

Troubling Vision Performance, Visuality, and Blackness: Interrogating the Gaze



Vision, performance, and visuality are inherently intertwined concepts that shape our understanding of the world and our place within it. However, when it comes to the representation of blackness, these concepts have often been entangled with troubling power dynamics and oppressive ideologies. This article explores the complex relationship between vision, performance, and visuality in relation to blackness, interrogating the ways in which the gaze has historically been weaponized against black bodies.

Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness by Nicole R. Fleetwood

★★★★☆ 4.4 out of 5

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The Gaze and the Objectification of Blackness

Throughout history, the gaze has been used as a tool of power and control, particularly over marginalized communities. The white, male gaze has been positioned as the norm, rendering non-white bodies as "other" and subjecting them to a constant process of objectification. Black bodies have been fetishized, exoticized, and pathologized, reinforcing a binary narrative that places whiteness at the center and blackness at the margins.

For centuries, black people have been portrayed in Western art and media as objects of desire or fear, perpetuating stereotypes and reinforcing a dehumanizing narrative. This objectification extended to the scientific realm, where black bodies were subjected to invasive experiments and degrading treatments, legitimizing racist ideologies and justifying the subjugation of black people.

The Gaze and the Performance of Blackness

In response to the objectifying gaze, black artists and performers have sought to reclaim their agency and challenge the dominant narratives about blackness. Through experimental performance, they have disrupted

traditional notions of representation and questioned the power structures that shape the way blackness is seen and understood.

Artists such as Kara Walker and Wangechi Mutu use visual imagery to confront the complexities of racial identity and the impact of the white gaze on black subjectivity. Their work challenges the traditional dichotomy of subject and object, inviting viewers to engage with the multifaceted and often contradictory experiences of blackness.

Musicians like Nina Simone and Beyoncé have used their performances to blend activism with artistic expression, drawing attention to social injustices and celebrating black pride. Through their performances, they have disrupted the notion of black entertainment as solely for the pleasure of white audiences and asserted the right to self-representation.

The Gaze and the Visuality of Blackness

The visuality of blackness has been shaped by the dominant gaze, but it is also a site of resistance and empowerment. Black artists and filmmakers have used visual media to reclaim their narratives and create counternarratives that challenge traditional representations.

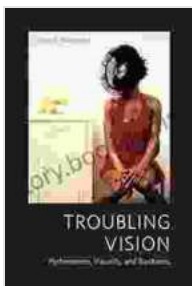
Films such as "Moonlight" and "Get Out" have explored the complexities of black identity, masculinity, and sexuality, providing nuanced and authentic portrayals that break away from stereotypical tropes. These films have shifted the landscape of cinema and opened up new possibilities for black representation.

Fashion has also played a significant role in shaping the visuality of blackness, with black designers and models challenging Eurocentric beauty

standards and celebrating the diversity of black bodies. They have created spaces where blackness is celebrated and adorned, empowering black communities and redefining the visual landscape.

The relationship between vision, performance, and visibility in relation to blackness is complex and multifaceted. The white gaze has historically been used to objectify and dehumanize black bodies, but black artists and performers have resisted this objectification through experimental performance and the creation of counternarratives.

By interrogating the gaze and reclaiming their agency, black artists have challenged traditional notions of representation and created new ways of seeing and understanding blackness. Their work has disrupted the dominant narratives, expanded the visual landscape, and empowered black communities. It is through these ongoing acts of resistance and empowerment that the troubling vision performance visibility and blackness can be transformed into a source of liberation and self-affirmation.



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