is often interchanged with 'ideology', 'ideological prop', 'illusion', 'myth', 'representation', 'images'.


62 Zizek, op cit, p 45.
withholding, mediated by representation, of the a priori freedom of the whole subject.

In turn, Enwezor relates ideological fantasy, to the way that the 'black subject' is turned into the 'Other' of the 'white subject'. Yet, it must be made clear, the 'invention' of the 'Other', in Enwezor's terms, historically and logically precedes the workings of ideological fantasy. Consider a second passage:

Tropes [of whiteness] can be related to what Claire Kahane has written of as "objects relation theory". She writes that "Objects relations theory assumes that from birth, the infant engages in formative relations with 'objects' — entities perceived as separate from the self, either whole persons or parts of the body, either existing in the external world or internalised as mental representations". Is this then how the 'Other' is invented and assigned his place on the margins of the nation?\textsuperscript{83}

From here, Enwezor goes on to answer his question about the significance of 'object relations theory' to the invention of the 'Other' in the affirmative (I will consider the related passage below). Let me pause for a moment, though, to consider this passage. Enwezor chooses an unexpected theory to form the basis for an understanding of the production of the 'Other'. Unexpected and incongruous — not least of all because this version of object relations theory contradicts, on the one hand, Lacan's formulation, which Zizek relies upon, of the production of an alterity imminent to the subject, and, on the other, the well known tenets of Said's critique of the colonial project, an interpretation which Enwezor espouses in other parts of his essay. By resting the weight of explanation of illusory representation and racism on a theory of the essential, universal structure of the self, any historical analysis of the relations of power and knowledge to the institutionalisation of inequalities becomes superfluous, or at least a mere elaboration of how infantile processes are transformed into societal processes. This, though, is not an adequate critique of object relations theory.

Object relations theory has played a considerable part in psychoanalytic debates concerned with the feminine Oedipus complex and the pre-oedipal mother-child relationship — and it may not be surprising that one of the prominent producers of this theory was Melanie Klein.\textsuperscript{84} As an alternative to the Freudian triadic structure of father-mother-child, this theory suggests the dyadic structure of the mother-child, and explains, variously, the feminine fantasy of castration, penis envy, and identifications with the father as 'symbolic expressions' of the girl's desire to be free of the omnipotent mother. Constructing the father as the liberator, this formulation positions the significance of patriarchal social relations outside of the process constitutive of gender and sexuality. The father as liberator only makes sense if the father is an already constructed object either existing in the external world or internalised as a mental representation. In this case, the Freudian notion of "object-relationship" is replaced by the notion of the "relationship to the object", with the following danger, pointed out by Laplanche and Pontalis: if the logic is pushed to its limit, this "would imply that the object or objects predate the subject's relations with them, and by the same token, that the subject has already been constituted".\textsuperscript{85}

Enwezor does not retain the categories of 'mother', 'father' and 'child' in his discussion of representation and 'white' domination. Nor does he reflect on the feminist writings of Kahane or others who have been involved in the debates concerning the Oedipal conflict." Nevertheless, the category of subject is kept
intact, as are those of the omnipotent oppressor ('white' nation) and potential liberator (Rainbow Nation), (although these categories do not refer to the 'white' subject who creates the 'black' Other, but, rather, apply to the oppressed 'black' subject). In this transposition of object relations theory, the significance of ideological fantasy (i.e., illusory representation) and 'the body' must be made clear, particularly in its link to the invention of the 'black' subject as the Other. Consider a third passage which follows directly from the last:

Is this then how the 'Other' is invented and assigned his place on the margins of the nation, [in the wilderness of incommensurability]? Here the Hottentot Venus, whose supposedly horrendous looking vagina is now preserved in formaldehyde [in a museum in France], and the black man on the auction block, as objects of denigration and desubstantialisation, become props of this ideological fantasy, the degenerative sketch from which whiteness stages its purity. These two historical scenes in which the black body has been tendered as display, reproduce the abject as a sign of black identification. Thus, the Hottentot Venus and the black man on the auction block signal a kind of black genitalia abjection, products of a white masochistic enjoyment of black sexuality in its most debased form.67

Let me draw out the argument in this passage in detail. First of all, the Other (Hottentot Venus/black man on the auction block) is not, strictly speaking, an object through which 'white' identification occurs; rather, it is the object of denigration and desubstantialisation (a formulation which does not clearly point out the agent of these processes, although from the tenor of the passage it seems that whiteness is the agent).68 The object is also a prop — though not, in the well known sense, of the fetish (i.e., that which veils an absence, the castrated penis of the mother), but of the ideological fantasy (perhaps a structure which holds the illusion up?). Furthermore, this ideological fantasy, which appropriates the objects and perhaps takes control of their (supposed) prior existing substance, provides whiteness with the opportunity to display its definitive property, purity (although it is not clear whether this property is presupposed or constituted in the relation).

The claim that these are historical scenes resonates well with the developmental scheme of object relations theory, and suggests a putative parallel structure inhering between racism and infantile development. It also suggests a parallel to Freud's early understanding of the "primal scene" which could be attributed a chronological location, thus presupposing "a real nature of the child before seduction", a "pre-structure inaccessible to the subject" (I will elaborate the prestructure in Enwezor's formulation below).69 Concurrently, this historical rendering, importantly, ends up not to be about the production of the 'black' body or the 'black' subject as an object for 'white' identification but rather about 'reproducing' — not constituting — what is abject and then transforming the abject into a sign of black identification (this must be distinguished from the idea that 'black' identification, or the 'black' body, is a sign of the abject).

But there is an aspect of production at play here. Let me spell this out: 1) the 'black' body (represented by Hottentot Venus and the black man on auction block) refers to the 'black' genitalia; 2) 'black' genitalia are abjected; 3) the abject is a sign of 'black' identification; 4) whites enjoy 'black' sexuality; 5) this enjoyment is masochistic (an interesting twist because usually this form of enjoyment is described from the sadistic side of the Freudian dialectic); 6) 'white' masochistic enjoyment of 'black' sexuality produces the abjection of 'black' genitalia. Leaving aside the problem of tautology, this argument still

67 Enwezor, 1997a, p 4; Enwezor, 1997b, p 21. Please note, brackets indicate what has been added in 1997a. Also, the phrase "and desubstantialisation" is not included in 1997a.


69 Laplanche and Pontalis, op cit, pp 11, 17.
begs the question of the subject. And, indeed, the important point here is that propositions (4) and (5) presuppose 'black' sexuality and 'white' enjoyment. This, again, returns to the formulation of the subject. The subject, though, is not only pre-existent and whole. The pre-existent structure of the subject is its sexuality. Thus, it is not the case that the subject is constituted through the force of objection. Nor is it the case that the 'white' subject disavows the desire of the object with which it has identified (rather it denigrates and desubstantialises the 'black body'). Neither of these are viable within a model which presupposes the integrity of the already-sexed subject.

CONCLUSION: THE NEW MONARCHY, THE NEW NATION AND INCARCERATION

Let me return to the problem of representation. I discussed earlier how Enwezor's general theory of representation collapses the function of representation into that of the representative. I have gone to such length to investigate the position of sexuality in Enwezor's writings because, as it turns out, the category of sexuality facilitates this collapse. Sexuality, and not, for example, domination, constitutes not only the 'meaning' and effect of representation, but also the very possibility of representation. As I have discussed earlier, representation, in Enwezor's terms, is supposed to act as a substitute for an already existing subject, and, through this substitution, is supposed to express some essential aspect of, or 'speak for', that subject. Under a racist regime, representation claims to 'speak for' the subject, but actually withholds its ability to speak — in this case, what must be withheld through representation is that which constitutes the subject's integrity, and thus its threat (sexuality). Either way, it is not merely the inviolate subject, but the subject's essential kernel, sexuality, around which the character of the subject is expressed or manipulated, which opens up the possibility of representation — for it is that abstraction which stands before the representation-cum-representative to claim (or disclaim) its body. Thus, as an assumed category in Enwezor's discussion, sexuality falls outside of the purview of analysis.

Sexuality thus enables a recuperation of the well known theory of mimesis in representation, a theory which is then placed at the centre of a theory of the nation. To summarise the preceding section's discussion, I would say that, in Enwezor's formulation, sexuality becomes the category of anteriority which constitutes the basis for the development of the new nation, the 'Rainbow Nation'. Conversely, the primacy which is given to the body, as a totality, rests upon the putative anteriority of sexuality. What we are left with, then, is an old equation in new clothes: sexuality takes on the status of monarchy. And the representation of the total body allows sexuality to inhabit an eternal instance (of the representation) and an infinite duration (its anteriority).

Such a formulation of sexuality, the body and representation is not merely the product of Kleinian psychoanalytic theory. Indeed, nations have historically deployed sexuality — understood as a category of biological-cum-cultural anteriority — as a means of linking "bodies politic to bodies personal". Hence the proliferation of juridical procedures which regulate family values, health and the rights of the unborn. Violent struggles concerned with abortion suggest only one way in which the imbrication of sexuality and nationality has been reconstituted. As Comaroff has pointed out, such practices replay "long-standing modernist themes — like the tendency to root nationality in nature.
and in the essence of the human form. Comaroff's argument about modernity, in line with Lefort, Berlant and others, suggests an important avenue through which we might reconsider the relation of nations to bodies. That is, the possibility that the body is not so much a pre-given vessel in which the nation may reside, but, rather, has been constituted historically and dialectically in relation to processes of colonialism, capitalism and nation-form. It may be sufficient to point out that the metaphysical aspects which Enwezor attributes to sexuality have, historically, often been attributed to, and interwoven with, other categories as well: for example, race, the citizen and the commodity. These abstractions apparently exist outside their embodiment in "real" individuals or objects; they are, so to speak, integrated into them; or, it is through the mediation of such abstractions that the integration of individuals or objects is achieved.

Sexuality and the body may thus enter into a historical investigation of representation as points of inquiry. The significance of such questioning, although seemingly commonplace, is one which many, including Enwezor, have neglected to explore fully. It is for this reason that Enwezor's important claims about the continuity of the structures of Apartheid in the present moment of the South African nation carry little explanatory power. For, indeed, if such structures of domination signify a historically specific reconstitution, should we not also consider sexuality and the body as constituted through often violent circumscriptions of changing forms of power and knowledge as historical categories as well? Yes, as Foucault pointed out some years ago, it may very well be that neither the body nor sexuality are prediscursive and total facts, susceptible to representation. Nevertheless, that they are ambivalently constituted categories with specific histories, and that "the subject" is also formed within and through such histories — these are propositions which must continually be investigated. And the production of the "new" South Africa presents us with the opportunity for just such an exploration. It is at this point that we may reconsider the totalised image of the body as a problem for democracy. It is at this point, also, that we may reconsider the incarceration of the body — by what has been positioned within it.

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