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# Racialization as an Aesthetic Production: What Does the Aesthetic Do for Whiteness and Blackness and Vice Versa?

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RACIAL FORMATIONS ARE AESTHETIC PHENOMENA and aesthetic practices are racialized structures. A theory of the nature of race and racism, at macro- as well as micro-levels of social organization, as a matter of large-scale cultural forces as well as everyday experience, in the realm of the personal as well as the impersonal, must address the place of the aesthetic in processes of racialization.<sup>1</sup> Correlatively, a theory of the aesthetic as a philosophical category—a category of experience, production, and analysis—must account for the ways in which structures of aesthetic exchange channel racial passions and perceptions.

This chapter develops a philosophical framework for understanding the interconnections among aesthetic and racial formations. It also points to avenues for moving toward novel alignments of racial and aesthetic schemes that this framework brings into view.

In order to think through the links among aesthetic and racial formations, I identify two interrelated but nonetheless distinct lines of interaction among aesthetic and racial phenomena. The first line of interaction consists in a phenomenon I call “racialized aestheticization,” which pertains to the ways in which racial formations support aesthetic constructions. The second line of interaction is “aesthetic racialization,” which concerns the ways in which aesthetic formations support racialized constructions. While these phenomena are inseparable collaborators in the production of racialized aesthetic structures, for analytical and transformative purposes it is crucial to recognize the specific contributions each factor makes to the larger aesthetic and racial fabric.

I trace several forms of racialized aestheticization and aesthetic racialization in historical writings by David Hume and Immanuel Kant. These forms are not unique to the eighteenth century but are both replicated and resisted in contemporary works by Jamaica Kincaid, Agnès Varda, Franz Fanon, Paule Marshall, Angela Davis, and others. In readings of these historical and contemporary works, I make the complexities of the operative forms of aesthetic racialization and racialized aestheticization legible, by analyzing these phenomena as elements of a cultural system I call “aesthetic relationality.” By this, I mean a dynamic network of aesthetically generated and aesthetically productive relationships that agents inhabit vis-à-vis one another and vis-à-vis artworks and other aesthetic objects and environments.<sup>2</sup> A perspective on culture in terms of aesthetic relationships recognizes that the aestheticized and aestheticizing dimensions of whiteness and blackness inevitably put into play the full gamut of social and subjective determinants, such as class and gender.<sup>3</sup> A relational theory of the aesthetic postulates a layered texture of interconnections among aesthetic forms of signification and modalities of cultural positioning such as blackness, whiteness, gender, ethnicity, colonial background, and class. More generally, it brings into view ways in which subjectivity, identity, and culture implicate aesthetic structures, and in which aesthetic structures implicate modalities of cultural positioning. At the same time, a theory of aesthetic relationality draws out possibilities for alternative constellations of aesthetic and racialized subjectivity. It exposes the aesthetic as a social technology that must be retooled, an art of constructing and deconstructing formations of whiteness and blackness, that reaches into the minutiae as well as the broader outlines of our racialized, gendered, and classed lives.

Through its structure and thematics, the present book explicitly invites white philosophers to speak and be read *as* white commentators on whiteness, and black philosophers *as* black analysts of blackness. My chapter interrupts this organization of authorial voices and its concomitant modes of reading, with respect to both the text’s focus and its address to the reader. I have two reasons for this. One, I see whiteness and blackness in the most significant sense of these terms as social constructions that are inextricably intertwined with one another as well as other markers of social identity and difference. This means that theorizing whiteness involves theorizing blackness and vice versa.<sup>4</sup> A framework that has whites focus solely on whiteness and blacks on blackness is too restrictive. Whites have a theoretical need and an ethical responsibility to think about blackness, to understand theories and artworks created by blacks, and to comprehend ourselves and our white identities in relation to blacks.<sup>5</sup> In this discussion, I thus examine questions of whiteness as well as blackness.

Two, the work of critique makes it crucial that we venture to speak, analyze, and experience *across* the cultural positionings that have been mediated by already given social categories. This need not amount to a self-serving occlusion of one's positionality, an unselfconscious imposition of one's perspective, or a naïve flaunting of the limitations of one's situated condition, but must proceed in forms that are (1) explicitly de-naturalized, that is to say, distanced from authentication by mere testimony, (2) theoretically and politically driven, and (3) productive of progressive reconfigurations of the categories that are fundamental to our social positionings. It is such forms of knowledge production that I am after in this text's address. By elaborating philosophical interconnections between writings and artworks by whites and blacks, it is possible to do historically grounded conceptual work that I take to be central to a critical account of the intersection of aesthetics and race. The links between aesthetics and race have been so underexplored in philosophy that basic theoretical stage setting is in order, some of which I hope to undertake in this chapter.

I begin by examining the links that philosophers have traditionally forged between the aesthetic and whiteness/blackness.

### 1. Enlightenment Connections between Whiteness, Blackness, and the Aesthetic

Enlightenment philosophers such as Hume and Kant have implicitly aestheticized whiteness. They have enlisted the aesthetic in the service of white processes of cultivation and construed whiteness as an aesthetic achievement. They have mobilized aesthetic modes of creation, reception, and interaction toward white cultural goals, goals that have been defined against blackness. Conscripting aesthetic passions and modes of exchange in the project of white culture formation, and distancing these passions and modes of exchange from blackness, they have, then, articulated forms of aesthetic racialization. Correlatively, Hume and Kant have also established forms of racialized aestheticization. It is modes of creation, perception, and interaction that support white subjectivity that they have identified as aesthetic, and it is modes of creation, perception, and interaction that support black subjectivity that they have denominated as uncultivated and lacking in taste. Construing the aesthetic along lines that render it effective in light of white cultural goals and orienting it against blackness, they have racialized it as white.

In this section, I examine a pattern of historically influential connections that Hume and Kant forge between the aesthetic and whiteness/blackness.<sup>6</sup> These connections are primarily located in the conceptual structures outlined

by these thinkers, rather than in their overt statements. It is the subtexts of Hume's and Kant's writings that provide access to their constructions of whiteness and blackness, constructions that have been shaped, among other things, as we shall see, with the help of ideas about gender, class, and heterosexuality. A detailed analysis of these constructions is critical to an understanding of the experiences and desires that bind the categories of race and the aesthetic. I begin with Hume who regards the aesthetic, understood on the model of "taste," as a civilizing force.

### Race and Taste in Hume's Philosophy of Culture

Racialized aestheticization, in Hume, emerges in the first instance from the ways in which differentiating categories such as race, class, and gender affect the distribution, the structure, and the functioning of taste. Aesthetic racialization, in Hume, derives from the alleged civilizing effects of taste. Hume makes taste central to the individual's and the nation's entry into and level of civilization and humanity. That given, a further kind of racialized aestheticization emerges as the acquisition of taste is rendered desirable on account of taste's cultivating effects. Racialized aestheticization and aesthetic racialization thus turn out to collaborate closely in Hume, as I indicate below. Both phenomena have their philosophical origins in the connections Hume forges between taste and the faculty of reason and between taste and the appropriate management of the passions. Hume sees taste as drawing on and productive of adequate levels of reason and passion. I first examine taste's ties to reason and next consider its links with the passions, which, in turn, affect questions of rationality.

The connection between reason and taste gives rise to the following form of racialized aestheticization in Hume's philosophy of culture. For Hume, the exercise of reason is fundamental to the operation of taste ("Standard" 16–17; "Delicacy" 26–27).<sup>7</sup> A high level of reason, however, is the prerogative of white, middle-class European males. Hume considers black men and women, white women, and lower-class or "common" white men inferior in rationality.<sup>8</sup> Given the centrality of reason to taste, in Hume's scheme, deficient rational capacities translate into a diminished taste. True taste is then reserved for white, European, middle-class males who go through a requisite process of cultivation, involving practice, the making of comparisons, and a freeing from prejudice ("Standard" 13–17). Indeed, Hume labels aesthetic preferences and pleasures that he ascribes to peasants, Indians, workers, and middle-class women, among other things, "course," "vulgar," "disagreeable," "insipid," "obvious," "idle," "harsh," "uninteresting," and "trifling" ("Standard" 14; "Simplicity" 43; "Refinement" 55; "Essay" 38; "Study" 97).

The realm of deficient taste is not a homogenous field. Hume diversifies this domain by race, class, gender, and ethnicity. It is worth taking a brief look at the structurations introduced through the category of gender because this clarifies the complexly gendered and whitened structure the aesthetic acquires on Hume's theory. Hume accords "women of sense and education" ("Essay" 40) a restricted form of taste. Given Hume's deprecating views of blacks, upper and lower classes, and his appreciative views of France and Britain ("Refinement" 57; "National"), this designation seems to apply to French or British middle-class women.<sup>9</sup> While white middle-class men's taste is supposed to range over all sources of beauty and deformity, including in particular, artworks and other cultural achievements ("works of genius"), the taste of sensible and educated women is restricted to objects and practices in their immediate surroundings ("Essay" 38). These women's taste also takes on a different structure from white men's. Unlike white men's taste, white women's taste is not guided by rules ("Essay" 40). It is also sensitive to perversion by women's "tender and amorous disposition" (41), a disposition that, in Hume's view, can legitimately affect young, white men's aesthetic judgments ("Standard" 20) without betraying a distorted taste. In spite of the tendency of female taste to slide into degeneracy, white women excel in two limited aesthetic domains, namely, the genre labeled "polite writings" ("Essay" 40), which includes novels; and the conduct of the domestic sphere, which encompasses "the ornaments of life, of dress, equipage, and the ordinary decencies of behavior" ("Delicacy" 172, textual variant, 1741–1770 editions). Taste is thus intricately gendered and racialized. Taste's gendering is part and parcel of its specific racialized and racializing structure and its racialization is part and parcel of its gendered and gendering structure.<sup>10</sup>

While white women are able to attain a special, limited form of taste, black men and women do not seem to be allotted any level of taste and, furthermore, are denied the possibility of acquiring it. As is well-known, Hume considers blacks "naturally inferior" to whites. He declares that black nations have not attained civilization, arts, or sciences. He infamously dismisses the idea that a black man might qualify as "a man of parts and learning" ("National" 306n). Hume excludes blacks thus not only from taste but also from the possibility of aesthetic education. Taste is the prerogative of white, middle-class males, and in a diminished variety, of a narrow group of white women. Hume's racialized, gendered, and class-based distribution of reason leads to an unequal distribution of the propensity for taste, and more than that, to an implicit coding of taste in terms of racial, gender, and class difference. We encounter here, then, the phenomenon of racialized aestheticization. Grounding racialized aestheticization initially in the link between taste and reason, Hume

carries it further by connecting taste with the passions, thus implementing a version of aesthetic racialization, in the following way.

Hume sees taste as a civilizing factor. One of the ways in which Hume takes taste to civilize the individual is by regulating the passions. In Hume's view, "delicacy of sentiment," which is the central ingredient of taste, enables one to put into order another kind of delicacy, namely "delicacy of passion," that is to say, a sensitivity to the "good or ill accidents of life," which include, for example, small injuries, favors, and good fortune ("Delicacy" 26). Hume holds delicacy of passion responsible for an excessive degree of emotionality, which he sees as interfering with "the right enjoyment" of things (25). For this reason, delicacy of passion must be kept in check. Delicacy of sentiment, and therefore taste, is the only and most proper means of curtailing delicacy of passion (26). Clearing away obstacles to "right enjoyment," taste thus takes on great importance in the formation of white, moral personhood, as imagined by Hume.

Through its effects on the passions, taste enters deeply into the formation of white moral personhood and social agency, for Hume. Hume envisions five specific ways in which taste enables one to appropriately organize one's passions, writing the aesthetic into the minute structures of an individual's existential stance. For Hume, taste (1) corrects the passions; (2) brings them under the agent's control; (3) intensifies a respectable form of happiness; (4) refines the passions; (5) promotes passions that render one sociable. Each of these effects on the passions are civilizing factors.<sup>11</sup> Because taste is distributed differentially, and civilizes the individual, civilized status is distributed differentially. Hume extends the racialization of taste, then, to the level of civilization. Taste supports the cultivation of white, middle-class subjects, and at a more general level, the establishment of white civilization. Racialized aestheticization (the racial exclusiveness of taste) thus contributes to aesthetic racialization (the racial exclusiveness of the civilized standing generated by way of taste).

By examining the ways in which taste is taken to effect an appropriate management of the passions, we can bring into view the aesthetic forces from which Hume imagines white civilized existence to emerge. Taste influences the passions in the following ways: (1) By "cultivating a relish in the liberal arts" the individual is able to strengthen his judgment. Equipped with "juster notions of life," the man of taste comes to withdraw his attention from "many things which please or afflict others" (27), and instead, to focus on what truly matters in life. Bringing a person's sensitivity in conformity with adequate insights into life, taste functions then as a corrective to an excess of passion. (2) Taste brings the passions under control as it enables the man of taste to take his happiness in his own hands. Hume believes "we are pretty much masters of what books we shall read, what diversions we shall partake of, and what company we shall keep" (26).

The exercise of taste allows, then, for a controlled form of happiness, a kind of happiness that accords the tasteful subject an optimal level of personal autonomy. (3) Taste enhances a virtuous kind of happiness. In Hume's view, the man of taste "is more happy by what pleases his taste, than by what gratifies his appetites, and receives more enjoyment from a poem, or a piece of reasoning, than the most expensive luxury can afford" (26). For Hume, this affective and conative shift produces a morally praiseworthy state of affairs, one which everyone would prefer "when everything is balanced" (25) and to which every wise man aspires (26). (4) In Hume's view, taste refines the passions: "[A cultivated taste] . . . improves our sensibility for all the tender and agreeable passions; at the same time that it renders the mind incapable of the rougher and more boisterous emotions" (27; see also "Rise" 90). Hume notes that the study of "beauties" (read: aesthetically good works of fine art and other cultural productions) improves the temper and provokes "a certain elegance of sentiment to which the rest of mankind are strangers. The emotions which they excite are soft and tender." Taste thus refines the passions. (5) More specifically, taste promotes passions that are productive of adequate social bonds and, in this way, works to refine social life. Hume claims that the perusal of, for example, poetry, music, and painting, produces "an agreeable melancholy, which, of all dispositions of the mind, is the best suited to love and friendship." In his view, taste inspires suitable social passions by enabling the man of taste to make precise and detailed judgments of other people's characters (26–28). The man of taste can thus be seen to combine a high level of delicacy of sentiment with an appropriately measured degree of delicacy of passion as well as a third kind of sensitivity, an enhanced social sensibility, which I will call "delicacy of socialization." Taste deepens love and friendship by "confining our choice to few people, and making us indifferent to the company and conversation of the greater part of men" (27). This results, again, in refinement, at the affective as well as social level.

One that has well digested his knowledge both of books and men, has little enjoyment but in the company of a few select companions. He feels too sensibly, how much all the rest of mankind fall short of the notions which he has entertained. And, his affections being thus confined within a narrow circle, no wonder he carries them further than if they were more general and undistinguished. The gaiety and frolic of a bottle companion improves with him into a solid friendship; and the ardors of a youthful appetite become an elegant passion. (28)

Through its effects on the passions, taste instigates "appropriate" social bonds among individuals while eroding less suitable affiliations.<sup>12</sup> By allowing for an adequately managed and refined set of passions, as well as a proper social circle, taste enables the individual to reach a high level of civilization. Cultivation, for Hume, is thus an aesthetic process, one that is fostered by the faculty

of taste. As we have seen, Hume has differentiated taste along racial, gender, and class lines. Implemented as an element of the cultivating process, taste inscribes these differentiations into civilization, its product. Cultivation, as an aesthetic production, is a racially exclusive attainment, that is to say, an arrangement that enables white, middle-class men of taste to seek out one another's company to their mutual satisfaction and edification. Racialized aestheticization (taste's racialized nature) can be seen to support aesthetic racialization (white civilization as structured and produced by way of taste). Both reach into the minutiae of an individual's psychosocial identity.

At this point, as suggested above, Hume is able to motivate the acquisition of taste and interactions with artworks by their role in the civilizing project. Aspirations to white cultivation offer a powerful motive for engagement with art and for the attainment of taste. We thus encounter here a further kind of racialized aestheticization, that is to say, a new way in which racial structures support aesthetic structures. Taste owes its importance, in part, to the white cultural goals it fosters. Hume renders the aesthetic attractive on account of its civilizing effects. Racialized aestheticization, for Hume, resides then, in the first instance, in the cultural differentiations built into the notion of taste (through the link with reason), and in the second instance, in the importance taste derives from its cultivating labors (its affective and social impact).

The whitening effects of taste are in fact more widespread for Hume than I have indicated so far. Taste's civilizing force transfers its effects from the individual to the national level, at which Hume takes taste to improve knowledge, productivity, pleasure, and social life. He considers matters of taste such as luxury, refinement, and progress in the arts necessary to the economic and political well-being of the state. Taste functions in Hume's theory to build culture and, more specifically, to produce what Hume calls "humanity." Accordingly, he institutes aesthetic racialization at the level of the nation. His reasoning is as follows.

In Hume's view, the arts of luxury and the liberal arts depend on refined taste or sentiment ("Rise" 83).<sup>13</sup> Hume attributes four humanizing effects to refinement in the arts and refinement in the gratification of the senses. I list each of these humanizing effects because they turn out to be carriers of aesthetic racialization. They also indicate what precise and deeply ingrained forms such racialization takes. One, refinements in the arts and in the gratification of the senses make humans more active and productive ("Refinement" 49–50, 59). They counteract laziness (an overdose of indolence, idleness, sloth, and repose). They enable individuals to derive more happiness from their work. They help to keep desire and gratification within the bounds of "true" and proper pleasure (50–51). Accordingly, they sustain the level of virtue that marks refined society. Two, refinements in the arts strengthen the faculty of reason.

They provide occasion for the exercise and refinement of reason (52), inspire curiosity, and invigorate the mind (49–50). Three, refinements in the arts encourage conversation, sociability, and interaction between males and females, which has the benefit of softening men's temper (50, 51). Four, initial refinement produces yet more refinement. Hume attaches cultivating effects to the "taste, genius, and spirit [. . .] of a whole people" (50). He postulates a "spirit of the age" in which the arts mutually enhance one another ("Rise" 75).<sup>14</sup> Refinement thus is a phenomenon that spreads (predominantly among those subjects who are genuinely capable of it, that is to say, white upper/middle class males, but also, in carefully guarded ways, among these males and their white, female, social companions). The result of these four interacting refinements is an increase in humanity, which, for Hume, is the mark that distinguishes polished or civilized societies from barbarous and rude nations ("Refinement" 51, 53, 55). Taste, for Hume, functions then as one of several factors that are productive of the form of humanity which he places at the heart of civilization. We encounter here aesthetic racialization at the level of a nation's culture and its alleged measure of humanity. At this level, as we have seen, aesthetic racialization implicates not only ideas about reason and the passions, but also questions about work, productivity, happiness, sociability, and heterosexuality. Hume weaves aesthetic racialization deeply into the fabric of cultural life, immersing virtually every parameter of human interaction in a practice of micro-aestheticization that is also a practice of micro-racialization.

We have seen that taste, for Hume, regulates the nature and the level of a person's activity, passivity, passion, and pleasure. Capacities for reason and social judgment are sharpened. Refined relationships emerge. Members of the white middle-class become socialized, cultivated, and humanized. The nation enjoys mounting levels of national productivity, happiness, virtue, and civilization. Appropriate forms of cultural production, exchange, and interconnection take shape.

The contribution of taste to the civilizing process amounts to a form of aesthetic racialization. Hume aestheticizes whiteness in the sense that he construes white civilization, in part, as an aesthetic achievement, a project to be attained through the operations of taste. As noted earlier, aesthetic racialization, initially supported by racialized aestheticization, at the present stage, feeds back into the workings of racialized aestheticization. Hume values taste in part on account of its civilizing labor. Taste functions as a conduit for passions for whiteness. Taste is racialized, that is to say, its acquisition and exercise are partially motivated by desires for whiteness. More than that, taste is structured so as to secure white cultural goals. Hume organizes taste in such a fashion that desires for whiteness, at the individual and national levels, can inspire the acquisition of taste and the engagement with art.

What shape does whiteness take, in this scheme? I have already indicated that aestheticized whiteness pertains to the “adequate” regulation of individual passion as well as to the “virtuous” and “pleasurable” intensification of human productivity. More needs to be said about the modes of cultural production, exchange, and interconnection that are instituted through the cultivating operations of taste. Taste is in the first instance called upon to establish homosocial cultural ties among tasteful white men who engage in cultivated and cultivating connections with and over artworks and other cultural objects. In the second instance, taste functions to institute heterosexual bonds among white men and women, who mutually civilize one another. Taste realizes this task in the following way.

Civilization and taste make different demands on differentially positioned social agents. White women are asked to extend their softening influence to the tempers and rational minds of white men (“Rise” 92). They are imagined to contribute to the realization of a tasteful society by entering into conversation with white men, which allows white men to develop their taste and manners, to connect with the world, and to warm their hearts.<sup>15</sup> It is white women’s role to make their cultivating influence available to white men (“Essay” 38; “Refinement” 51; “Rise” 92; “Study” 97). In turn, white men are asked to extend reason, knowledge, and gallantry to white women.<sup>16</sup> White men and women’s differential labors of taste collaborate in the process of realizing what is seen as civilized society.<sup>17</sup> Hume imagines taste then to support cultivation by fostering appropriate affective and aesthetic interactions and affiliations among white men and women.

Absent the cultivating company of tasteful white men and women, and absent, also, for Hume, the requisite level of reason, which as we have seen, is central to taste, blacks are excluded from the civilizing process taste makes available to whites. Black men and women are placed outside the aesthetic dynamic that is productive of civilization; they have no place in the white, heterosexual arrangement that exemplifies taste. Moral, epistemic, affective, and aesthetic refinement is circulated among white men and women. The labor of taste demands that blacks stay away from the relevant affective and aesthetic bonds.<sup>18</sup>

Hume has outlined a process of aesthetic racialization. He inscribes a racializing trajectory into culture that is driven by taste. The aesthetic is complicit in the specific form of racialization that amounts to white culture building. Hume construes whiteness, understood in the sense of white civilization, as an aesthetic achievement. White racialization is created and sustained through taste, which is acquired through the process of creating and responding to art and other cultural objects.<sup>19</sup> Besides a process of aesthetic racialization, Hume has also delineated a form of racialized aestheticization. In the

Humean picture, taste and art-appropriate experience work to satisfy desires for distinctive modes of cultural interaction among whites and to reward aspirations toward white civilization. Hume has the passion to act and judge in conformity with taste function as a passion to enter into cultivating affiliations with white men and women, and to place oneself at a remove from bonds with black men and women. I see here the formation of a network of racialized relationships that is supported by and conducive to taste.<sup>20</sup> Civilization is imagined as a web of relationships centered around flows of products and modes of exchange that are both racialized and aestheticized.<sup>21</sup> In short, culture, as theorized by Hume, emerges from the interacting labors of racialized aestheticization and aesthetic racialization.

### Race and Taste in Kant's Philosophy of Culture

Immanuel Kant replicates some of the above strategies of aesthetic racialization and racialized aestheticization but, as I indicate shortly, he also adds an influential move of his own to the already existing techniques, thus substantially enriching the repertoire of whitened and whitening aesthetic tactics that we inherit from the philosophical tradition.

Kant's account of refinement in the *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* parallels the cultural arrangement in which Hume sees white, middle-class men and women generate and exchange moral, epistemic, and affective goods. Like Hume, he envisions differential, hierarchized, and collaborating moral and aesthetic trajectories for white men and women. White men are asked to offer nobility, sublimity, and insight to white women (95, 102n), who are marked by mental deficiency (94). White women make complaisance and beauty available to men, rendering them more gentle, polite, and refined (95–96, 102n). Kant closes this exchange off to blacks and to a lesser extent to other nonwhites. He considers the mental capacities of black people inferior to those of whites (110–11, 113) and finds them incapable of more than trifling feelings (110). Since he defines taste as a faculty of *fine* feeling (46), this strongly suggests that he imagines black men and women as lacking any measure of taste.<sup>22</sup> Kant's constructions of racialized aestheticization and aesthetic racialization in the *Observations* thus parallel Hume's.

Kant shares with Hume also an interest in establishing comparative aesthetic hierarchies across cultures.<sup>23</sup> In evaluating the taste of "the Arab," "the Chinese," and other ethnicities, Kant places himself unhesitatingly and without argument in the position of the person who is able to recognize true and false taste. His recognition of a variety of tastes is fully explicit: "If [. . .] we cast a glance at history, we see the taste of men [. . .] continually taking on variable forms" (114). While he indeed posits links between taste and culture,

these links do not enter into his overt account of the conditions of possibility of taste.<sup>24</sup> The phenomenon of ethnic, racial, class-based, and gendered diversity of taste is not given an explicit theoretical role in the context of Kant's *critical* account of the conditions of possibility for true taste.<sup>25</sup> In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant grounds the general validity of the true judgment of taste in the postulate of a common sense, that is to say, in a set of cognitive faculties that human beings are assumed to have in common (pars. 19–22; 40). He understands these faculties as *natural* rather than cultural dispositions. That they are not natural I take critics such as Pierre Bourdieu (“Historical”), Richard Shusterman (*Scandal*), and Sylvia Wynter (“Rethinking”) to have argued persuasively. As these thinkers have indicated, Kant's theory of taste privileges appreciative conditions and values that must be associated with educated, leisured, white, socially quiescent, masculine, middle-class subject-positions.

The difficulty, however, is not simply the false or impossible universalization of such appreciative conditions. From the perspective of the interactions between aesthetics and race, a further ambivalent deployment of whiteness must be noted. On the one hand, Kant can be seen to rely on comparative cultural evaluations. He announces, for example, that aesthetic judgments guided by charm and emotion are “barbarous” (par. 13), that is to say, uncultivated, in a manner associated with a status outside culture. He suggests that the aesthetic attractions of Caribs and Iroquois are more motivated by sensation than those of observers at a higher stage of civilization (par. 41). He tentatively deploys figures of non-Europeans as examples of individuals whose taste somehow fails, such as the “Iroquois sachem” whose aesthetic perception he denounces as interested, rather than appropriately disinterested (par. 2). Given the *schematic* nature of Kant's conception of aesthetic experience and the unclarity and underdeveloped nature of important theoretical concepts such as charm, emotion, interest, and disinterestedness, Kant's cultural examples and judgments cannot straightforwardly be dismissed as inessential. The theory simply does not offer enough specification of its basic concepts. Kant's crosscultural comparisons help to substantiate these concepts. However, Kantians are able to dismiss crosscultural examples and evaluations as incidental to the theory by reference to the postulate of the common sense.

The postulate of the common sense protects Kant from having to provide a reasoned account of the cultural preconditions that his version of the natural implicitly makes relevant or irrelevant to the determination of what counts as aesthetic. Consequently, his deculturalizing move stands as an open invitation to an uncritical channeling of cultural preconditions that are likely to go unmarked for the simple reason that they happen to be associated with cultural

identities and behaviors that have been normalized in Western culture, in short, with white modes of being.

Kant implicitly appeals to cultural conditions while at the same time insulating the aesthetically relevant appreciative faculties from being understood to be affected by cultural conditioning. Precisely by overtly *decentering* considerations of culture, the *Critique* is able to rely on normative connections between culture and taste. Kant's cultural gestures make their effects because they are masked by an encompassing deculturalizing move. He makes white, middle-class masculinity effective by ostensibly rendering it incidental. Kant here takes advantage of a common feature of whiteness, namely its function as an unmarked basis of normativity. The invisibility of securely established, white, middle-class masculinity participates in the *modus operandi* of this subject position in Kant's aesthetics. It is on account of the invisibility of this position that Kant is able to ground the general validity of judgment of taste in a *sensus communis*, without being theoretically impelled to critically reflect on possible connections or disconnections between this universalizable cognitive disposition and the differential processes of enculturation that underwrite his comparative evaluations of varieties of taste.

In sum, Kantian aesthetics renders white, middle-class masculinity foundational aesthetic power by dismissing the relevance of cultural conditions. It is in virtue of the invisibility of normative whiteness that Kant's aesthetic system can appear to be founded on the postulate of a common sense without essentially seeming to implicate a series of unfounded crosscultural aesthetic hierarchies. Whiteness functions, in Kant's scheme, not as one ethnicity among others, but as an ethnicity that carries its normative status, cultural specificity, and existential content into his conception of art-appropriate faculties and perceptions.<sup>26</sup>

At the level of aesthetic relationships this plays out in the following two ways. One, Kant's (and Hume's) aesthetics have historically provided a theoretical basis for the influential view that takes art to have its home in the public sphere, and that construes aesthetic meanings as public meanings, that is to say, as meanings that are accessible through the operation of common appreciative faculties. The notion of the public that is hereby in effect is basically the notion of a community of subjects equipped with generalizable appreciative faculties.<sup>27</sup> However, as many have argued, what has *seemed* to be public or generally accessible is in fact not truly or possibly public or generally accessible; the concept of the public functions in many ways as a stand-in for white, male, middle-class subject-positions.<sup>28</sup> Given the Enlightenment heritage in aesthetic theory, the racialized and racializing substructure that deploys but at the same time *masks* white normativity has been transported into contemporary notions of art's public functioning, where it continues to

underwrite patterns of aesthetic production and experience. Contemporary philosophy has built its views of art's place in culture around a precritical, racialized, and racializing aesthetic.<sup>29</sup> This has a wide-ranging set of effects that must be studied in detail.

Two, deculturalization in aesthetics stands as an open invitation for white people to imagine themselves as standing above their cultural needs, untouched by culture's interactive, material supports. When white culture becomes an invisible datum, an unmarked given, the cultures of those who are not normatively white, that is to say, of white people's "others," can acquire hypervisibility, as many have suggested. In the plane of crosscultural and intracultural difference, "other" people's cultural needs and supports are then easily dismissed as extraneous, incidental, a burden these people bring with them, or at best, a momentary aesthetic thrill. The sphere of normative culture is thus whitened. White people's various "others" can then be relegated to an ornamental status.<sup>30</sup> The appearance ensures that they are excessively bound to their specific cultural locale, powerless to transcend their specific conditions, unlike normative whites, who freely move in universal terrain. Aesthetic deculturalization facilitates these well-known cultural prejudices.

We encounter in Kant's writings structures of aesthetic racialization and racialized aestheticization that are masked under a conception of aesthetic universality. Kant enlists the aesthetic in support of white civilization. Grounding taste in the *sensus communis*, he renders the aesthetic normativity of whiteness invisible and decenters the hierarchized cultural standards underwriting his aesthetic system. Both Kant and Hume exclude white women, lower-class men, and nonwhite men and women from the ordinary developmental processes that amount to the cultivation of taste. They have formulated aesthetic systems on which the desire for civilization *de facto*—in virtue of its structural, though not necessarily fully conscious or intentional functioning—amounts to a desire for participation in an exclusionary aesthetic system. In short, they have delineated a network of relationships that is supported by interacting forms of aestheticization and racialization. They have thus written racialization and aestheticization into the heart of the notion of culture.

## 2. Contemporary Figurations of Aesthetic Racialization and Racialized Aestheticization

Contemporary cultures are organized around multiple, interconnected varieties of aesthetic racialization and racialized aestheticization. The present section traces several of these forms in work by Jamaica Kincaid, Agnès Varda, and Franz Fanon. These artists and writers, I argue, have each more or less ex-

PLICITLY emphasized the subjective and cultural importance of everyday aesthetic activities. They have expanded the spectrum of legitimately aesthetic agents as well as the scope of aesthetically normative modes of perception, creation, and interaction, as compared to Hume and Kant. This is a crucial step toward clarifying the workings of racialized aestheticization and aesthetic racialization. However, by implicitly imagining the aesthetic to follow cultural delineations produced through racialized aestheticization and aesthetic racialization, these thinkers and artists nonetheless underestimate the cultural possibilities the aesthetic holds in stock, and sidestep complex connections among aesthetics and race in ways that are reminiscent of Hume and Kant.

### An Aesthetic Stand-off

Jamaica Kincaid's novel *Lucy* is the story of a young black woman from an unnamed Caribbean island, who arrives in an unnamed city in North America to take up employment as an au-pair in a white family. The family consists of a mother, Mariah, a father, and four children, who are put partially under Lucy's care. Written in Lucy's voice, the novel offers her observations on her friendship with Mariah and her developing relationship with her current and previous home countries. Kincaid depicts Lucy's consciousness as an *aesthetic* consciousness. Lucy's experience foremost takes an aesthetic form. It consists in sensory impressions of elements such as food, clothes, sounds, bodies, fields, the sun, and music—elements whose subjective qualities are shown to reflect her ambitions and dreams, her history, and her understandings of her new surroundings. Kincaid depicts aesthetic experience as Lucy's primary means by which she makes herself present in her new environment. Aesthetic experience is represented as the medium through which Lucy establishes meanings and negotiates connections in novel cultural terrain. The importance aesthetic experience holds for Lucy as well as Mariah, is evinced in a clash between Mariah's and Lucy's different, personal, and cultural structures of aesthetic desire and value. Lucy describes a conversation in which Mariah longingly looks forward to the arrival of Spring.

She said, "Have you ever seen daffodils pushing their way up out of the ground? And when they're in bloom and all massed together, a breeze comes along and makes them do a curtsy to the lawn stretching out in front of them. Have you ever seen that? When I see that, I feel so glad to be alive." And I thought, So Mariah is made to feel alive by some flowers bending in the breeze. How does a person get to be that way? (17)

Instead of the affective resonance desired by Mariah, Lucy responds with critical distance. For Lucy, the image of curtsying daffodils carries less enlivening

connotations. She recalls a successful recital of a poem at “Queen Victoria Girls’ School”:

After I was done, everybody stood up and applauded with an enthusiasm that surprised me, and later they told me how nicely I had pronounced every word, how I had placed just the right amount of special emphasis in places where that was needed, and how proud the poet, now long dead, would have been to hear his words ringing out of my mouth. I was then at the height of my two-facedness: that is, outside I seemed one way, inside I was another; [. . .] [I]nside I was making a vow to erase from my mind, line by line, every word of that poem. The night after I had recited the poem, I dreamt, continuously it seemed, that I was being chased down a narrow cobbled street by bunches and bunches of those same daffodils that I had vowed to forget, and when finally I fell down from exhaustion they all piled on top of me, until I was buried deep underneath them and was never seen again. (17–18)

In withholding empathy from Mariah, Lucy disengages from the British colonial cultural project and distances herself from a projective relation with nature, celebrated in the poem to which I take the passage to allude, namely, Wordsworth’s “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud.”<sup>31</sup> Kincaid ends Lucy’s and Mariah’s aesthetic confrontation by having each take a step back from the other (18–19).<sup>32</sup> As the novel proceeds, this gesture is followed by similar attempts at aesthetic sharing on Mariah’s part, which repeatedly provoke distancing moves on Lucy’s part, who ultimately leaves the family to pursue photography.<sup>33</sup> Aesthetic clashes in *Lucy* represent a stand-off between an aesthetic that is implicitly figured as North American, middle-class, white and one that is imagined as immigrant, Afro-Caribbean, middle-class, black. Kincaid juxtaposes two aesthetic worlds. Structures of aesthetic desire are suggested to coincide with structures of racialization. She depicts racialized aesthetic consciousness as central to Lucy’s and Mariah’s personalities, structures of desire, and existential stances. This centrality carries over to Lucy’s and Mariah’s friendship. Although Lucy and Mariah are described as loving one another, the aesthetic, in Kincaid’s book, exemplifies a relational deadlock, limiting further negotiation of the friendship. Kincaid imagines the aesthetic then to follow the racial delineations set out in the novel. She accords the aesthetic the power to make present in a relationship profound cultural and personal experiences and differences, and to bring out a need for distancing. This is a significant achievement of the aesthetic and I find it an important strength of the book that it brings this out sharply. At the same time, this produces also a limitation for the notion of the aesthetic that the book implicitly articulates.

Kincaid has staged an aesthetic clash along sharply differentiated racial and cultural lines. There is little crossover or syncretism between Mariah’s and

Lucy's aesthetic desires and perceptions.<sup>34</sup> However, aesthetic activities are capable of shifting and diffusing tidy racial categorizations.<sup>35</sup> Aesthetic systems do not simply line up with colonial divides, as discussions of hybridity in literary studies suggest. In matching distinct aesthetic systems with distinct ethnic, cultural, and personal identities, *Lucy* parallels the Enlightenment scheme that channels aesthetic passions along tightly delineated, ethnic paths. Although the book does not represent the clash between Lucy and Mariah as one between barbarism and civilization, like Hume and Kant's theories, it lines aesthetic passions up with cultural identities in an orderly way. Considered as a view of the aesthetic, this all too rigidly stratified system amounts to a diminishment of the powers and complexities of aesthetic racialization and racialized aestheticization.

### The Aesthetic as an Aside

In two documentaries, *The Gleaners and I* and *The Gleaners and I: Two Years Later* (France, 2000 and 2002), Agnès Varda articulates a conception of the aesthetic as a form of gleaning. Both documentaries celebrate everyday aesthetic experiences and activities. Varda interviews gleaners of several classes and races, including poor whites picking up loaves of bread at the end of the market, African immigrants making a living by salvaging stoves, middle-class whites picking apples after the harvest, a restaurant chef collecting herbs, and the psychoanalyst Jean Laplanche who registers unintended turns of language. Among these gleaners, Varda also includes herself. We see the filmmaker, digital video camera in hand, gleaning images from paintings, fruits, her hands, her hair, other people, landscapes, and coincidences, such as a "dancing" lens cap. Both documentaries propose a notion of video making in terms of daily activities such as the seeing, touching, recording, gathering, recontextualizing, and assembling of everyday materials. The gleaner/artist playfully devises new functions for things considered to fall short of ordinary standards of usefulness, and thereby creates a new value for otherwise devalued elements.

Varda lends gleaning a double pleasure. She presents the urban and rural spaces traversed in the films as occasions for abundant aesthetic pleasure to those who encounter them with a fresh eye and an open imagination. The videos testify to the joys on offer in the domain of commodified produce and artifacts. But Varda does not simply celebrate the material world. Building on and redeploying aesthetic pleasures anchored in the world of production and consumption, the viewer, artist, and gleaner also encounter a pleasure that is imagined to *elude* institutionalized commodification procedures. Varda accords gleaning the attraction of a gentle subversiveness as it disorients hierarchies of significance that have been encoded in the objects. The double

pleasure of bringing out an aesthetic that has already materialized, and of carrying this pleasure nonetheless into unexpected and disparate directions, which then modifies the initial pleasure, is part of the immediate visual delight of seeing old refrigerators refurbished as living quarters for playmobil families or as sites for demonstrations by playmobil activists. Varda also shows the limitations of such playful resignification. Aging and processes of material decay will not be turned about through imaginative redeployment.<sup>36</sup> Neither does Varda redeem current structures of consumption and production. Gleaning includes the rescuing of damaged birds after oil spills, the salvaging of delicious fruits and vegetables whose limited profit margin destines them to rot away as waste, and conversations with homeless individuals who have been dismissed from the work force. Varda's cinematography remains in a constant connection with the underside of socially sanctioned economic life. Nevertheless, Varda's visual study somewhat paradoxically idealizes the aesthetic.

Casting the aesthetic in the shape of gleaning, Varda models it as an aside, something that takes effect *after* an element's designated usefulness has been found lacking, in the margins of the institutions of the market, apart from standardized regimes of production and consumption. At the same time, she complicates the aesthetic's status as an aside by lending it existential centrality. Showing souvenirs collected on a visit to Japan, Varda observes that "it is what I have gleaned that tells me where I have been." It is through individual invention that the gleaner both deploys and counters disenchanting and dehumanizing dimensions of routine economic formations. The videos celebrate the gleaners' and thus also Varda's and the viewer's discovery and framing of aesthetic meanings. The double pleasure of gleaning thereby extends to the activity of artistic and aesthetic looking and making. Yet more broadly, Varda depicts gleaning as a stance toward the physical environment, *vis-à-vis* the passing of time, in relation to one's body and to other people. This means that the aside paradoxically takes up a crucial existential role. While the centralization of apparent asides, to my mind, plays a significant role in the formation of aesthetic experience,<sup>37</sup> as a picture of the aesthetic this scenario occludes problematic sides of the aesthetic.

The concept of free aesthetic play represents only one side of aesthetic activities and identities. Aesthetic energies are more fundamentally embedded in processes of consumption and production than the idea of gleaning, imagined as a centralized aside, is able to express. Market formations observe aesthetic norms and standards. Aesthetic needs and desires fully participate in structures of consumption and production. Overconsumption, environmental pollution, mass production, and wastefulness are supported by aesthetic passions for objects and experiences. Aesthetic energies are impulses toward

consumption and production. These energies are fully complicit in making the world of consumption and production the world it is. While the image of gleaning brings out important life-affirmative dimensions of the aesthetic, it disregards an influential spectrum of aesthetic choices that motivate and maintain economical processes. Of special significance, here, in light of the structure of racialization, is that it renders invisible the formative force the aesthetic wields in the ongoing establishment of culture.

To see the aesthetic as an aside, that is to say, to position it as a dimension of life that is conducted at a distance from economical and political structures, is to set it apart from important aspects of its subjective and cultural labor.<sup>38</sup> It is to bracket the racial importance of the aesthetic and the aesthetic importance of race. It is to screen out the work of aesthetic racialization and racialized aestheticization in favor of a fantasy image of white people as situated outside of a whitened and whitening aesthetic. A notion of the aesthetic as a supplementary factor, a decorative epiphenomenon, housed in the margins of social life, implicitly takes for granted the trajectories of white subject and culture formation. It owes its plausibility to a vision that has already been immersed in these trajectories, one that has securely whitened itself, precisely by way of the cultural powers it is now safely able to overtly disregard. The dominance of whiteness manifests itself in this case, then, in the obfuscation of aesthetic forces that bolster white selves and support white cultural life, as well as in the occlusion of cultural forces that underwrite a white aesthetic. A philosophical perspective that sees the aesthetic as an after- or side effect of moral, political, and epistemic practices participates in a regimen that renders the aesthetic workings and production of whiteness invisible. This fantasy allows whiteness to function as an unmarked basis of normativity with respect to racialization and the aesthetic. Varda's proposed conception of the aesthetic as an aside parallels in this regard Kant's deculturalizing move.<sup>39</sup>

Varda's and Kincaid's appeals to aesthetic dimensions of everyday activities and objects, though different, thus both appear to adopt moves that are familiar from the Enlightenment scheme. The task, then, is to think the aesthetic in a manner that is able to register the full extent to which culture formation is an aesthetic process and to which the aesthetic is racialized.

### Racial Oppression as Aesthetic Oppression

Franz Fanon has emphasized the importance of the aesthetic to processes of identity formation. In his view, popular cultural forms such as newspapers, books, advertisements, film, and radio tend to establish and sustain white identities (*Black* 152, 177, 179, 191–92; *Wretched* 209). They do this, among other things, by shaping white worldviews and by providing anecdotes and

stories that endorse white myths about blacks (*Black* 111–12, 188).<sup>40</sup> They cause both white and black people to identify with white attitudes and perceptions (146–48, 152–53, 191–92). To counteract the effects of white popular forms on blacks and to give shape to a black voice, Fanon believes it is necessary to create magazines, songs, and history texts that support black modes of socialization (148, 153). Furthermore, he sees “revolutionary” art as contributing to processes of decolonization (*Wretched* 227–32). Aesthetic elements thus bear important cultural weight, on Fanon’s analysis. However, Fanon’s emphasis on the power of the aesthetic stands in contrast with a strand in his writing that curtails this power. Fanon argues that the colonial system obliterates the culture of colonized nations, destroying their aesthetic rhythms, habits, and artistic creativity (40, 93, 236–38). Accordingly, “[i]t is around the peoples’ struggles that African-Negro culture takes on substance, and not around songs, poems, or folklore” (235). Fanon sees no room for new cultural departures under colonial domination (237, 244; *Black* 187). To the contrary, he considers national liberation a condition for culture (*Wretched* 233, 244–45). He notes that under colonial oppression, the struggle for liberation is the only available and exemplary form of culture and creativity (93, 244–45, 247–48). Only the emergence of national consciousness is able to re-energize culture outside of the struggle (36). In Fanon’s view, aesthetic change can and will arise at an advanced stage of the anticolonial struggle (238–46).

Fanon has identified important sources of aesthetic racialization (popular arts as instrumental in the realization of white and black cultural goals) as well as racialized aestheticization (popular arts as reflecting whiteness; “the” anticolonial struggle as fostering vital forms of postcolonial culture).<sup>41</sup> While it is important, as Fanon does, to register the aesthetic effects of aesthetic oppression, and while aesthetic oppression indeed dramatically violates the effectiveness and impedes the realizability of specific artistic forms, I believe that such oppression, on the whole, cannot adequately be understood as a general destruction of aesthetic modes and possibilities. Fanon subscribes to an overly diminished view of the aesthetic under oppression, one that makes it hard to recognize powers of resistance that remain unharmed. We encounter here a tension in Fanon’s account, for his notion of anticolonial resistance as a form of culture already suggests that certain forms of creativity are retained intactly under colonial oppression and must be made productive. By recognizing the cultural dimensions of resistance, Fanon makes it plausible that where given aesthetic forms are damaged, other aesthetic forms must and do indeed arise. Accordingly, I propose to understand aesthetic oppression, alternatively, violent and unjustifiable restructuring of the aesthetic, that is to say, as a problematic *transformation* of aesthetic rhythms, choices, and possibilities. Aesthetic oppression, so conceived, is not exhausted by its destructive dimension

but can be seen to re-establish the terrain from which novel productive forms must inevitably emerge. Fanon's reading of aesthetic oppression as an extinction of aesthetic modes and capacities aligns the aesthetic too closely with a pure, unambivalently valorized national identity. It replicates in this regard Hume's direct alignment of taste and civilization.<sup>42</sup>

In reading aesthetic oppression as cultural obliteration, Fanon downplays the aesthetic energies inherent in fundamental affective, cognitive, and social capacities. Sidestepping these energies, he also misses an important repertoire of political powers and passions. I find it implausible that the anticolonial struggle is able to do the cultural and political labor that it is called upon to do in the absence of the aesthetic capacities manifested in songs, poems, and folklore.<sup>43</sup> I do not see how "the people's struggle," defined as culture, but depleted of aesthetic rhythms, habits, and creativity, could be capable of revitalizing art and culture. The culture of political action is not simply distinguishable from the culture of aesthetic forms (such as "songs"). The performativity, the humor, and the affective intensity of much of Fanon's own writing is testimony to the power aesthetic forms carry *as political elements*. This power does not reduce to aspects of the struggle but amounts at the same time to the power aesthetic forms carry *as aesthetic elements*.<sup>44</sup> Whether they are oppressive or liberatory, racialized processes of culture and identity formation participate in and draw on aesthetic capacities and activities that—for better and for worse—coincide with basic human abilities.

Kincaid, Varda, and Fanon each implicitly challenge aspects of the relational framework inherited from the Humean and Kantian tradition by expanding the spectrum of legitimately aesthetic modes of agency, relationality, creation, perception, and exchange. However, they each also replicate influential aspects of this tradition, underestimate powers and possibilities that are inherent in basic aesthetic capacities, and downplay complexities that attach to the cultural functioning of the aesthetic. Clearly, enlightenment conceptions of aestheticization and racialization are deeply entrenched in artistic and theoretical figurations of aesthetic passions and relationships. These conceptions have come to be anchored in art forms, artistic modes of address, and institutional arrangements. They have been determinative of such fundamental parts of our cultural being that it is difficult to step away from them. Yet, at the same time, outlines of alternative configurations of aesthetic passions and relationships are visible that must be elaborated. In the following section, I consider links between the aesthetic and blackness that, like tendencies in Kincaid, Varda, and Fanon, gesture toward different forms of aesthetic racialization and racialized aestheticization, but challenge whitened and whitening aesthetic relationships further on the points where these three thinkers, as we have seen, observe Enlightenment postulates.

### 3. Aestheticized and Aestheticizing Blackness and the Reconfiguration of Whitened and Whitening Aesthetic Relationships

In creating and analyzing artworks addressed to black existence, artists, critics, and theorists have given the aesthetic a central role in light of black cultural goals, thus implementing processes of aesthetic racialization. Working toward the establishment of modes of criticism, reception, tradition-, and canon-formation that are adequate to black aesthetic productions, many thinkers have established processes of racialized aestheticization. Others have formulated deconstructive approaches to structures of aesthetic and racial signification that establish a measure of distance from what I take to be entrenched patterns of racialized aestheticization and aesthetic racialization.<sup>45</sup>

This section examines forms of aesthetic racialization and racialized aestheticization that are implicit in what may be called “everyday” aesthetic capacities, identified by Alice Walker, Audre Lorde, Paule Marshall, and Angela Davis. These thinkers each describe aesthetic powers and passions that are inherent in human capabilities that are at work in the conduct of daily, material lives, such as storytelling, sensory perception, ornamentation, speech, and the integration of feeling and understanding. They articulate aesthetic relationships, productions, and interactions that have been ignored by the Enlightenment model of aesthetic exchange. As I indicate below, they also implicitly challenge this model at junctures where Kincaid, Varda, and Fanon have replicated Enlightenment conceptions of culture.

While Varda, as we have seen, puts into play the double pleasures of the somewhat paradoxical logic of a centralized *aside*, Walker and Lorde insist on the existential and political necessity of the aesthetic. Walker sees art, in the form of storytelling and growing flowers, as work her mother’s soul “must have” (“Search” 241). This work, hence, was a daily part of her mother’s life (241). She describes her mother’s art as an example of the creativity that she takes to have sustained millions of black women (238). For Walker, the aesthetic, then, includes the making of meaning and value “in simple ways” (242), namely by tapping into creative and material resources that are able to energize life, despite prolonged hardship and oppression.<sup>46</sup>

Audre Lorde, likewise, points to the importance of a form of poetry that is grounded in fundamental faculties of thought, feeling, and experience. Poetry, so conceived, in her view, is essential to the survival of feelings that are otherwise kept from developing, due to oppressive social structures. Hence, it enables the kind of freedom that can attach to formulating “the implications of ourselves” (“Poetry” 39). She describes it as “a revelatory distillation of experience,” that is to say, as material that is crafted from daily life, which it then also serves to illuminate (36–37). In combining thought and feeling,

poetry, according to Lorde, allows feelings to develop into radical ideas, where they come to hint at the realization of new existential possibilities (37, 39). Lorde and Walker thus both insist on the affective and existential necessity of the aesthetic. Highlighting aesthetic media and capacities that they explicitly locate in the context of racialized, classed, and gendered cultural conditions, they implicitly identify sources of racialized aestheticization. Furthermore, in depicting the aesthetic as indispensable to survival, resistance, identity formation, as well as ordinary forms of life, they implicitly describe sources of aesthetic racialization. Paule Marshall and Angela Davis have articulated similar forms of racialized aestheticization and aesthetic racialization.

Marshall affirms the indebtedness of her own literary work to the artistic lessons and standards of excellence passed on to her by other poets, namely her mother and her mother's friends, ordinary, working-class, Barbadian immigrants in New York City, who used to gather in the kitchen after work to talk. Marshall highlights the artfulness of their language, its beauty, originality, irony, exuberance, insight, and wit. She portrays it as an oral art form, which, "in keeping with the African tradition in which art and life are one—was an integral part of their lives" ("Making" 6).<sup>47</sup> Marshall (and with her, Walker and Lorde) clearly take a broader view of the powers of aesthetic racialization than Fanon. As argued above, Fanon recognizes varieties of aesthetic racialization (popular arts' ability to socialize whites and blacks into white culture; the struggle's cultural importance) but considers the aesthetic diminished under oppression. Contrary to the latter strand in Fanon, however, Walker, Lorde, and Marshall each describe aesthetic powers that are crucial parts of life despite—and in some respects on account of—the realities of systemic oppression. This also goes for Angela Davis, who in a reading of Billie Holiday's music, moreover, makes a shift vis-à-vis Fanon and Kincaid on the point of the alignment of aesthetic and racial forms.

Where Fanon and Kincaid tightly align aesthetic divides with racialized divides, in Davis's reading, Billie Holiday achieved a politically effective combination of white and black musical forms. Davis notes that Holiday challenged the often trivial texts of the popular songs assigned to her by white producers, through a humorous, ironical, or, to the contrary, deeply serious mode of singing (*Blues* 163–80). Accordingly, by conjoining black and white forms in a style that operated in multiple aesthetic registers, Holiday's work, as Davis reads it, acquired the ability to speak to heterogeneous black and white audiences (166, 171–72). Through this intricate manipulation of complexly racialized forms, Holiday's music opened these diverse audiences up to its meanings, according to Davis. This enabled the music to provoke changes in these audiences' understanding of race and racial, gender, and class relationships

(170–73, 177–80). Davis’s account of Holiday’s music clearly loosens the rigid aesthetics-culture parallelism postulated by Hume and Kant, which allots distinct aesthetic systems to distinct ethnicities.<sup>48</sup> Identifying a form of racialized aestheticization (Holiday’s music is marked by black and white racialization) and of aestheticized racialization (Holiday’s music is able to affect black and white constructions of race and racial, gender, and class relationships), Davis brings out relational structures and capabilities that Enlightenment theories have implicitly discounted; perhaps most notably, art’s power to mold a critical and emotional community across racial, gender, and class lines (36, 90, 118–19, 155, 172).<sup>49</sup> Racialized aestheticization and aesthetic racialization take yet a further form on Davis’s analysis.

Davis connects the layered aesthetic structure of Holiday’s singing with the layeredness of everyday African American speech, which she sees as “musicalized” through African American slave songs (167–68). In Davis’s view, this speech is marked by a “decidedly aesthetic character” (166) that reflects, besides slave songs and its interplay of literal and aesthetic meanings, interdependencies between music and speech issuing from West African art forms (174). Davis thus finds important aesthetic passions and powers in daily speech. In addition to this, she sees blues women’s music as thematically interwoven with working-class black people’s daily lives (142, 159). She notes that Billie Holiday gave her life experiences aesthetic form (179). More generally, she reads “Ma” Rainey’s, Smith’s, and Holiday’s work as expressive of the lived experiences of black working-class women (171, 173).<sup>50</sup> Thematizing questions of emotion, sexuality, love, and racial and gender violence and injustice that were part of ordinary life in black working-class communities, women blues performers, on Davis’s analysis, produced critical representations of these subjects, and thereby made blues audiences aware of the importance and the possibility of social transformation. By reading “Ma” Rainey’s, Smith’s, and Holiday’s music in terms of its mobilization of everyday experiences and forms, Davis, then, renders legible the sexual, feminist, and racial politics of this music, which has historically been downplayed and misconstrued.<sup>51</sup> In seeing these performers’ music as inflected by racialized forms and identities, Davis has articulated a source of racialized aestheticization. Theorizing the social and political powers of this music, she has articulated a process of aesthetic racialization.

As I have indicated, Davis points to a wider range of aesthetic relationships than is typically recognized in philosophical aesthetics. I have already mentioned the point about the formation of a critical and affective community that transcends given class, gender, and racial lines.<sup>52</sup> More specifically, Davis sees Billie Holiday’s work as “drawing from and contributing to an African American social and musical history” in which women’s political and aesthetic

agency mutually nurture one another (164). It is precisely this kind of synoptic perspective, one that interconnects aesthetic, racial, existential, and political questions, that is central to an understanding of significance of aesthetic racialization and racialized aestheticization. Walker, Marshall, and Lorde come close to this in emphasizing the existential and political centrality of the forms of racially inflected artfulness they have identified, and in outlining the impact of this artfulness on self, agency, and culture. For example, Walker conceptualizes the transmission of creativity in expansive existential and political terms, when representing her mother as having passed on to her a respect “for all that illuminates and cherishes life,” and, more than that, “for the possibilities—and the will to grasp them” (241–42). She also claims that understanding the creative spirit that she takes black women to have inherited amounts to knowing “who and of what, we black American women are” (235).<sup>53</sup> Marshall, likewise, as we have seen, considers conversation in the kitchen an integral part of her mother’s and her mother’s friends lives, a part, moreover, that provide an affirmation that Marshall depicts as critical to their sense of themselves. Relatedly, Lorde’s view of poetry as “not a luxury” clearly foregrounds poetry’s indispensability. Davis, Walker, Marshall, and Lorde thus each accord pivotal existential and political powers to fundamental aesthetic capacities that participate in the conduct of everyday life. They give the aesthetic a basic role in enabling survival, sustenance, community formation, and the creation of meaning in the face of racial, gender, and economic oppression, while also locating aesthetic forms in the racialized, cultural histories that have helped to shape them. Like Hume and Kant, they implicitly posit collaborations among racialized aestheticization and aesthetic racialization, but unlike these philosophers, they thereby affirm links between the aesthetic and black subjectivity and culture formation.<sup>54</sup>

Walker’s, Lorde’s, Marshall’s, and Davis’s insistence on the existential and political centrality of fundamental, everyday aesthetic activities goes hand in hand with their emphasis on historically underprivileged aesthetic relationships. Each of these thinkers posits artistic transmissions and exchanges along black, feminine, and often matrilineal trajectories. For example, Marshall, as we have already seen, affirms the cultural legacy passed on to her in the “wordshop of the kitchen” (12). Lorde’s image of “the Black mother within us—the poet” locates poetry’s claim on feeling and freedom in a black, maternal lineage.<sup>55</sup> Walker’s “daughters” are represented as actualizing the creativity their “mothers” handed down to them on their own terms, offering their mothers’ works a legibility they would not otherwise have had.<sup>56</sup> Davis, finally, traces connections among women blues performers that included the borrowing, influencing, and transformation of aesthetic materials among them.<sup>57</sup> In examining what may be learnt from blues women that could not be learnt from

feminist writers and activists (xiv, 24), she places “Ma” Rainey’s, Smith’s, and Holiday’s music in a feminist historiography.

In sum, in taking a careful look at frequently neglected, everyday aesthetic forms, Walker, Lorde, Marshall, and Davis expand our explicitly recognized repertoire of aesthetic capacities and relationships. Their acknowledgment of “ordinary,” often feminized aspects of daily aesthetic life illuminates dimensions of a more complex relational understanding of aesthetic productions, perceptions, and experiences that must be systematized. They bring out aesthetic relationships among black mothers and daughters; friends; artists; members of black, working-class communities; and members of black and white publics. They identify cultural arrangements, aesthetic forms, and modes of address that the Enlightenment model of aesthetic exchange ignores or under-theorizes. They emphasize the centrality of a mutual involvement between aesthetic resources and political and existential capabilities. In connecting aesthetic forms with racialized cultural conditions and in making the aesthetic central to black aspirations, they envision varieties of racialized aestheticization and aesthetic racialization that establish a distance from the patterns postulated by Hume and Kant, patterns that, to this date, perform structural roles in aesthetic theories and productions.

#### 4. Aesthetic Relationality

In the above discussion, I highlight multiple varieties of aesthetic racialization and racialized aestheticization that enter into the composition of culture. We have seen that Hume and Kant implicitly portray civilization as a product of interacting strata of aesthetic racialization and racialized aestheticization. These thinkers have imagined a network of cultural relationships in which racialization and aestheticization mutually support one another. Culture, as theorized by Hume, includes racialized and aestheticized arrangements of creation and perception, labor and knowledge, passion and control, social affect and conversation, virtue and judgment, friendship, indifference and love, refinement and dispositions that are to be refined. Hume and Kant, I argue, have authorized a structure of relationships in which aesthetic modes of exchange are geared toward white cultural goals. The significance of the aesthetic is at least partially construed as the appeal of these goals, and more generally, as the desirability of whiteness, that is to say, the attraction of a white culture, distinguished by racially exclusive forms of cultivation and refinement.<sup>58</sup> I have indicated that it is a highly specific form of whiteness that is thereby being aestheticized, one that is structured by differentiations according to class, gender, and sexuality, and defined by its differences from specific kinds of blackness

and other identity markers as are imagined to pertain, for example, to Native Americans, Muslims, and East Asians.<sup>59</sup> In aestheticizing whiteness and whitening the aesthetic, Hume and Kant have severely limited the spectrum of what counts as desirable intra- and crosscultural relationships. More contemporary artists, critics, and theorists, such as Walker, Lorde, Marshall, and Davis, however, take steps toward alternative schemes of relationships. These thinkers each foreground aesthetic relationships the Enlightenment scheme has bypassed, such as those among mothers and daughters, black, female, proto-feminist artists, members of black working-class communities, and among black and white audiences. Beyond that, they identify aesthetic powers and passions that to some extent elude cultural delineations attained through collaborating forces of whitened aestheticization and aesthetic whitening. Like Fanon and Kincaid, these writers also draw attention to aesthetic powers and passions that are supported by and supportive of black cultural goals. In attending to daily aesthetic detail, they bring out resources inherent in everyday aesthetic activities that tend to go unnoticed. Among other things, these artists and thinkers thereby take steps toward a reorganization of the relations between acts of aesthetic perception and creation and structures of affect, identity, and social and public existence, which must be examined in greater philosophical depth.<sup>60</sup> Although further analysis of the intriguing relational interventions made by the authors and artists canvassed in this chapter is much needed, I hope to have indicated that the cultural field manifests a wide range of divergent, but interconnected forms of racialized aestheticization and aesthetic racialization.

Throughout my argument, I have found the aesthetic to be central to whiteness as well as blackness and other modalities of subject positioning and vice versa. More generally, subjectivity, identity, and culture appear to implicate aesthetic structures, and aesthetic structures appear to implicate modalities of cultural positioning.<sup>61</sup> Racialization cannot be understood apart from its aesthetic supports and the aesthetic cannot be understood apart from its racial underpinnings. A failure to recognize their complex, mutual entanglements runs the risk of aligning the aesthetic too tidily with historically stabilized cultural demarcations, or of reinstating whiteness as a basis of normativity in the fields of art and culture. While Kincaid's *Lucy*, Fanon's reading of cultural oppression as aesthetic diminishment, and Varda's studies of gleaning successfully loosen the hold of several Humean and Kantian strictures, they nevertheless turn out to replicate in these respects problematic Enlightenment tendencies.<sup>62</sup> The project of thinking through the connections between aesthetics and race in their full complexity is thus crucial to the attempt to change them.

Readers may notice that the concepts of aesthetic racialization and racialized aestheticization are hard to wrap one's mind around. I believe this is due

to the fact that they brush against thoroughly sedimented philosophical, phenomenological, and artistic histories, histories that have been profoundly formative of current aesthetic needs and passions.<sup>63</sup> The cultivating trajectories outlined by Hume and the deculturalizing move inaugurated by Kant continue to this date both to enable and to protect aestheticized whiteness and whitened aesthetic theory. Philosophical aesthetics, of the European as well as the Anglo-American varieties, is thoroughly mired in whiteness, and continues to celebrate whiteness as this came to be anchored in proposed accounts of culture, aesthetic experience, and art. The ongoing reiteration and reestablishment of aestheticized whiteness and whitened aesthetics underscore the urgency of the project of creating newly aestheticized and racialized passions, modes of address, and patterns of relationality.

My argument points to a layered texture of aestheticized and aestheticizing dimensions of whiteness and blackness that inextricably implicate other social and subjective determinants, such as gender and class. Their entanglements reach into the miniscule elements of social existence, of our embodied interactions with one another, and the material world. No aspect of cultural life is thereby left untouched. Aesthetics and race are fundamental constituents of patterns of identity and difference at the same time as they remain profoundly problematic. Their centrality makes it imperative that we look *within the relational structures* that they have helped to establish and from which they draw their energy, for the resources that enable us to craft novel configurations of aesthetic and racial passions and modes of address. As subjects of aesthetic experiences and members of aesthetic communities, we participate in these relational structures. We keep these structures in motion. They are in an ongoing state of metamorphosis. It is crucial that white participants in aesthetic exchanges be aware of the positionings and structurations we continue to bring to this relational field. As white aesthetic agents, we must integrate our aesthetic feelings, perceptions, imaginations, creations, and interactions with an awareness of these positionings so that we can begin to own up to our cultural stances and to take responsibility for our cultural agency. There is no other way in which white people can hope to inhabit our cultures in a richly interactive, embodied sense. The price that we pay for inaction in this regard is momentous. White people have decided to live culture thinly; they have chosen to make do with a self-serving fantasy, incarnating a pseudo-aesthetic, rather than an intersubjectively achieved cultural field. If we desire to actualize the ethically promising ambitions that aesthetics and culture have held for us, we must own up to the conflicted, ambivalent powers of our aesthetic agency, and put these up for critical transformation. Ethical projects to live our racial (gendered and classed) identities differently will at the same time have to be projects of re-aestheticization and vice versa.

## Epilogue

The objective of the above discussion is to create a conceptual disruption of our investments in problematically racialized forms of aestheticization and problematically aestheticized forms of racialization. I point to the need to take a critical look at our engagement with racialized, class-based, gendered, ethnicized, eroticized (and so on) aesthetic forms, and at our aestheticized experiences, identities, and values. All racialized subjects who are positioned in systems of aesthetic relationality face this challenge, that is to say, blacks, whites, Asians, Latinas/os, and so forth, in multiple mixings and disjunctions. This project places our aesthetic and racial positions at risk; it destabilizes our cultural agency; it shifts the grounds for normativity in aesthetics; it dismantles the protected status of forms of whitened aesthetics and aestheticized whiteness; it asks for a reconsideration of the bases of modes of blackened aesthetics and aestheticized blackness; and it recrafts the aesthetic and racialized tools of self-fashioning, culture building, and political action. With the above discussion I hope to create openings for newly aestheticized and racializing passions, modes of address, and relational structures. My intention is to point to the presence of embodied insights, affective structures, and imaginaries that become tangible at the level of everyday aesthetic experience but are not legible at other levels of understanding and sensibility. I do not believe that the aesthetic can ultimately be divested from problematic ties to forms of subjectivity and identity. It is too fully intertwined with everything else for this to be a live possibility. However, I find the project of putting into motion given constructions of aesthetics and race from a position within them, through the means they make available, theoretically and ethically crucial.

While the present book fosters an autobiographical voice, I have approached the particulars of aesthetic existence, which implicitly include the personal details of my own white, aesthetic life, through an indirect, impersonal form of address. My point thereby has not been to depict this mode as aesthetically or politically neutral, as offering privileged access to universalizable insights, or as exempted from the challenge of re-aestheticization and re-racialization. To the contrary, in theorizing the aesthetic as a racialized and racializing technology, I have wanted to bring out for critical analysis—among a number of other things—the particular cultural power I exert as a white, aesthetically trained, European woman, in the context of a broader system of aesthetic relationality. It is this power that I both use and resist in my cultural and cross-cultural interactions, my philosophical writing, my art criticism, my teaching, my personal life, my fleshed dealings with the material world, and my aesthetic self-fashioning.

My reason for adopting the impersonal voice, as noted above, lies in the urgency of basic theoretical work in the undertheorized philosophical field where

matters of aesthetics and race coalesce.<sup>64</sup> More than that, in light of the critical project outlined in the above, a number of questions arise about the effectiveness of personal testimonies in the study of whiteness: How do such testimonies resist already scripted aesthetic scenarios of heroization, narcissism, and self-confession that they inevitably activate? How does the personal mode dislodge questionable kinds of aestheticized and aestheticizing power? How does this form avoid casting white self-professions in a self-decorative, recuperative mold, offering the freshly re-aestheticized self a new epistemic and moral cachet it is not yet able to sustain? Writers in the personal mode face the aesthetic demand to make their testimony engaging, or, at least, publicly presentable. This requirement impacts any edited sequence of poignant anecdotes, feelings, insights, and silences.<sup>65</sup> I believe this can hinder the critical effectiveness of self-declarations. I am especially reluctant to draw philosophical mileage from a centering of a supposedly achieved “insightful,” “sophisticated,” “cool,” “courageous,” “humorous,” “morally remediable,” “humane” whiteness. I worry about the capacities of self-aestheticization to pass off my whiteness as more critical than it can be. While it is crucial that whites take on the job of critical self-reflection, and extend this job to their own racial selves, I am not sure how self-reflections in print can be as critical as they need to be. I am skeptical about the power of white self-declarations—which keep whites solidly ensconced in the center—to help decentering whiteness from the grounds of cultural normativity. Juxtaposing white and black personal testimonies by itself does not dispel this skepticism. Moreover, the difficulty arises also for testimonies by blacks: Which black lives are being foregrounded over and above other black lives? While I do not doubt that carefully crafted, intentional self-contextualizations and autobiographical statements can do philosophical work, I am afraid that a personal testimony on the part of my white self replicates a pseudo-relationality and a pseudo-reciprocity, that must be analyzed and exposed.<sup>66</sup> These concerns apply not exclusively to the personal voice, which is at the same time also always theoretical, but pertain more generally to the aestheticization of self that is implicit in all reading and writing. Conceptual work along the above lines is indispensable to the realization of a critical stance vis-à-vis questions of self-representation, the formation of experience, and the aesthetic fashioning of individual selves, mine included.

### Notes

My thanks go to Elizabeth V. Spelman for crucial commentary on this essay.

1. Philomena Essed (*Understanding*) and Linda Martín Alcoff (“Phenomenology” 271–73, 281) emphasize the importance of considering the workings of race and racism

at these levels. See also the centrality of psychoexistential and phenomenological structures in Franz Fanon's writings (*Black* 12, 169) and Lewis Gordon's focus on the phenomenology of "lived reality" (*Majesty* 5, 85; "What Does").

2. I define this notion more extensively in my "Pearl's" and elaborate this concept in a book manuscript, entitled *The Cultural Promise of the Aesthetic*.

3. These effects work also in the other direction, that is to say, all social and subjective determinants put into play the aestheticized and aestheticizing dimensions of whiteness and blackness. That race, class, gender, and other categories of social identity are analytically interconnected, operate interdependently, and can neither function nor be apprehended apart from their interconnections and interdependencies I take to be argued persuasively by Elizabeth V. Spelman (*Inessential*).

4. Theorizing whiteness clearly involves also thinking about the positioning of Native Americans, Asians, Latinas/os, and so forth, and about the implications of categories such as class, gender, and so on. This chapter's binary focus on whiteness and blackness limits the depth of the analysis. At the same time my proposed move toward relationality ameliorates this limitation to some extent through its explicit engagement of a wide range of dimensions of subject-positioning and multiple forms of racialization.

5. In fact, aesthetic relationality cannot be theorized without considering what black writers have said on the matter and without analyzing the relational interventions made by black artists.

6. Hume and Kant have outlined a normative framework that continues to ground theory formation in contemporary aesthetics. For this reason, I consider their treatments paradigmatic of what I loosely call here "the Enlightenment model of the aesthetic."

7. Hume calls reason, in the specific form in which it is basic to taste, "sense," or "good" or "strong" sense ("Standard" 16–17). Reason as an ingredient of taste includes among other things, "capacious thought" and "sound understanding" (16–17). It is responsible for rational virtues such as a clearness of conception, exactness of distinction, and vivacity of apprehension. Hume calls on reason to check the influence of prejudice, to comprehend the different parts of a work of art, to compare these parts with one another, and to assess the suitability of a work's means to its ends. Reason is thus crucial to a critic's capacity for judgment, and in particular to the ability to "discern the beauties of design and reasoning, which are the highest and most excellent" (17).

8. For Hume's views on black intellectual inferiority, see "National" 360n. For his comments on the debased minds of poor and laboring classes, see "National" 114. On women's mental inferiority, see "Immortality" 163, "Study" 96, "Rise" 91, "Essay" 38 and 40, where a group of individuals labeled "the conversable," who incline toward "obvious reflections on human affairs" and have a limited "compass of knowledge," are mostly implied to be female. The masculinization of intellect in Hume is also evident in his insistence that a good writer's sense (see previous note) be "strong and masculine" ("Simplicity" 43).

9. Presumably the women in this sharply restricted group have a requisite amount of "strong" sense which allows for taste ("Standard" 17).

10. The cultivation that taste achieves is both masculinized and feminized in distinctive, racialized ways and it is racialized in gendered ways.

11. Hume makes this explicit in the case of the fourth and fifth effects. Because the first three effects contribute to the fourth and fifth effects, the refinement and “socialization” of the passions, it is clear that these three effects are civilizing factors as well.

12. Taste also has the effect of rendering the passions and the individual’s social bonds aesthetically more pleasing, witness the “elegance” of passion in the last sentence of the above quote.

13. The closeness of the fine arts, refinement, delicacy, and luxury is also apparent in “Refinement” and “Commerce” 157, 161–63.

14. Besides a productive interaction among the arts, this spirit also fosters the emergence of individual geniuses (“Rise” 74).

15. Conversation with white women allows white men to develop civility and deference (“Rise” 85). It enables white male intellectuals to develop “liberty and facility of thought” and makes available experience, which they are able to “consult” in their reasonings. Without white women’s civilizing force, white male intellectuals lack a “taste for life or manners” (“Essay” 39); their writings remain “barbarous”; their hearts “cold” (40).

16. It is white men’s task to rescue women’s talk from triviality (“Essay” 38, 41). Learned men are called upon to correct false female taste (41) and to offer women sincere affection, or “the substance,” where others can provide only “complaisance,” in other words, “the shadow” (42). White men are to meet white women with gallantry, a passion that improves both men and women at the same time that it affirms white masculine authority (“Rise” 91). Hume links such gallantry immediately with taste, observing that gallantry is “refined” by art (90), and in turn, is indispensable to refinement in the arts (92).

17. Hume postulates a mutually uplifting organization of relationships among white males and females. In Hume’s view, men’s and women’s “*mutual* endeavor to please must insensibly polish the mind” (“Rise” 92; my italics). He considers properly managed, heterosexual *love* the source of all politeness and refinement (“National” 125). More than that, this kind of love is a natural foundation for the “sweetest and best enjoyment” of both sexes (“Rise” 91).

18. Furthermore, given colonialism and slavery, blacks are implicitly expected to function, alongside white women and lower-class men, as material supporters of the aesthetic bonds among white, middle-class men and among white, middle-class men and women, performing the labor necessary to protect the leisure and the intellectual productivity of learned, white males (see “Essay” 38 and “Rise” 83). In addition to this, blackness, as indicated earlier, functions as a limit-category against which these white bonds are articulated, that is to say, as the zero-point of reason, and hence of taste, and therefore of humanity and refined society.

19. Aesthetic racialization lies at the heart of a concept of culture, the applicability of which is contingent on the racial identity of the cultured subject. Unmasking the supposed universality attaching to conditions for entry into culture, Fanon writes “[n]o exception was made for my refined manners, or my knowledge of literature, or my understanding of the quantum theory” (*Black* 117).

20. This is not a matter of intentionality but of the way these desires work out in a broader system.

21. The racialized and racializing dimensions of the aesthetic and the aesthetized and aestheticizing dimensions of race, on my analysis, must be read as pertaining to this structure of cultural relationships. This structure, as we have seen, includes elements such as specific configurations of the passions; strictures on bonds of love and friendship, regulations of indifference and care; as well as commercial arrangements that qualify as virtuous and productive. It also includes regimens of beauty, vision, embodiment, and self-abstraction, whose connections with aestheticized whiteness have been developed by several thinkers. For example, Cornel West gives centrality to questions of beauty (“Genealogy”); Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks emphasizes regimes of vision (*Desiring* 2, 8, 19–21, 36, 38, 131), and Richard Dyer highlights constructions of disembodiment and self-abstraction and their parameters, such as absence, purity, and neutrality (*White* 4, 30, 38–39, 75). While these factors have important connections with whiteness, I do not see them as privileged loci of aesthetic racialization and racialized aestheticization. The history of aesthetics, to my mind, suggests that collaborations among aesthetics and racialization activate an inclusive range of existential, phenomenological, psychological, affective, and cultural dimensions, more extensive than is usually acknowledged. It is only by recognizing a highly intricate and elaborate network of collaborating elements and relationships that we can hope to account for the complex cultural constellations that populate this field, such as, for instance, the figurations of the white imaginary described by Toni Morrison (*Playing*). See also n. 59.

22. Since Kant’s put-downs of black people’s intellectual faculties are global and unspecific, pinpointing precisely how his theory invalidates their aesthetic judgments and tastes requires extrapolation. Blacks’ said intellectual deficiency presumably hinders their ability to make judgments of so-called “dependent” beauty and to grasp aesthetic ideas, both of which Kant’s theory renders crucial to the aesthetic judgment of what today are considered art works. Alleged intellectual deficiency most likely hampers judgments of the beautiful and the sublime in making it difficult to achieve and register the relationships among the cognitive faculties that underwrite these judgments. See also n. 24 on Kant’s views about knowledge and moral feeling as preconditions for taste.

23. He informs us that Spain has an “odd taste” (108), that the Chinese privilege “trifling grotesqueries” (110), that the grotesque is of special interest to Indians as well, and that “the Arab” possesses an “inflamed imagination, which presents things to him in unnatural and distorted images” (109).

24. In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant recognizes connections between taste and culture, among other things, by arguing that “a culture of the mental powers by means of those elements of knowledge called *humaniora*,” and “the development of moral ideas and the culture of the moral feeling” are preparatory conditions for the emergence of taste (par. 60). Another connection lies in Kant’s view of genuine taste as a mean between the “large-mindedness,” “refinement,” and “higher culture” of “cultivated” classes and the “natural simplicity and originality” of “uncultivated” classes (par. 60).

25. To my mind, the presence of crosscultural, transhistorical, racialized, classed, and gendered variety in the forms and qualities of taste strongly suggests that the phenomenon of taste bears *complex* relations to cultural conditions, such as the supposedly aesthetically relevant factors that Kant takes to differentiate “the Arab” from “the

German.” These relations must be accounted for. However, at the surface level of the text, Kant simply sidesteps the complexities he has opened up by admitting culturally grounded variety in taste.

26. At the same time, characteristics ascribed to other ethnicities carry their specificity and content into Kant’s conception of inappropriate faculties and perceptions, and by contrast, help to give shape to what counts as aesthetically appropriate.

27. An example of a recent approach to aesthetic value judgments in terms of common cognitive faculties that deploys the term *public* in this sense is Railton’s “Aesthetic,” see esp. 90.

28. Examples of this extensive literature are essays by Nancy Fraser and Iris Marion Young in Benhabib and Cornell (*Feminists*); by Fraser, George Yúdice, and Michael Warner in Robbins (*Phantom*); and by Jean L. Cohen, Joan B. Landes, and Marie Fleming in Meehan (*Feminists*).

29. In my “Aesthetic” I deploy the notion of “address” to theorize artworks’ differential aesthetic meanings and cultural labors, which Enlightenment constructions of the aesthetic as public, and the public as the sharable, and the sharable as that which is accessible by way of common appreciative faculties are unable to capture.

30. See María Lugones’ *Pilgrimages* 135–36 on the idea of Mexican and Mexican/American culture as ornamental in the eyes of white America.

31. For the less joyful side of daffodils that is vivid to Lucy but not to Mariah, see also 29–30. The narrator of Wordsworth’s poem, on a walk in the country, sees “a host” of golden daffodils “[f]luttering and dancing in the breeze.” He experiences these daffodils as twinkling and joyful company, “tossing their heads in sprightly dance.” Accordingly, at times of emptiness and solitude, his heart “with pleasure fills [a]nd dances with the daffodils.” Wordsworth’s narrator’s projective stance, which finds in nature what it desires to see, while ignoring everything else, echoes Mariah’s sealed relationship with nature, which is imagined to celebrate nature’s beauty and the memories it holds and to deplore its devastation, without including the slightest awareness of the implications of her own comfortable lifestyle in such environmental destruction (71–73). The narrator’s stance also echoes Mariah’s attitude toward Lucy, insofar as Mariah is depicted as needing Lucy to see things the way she herself does, and as disregarding their different perceptions and racial positions (32, 35–36).

32. In reaching out to rub Lucy’s cheek, Mariah creates a rapprochement, but she shifts the terrain of engagement from the aesthetic to Lucy’s “history.”

33. Mariah hopes to share, for example, the spring sky and weather (19, 20), real daffodils (29), the look of a ploughed field (33) and of fish she has caught (37), the smell of peonies (60).

34. An exception is Mariah’s liking of coffee with hot milk which she has learnt to make in France and which Lucy picks up from her. This, however, is an example of Lucy opening up her aesthetic world to Mariah. The converse occurs only during a moment of great, shared pleasure and closeness centered around the smell of peonies (60).

35. Notably, it is precisely daffodils which take up a destabilized cultural position in Edwidge Danticat’s novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, a story of migration and mother-daughter relationships that takes place in Haiti and the United States. These “Euro-

pean flowers,” which are loved “because they grew in a place they were not supposed to” (21), are here imagined to connote strength, limberness, and freedom to the protagonist, a young Haitian woman (29, 9). They provide solace (112, 155) at the same time as they figure in an image of a rain of dry leaves, and in frightening dreams (7–9, 28). In Danticat’s novel, daffodils are seen as having “the color of pumpkins and golden summer squash, as though they had acquired a bronze tinge from the skin of the natives who had adopted them” (21).

36. I owe this point to Catherine Portuges.

37. The image of the aesthetic as an aside links up with its standing as a detail. Part of the logic of the aesthetic detail, I argue, is an aesthetic significance it acquires during a process of interpretation, which, paradoxically, reflects also an earlier insignificance (see my “Pearl’s,” 58 and 64–66). Interestingly, taste in Lucy (the taste of boiled over fried or baked fish in the story of Christ and the fishermen) is also figured as a “small detail,” a detail that means a lot to her (38–39), and that represents another point of aesthetic difference between her and Mariah.

38. Varda’s specific use of form and address (to the viewer, to other artworks and, especially in the second video, to aesthetic objects and relationships) complicate her treatment of gleaning and the aesthetic in ways I am bypassing here. For example, the notion of gleaning resonates with a long history that associates the aesthetic with a field of disinterested activities, in which concerns of ordinary utility are eluded. Accordingly, my remarks here are not intended as a full reading of her treatment of these themes.

39. I feel ambivalent about this argument because Varda’s videos at the same time do a lot to counteract the unmarked presence of the aesthetic in the intersubjective experiences and object-relations that underwrite everyday existence. However, Varda’s celebration of aesthetic life is limited in ways that are racialized. It is these racialized limitations on which my reading here has focused, rather than what I experience as a seductive, loving, and pleasurable celebration of the life that can reside in the collaborative, ostensibly incidental interactions with the world of objects with which we surround ourselves—aspects of everyday aesthetic life that Varda’s video draws out poignantly. It is precisely on account of the importance of the social possibilities generated by such interactions with our environment and other individuals that the limitations of Varda’s cinematic essay are so significant.

40. Another way in which these forms help to sustain white identities is by offering them outlets for collective aggression (145–46).

41. Fanon also indicates that white art and culture have been damaged and blinded by colonialism’s violence (*Wretched* 215, 313; *Black* 202–203). His view of Europe’s alienated humanity poses a challenge to the quality of European art and culture that must be addressed. I read Fanon as pointing to the problems of white aestheticization as well as aestheticized whiteness.

42. Fanon writes that “every culture is first and foremost national” and points to “realistic” developmental trajectories that are to make culture “fruitful, homogeneous, and consistent” (*Wretched* 216–67; see also 222–24).

43. This goes for the beginning as well as the later stages of the struggle for liberation. (As noted above, Fanon does acknowledge such a role in advanced stages.) In my

view, the political challenges of colonialism are not fundamentally different from the aesthetic challenges. Aesthetic oppression is at the same time political oppression and threatens “the struggle”; politics deploys aesthetic forms and energies at the same time as the aesthetic is political. I elaborate this view of the intertwinements of aesthetics and politics more fully in my “Aestheticification.”

44. Gordon mentions the beauty and other aesthetic qualities of Fanon’s prose, which he considers “a work of art” (*Majesty* 39, 230).

45. Examples of this form of aesthetic racialization, which we have also encountered in Fanon, are the appeals to the creation of artworks that address black existence by Amiri Baraka and Ed Bullins and other members of the Black Arts movement (see, e.g., Bullins, *Drama*). Other examples are Amilcar Cabral’s account of the role of a cultural politics in the process of decolonization (“National”) and Gordon’s conception of art as “a worldview,” which sees the aesthetic as a dimension of black advancement (*Majesty* 231). For the complexities of racialized aestheticization along the above-mentioned lines, see the debates over forms of black feminist criticism, among Barbara Smith (“Toward”), Barbara Christian (“But What”), Mary Helen Washington (“Introduction”), Hortense J. Spillers (“Afterword”), Deborah E. McDowell (*Changing*), and Hazel V. Carby (“Woman’s”). For a deconstructive approach toward racialized and gendered structures of signification, see Ann DuCille, “Toy.” To a certain extent, West (“New” 29–30) and Paul Taylor (“Malcolm’s”) also subscribe to a deconstructive dismantling of racialized meanings.

46. Walker sees her mother as “ordering the universe in the image of her personal conception of Beauty” (242). Walker and Marshall both find artfulness in media that did not belong to the traditions and canons of high art; that is to say, in the only forms that were available to their mothers (“Search” 239; “Making” 6).

47. Marshall comments on the imagination and skill with which her mother and her friends infused new life into old words. On her account, they transformed the English they had learnt in Barbados into “an idiom, an instrument that more adequately described them,” creating their own rhythm, syntax, and accent so as to render the sentences “more pleasing to their ears” (8). Marshall describes the conversationalists in the kitchen as poets (4), as “oral artists,” whose “guiding esthetic,” in Joseph Conrad’s terms, was “to make you hear, to make you feel . . . to make you see” (9). Through such parallels, she contextualizes these women’s conversations in relation to white literary canons. She also locates them in the context of black literary oeuvres, such as Paul Laurence Dunbar’s (10–11).

48. A similar move is made by Marshall, who depicts her mother and her mother’s friends as bending the English they had learnt in Barbados to the aesthetic desires they experienced in New York. For more recent analyses of similar eclectic and syncretic strategies, see Cornel West’s and Kobena Mercer’s deployment of the notion of improvisational and critical bricolage in connections with questions about aesthetics and racial difference (West, “New”; Mercer, “Black”).

49. It will be noted that the notion of such a community is reminiscent of the universalizing conception of the aesthetic public adopted on the Enlightenment model. The difference with Davis’s notion is that Davis, contrary to Enlightenment thinkers, affirms rather than denies the workings of these differentiating factors. Davis is inter-

ested in an actual creation rather than a mere positing of such communities. Enlightenment aesthetic theorists, clearly, also aspire for community across certain differences but fail to think through how this may be established in other ways than by hierarchizing different constituencies and grounding what counts as “public” in alleged commonalities that are considered normative. See also n. 52.

50. Davis also considers the blues expressive of African American working class identities and community consciousness (xv; 142–44).

51. This politics has historically been downplayed, among other things, by critics who conceived of the blues as a personal rather than a social form, or a direct exotic expression of black nature, rather than a self-consciously fashioned aesthetic medium. Davis attributes other misreadings to an overly narrow construction of protest in terms of organized action, and to the failure to see beyond the songs’ most obvious surface meanings (92–99; 142).

52. While Enlightenment thinkers make much of art’s transcendent meanings and its place in a public (see the above discussion of Kant), as suggested earlier, they have failed to build a framework that could actually support a multilateral and reciprocal emergence of the communities in which such meanings might be grounded (see also n. 49).

53. Walker indicates that this is crucial. Given the determination to be a black woman artist, in spite of the impediments to this, and the low status it involves, it is necessary, she argues, to “identify with our lives the living creativity some of our great-grandmothers were not allowed to know” (237).

54. Davis, as we have seen, and also Marshall (see n. 48) distance the aesthetic from a rigid parallelism between aesthetics and cultural identity that is replicated in Fanon’s and Kincaid’s treatments.

55. This poet’s demand for freedom, “I feel therefore I am free,” whispered in a dream, supplants the white fathers’ injunction, “I think therefore I am” (38). Lorde also points out that poetry helps to fashion a language for sharing feelings where this does not yet exist (37–38).

56. The mothers are said to have handed on “the creative spark, the seed of the flower they themselves never hoped to see: or like a sealed letter they could not plainly read” (240). Walker suggests that perhaps Phillis Wheatley’s mother was also an artist, and that many mothers have handed on their creativity, in forms that they were not able to fully know, but that are recognizable in their daughters’ lives and works.

57. See 138, 144, 165, 171, 197. Davis also theorizes Ma Rainey’s, Smith’s, and Holiday’s blues as indebted, among other things, to challenges to cultural oppression implicit in daily speech (166), slave songs (111, 167), African American folk practices (154–60), the call-and-response structure of West African based music, and fluid boundaries between speech and music inherited from West African cultural traditions (54, 174).

58. Connections between the aesthetic and whiteness in the Enlightenment model clearly implicate connections with blackness and other forms of subject positioning. Hume and Kant can thus be seen to aestheticize not only whiteness but also blackness. See Morrison (*Playing* 90) for the notion of aestheticized blackness in the white imagination.

59. Historical work in aesthetic theory suggests thus that aestheticized and aestheticizing whiteness takes a more complex historical form than suggested by notions of whiteness as, for example, a mastersignifier (proposed by Seshadri-Crooks, *Desiring* 2–4, 25), a melancholic structure of identity formation (proposed by Ann Anlin Cheng, *Melancholy* 10–14), or a structure of disembodied self-abstraction (Dyer, *White*). While I believe that these structures are part of the story, I do not think they are able to acknowledge the specificity of the multiple varieties of whiteness to which the above discussion points. As indicated earlier, I propose to read different aspects of whiteness as dimensions of an extensive network of cultural relationships. This network includes a wide range of collaborating factors, ranging from figurations of the passions to allocations of property (Cheryl Harris, “Whiteness”) and privilege (see, e.g., Peggy McIntosh, “White”), and many other elements (see also n. 21). Given the intricacy and layeredness of cultural existence, these different elements, to my mind, actively intersect with one another but manifest different “logics” and show no prospect of being reduceable to a set of basic factors.

60. This chapter’s separation between, on the one hand, Kincaid, Varda, and Fanon, and on the other hand, Walker, Lorde, Marshall, and Davis in this chapter is artificial and is grounded in certain selective ways in which they do or do not resist Enlightenment aesthetics. I see each author’s insights into everyday aesthetic elements as complementary rather than contrastive, and as offering a part of a picture of aesthetic relationality that must be told.

61. I develop this view of the connections among subjectivity and aesthetics more fully in my “Aesthetification.” See my “Aesthetic” for a more elaborate discussion of cultural positioning in the context of art’s aesthetic functioning.

62. This difficulty is to be expected in a situation where it is necessary to work within available forms of racialization and aestheticization. In outlining ways in which Walker, Lorde, Marshall, and Davis move beyond untenable Enlightenment views I have neither meant to suggest that their approaches represent a full response to the reality of problematic constellations of aesthetics and race, nor that all problems lie with the Enlightenment, or that Enlightenment paradigms stand in need of suspension across the board. I believe that many Enlightenment tenets, such as the links Hume forges among aesthetic sensitivity, the passions, and social identities, bonds, and judgments, resonate with deep-seated contemporary convictions, that can also be recognized in, for example, Lorde’s and Davis’s views, and stand in need of careful critical examination.

63. While these histories, as I have hoped to indicate, have influenced the aesthetic needs of whites as well as those of individuals of color, whose social and aesthetic histories are fundamentally interconnected with those of whites, the difficulties of thinking through racialized aestheticization and aesthetic racialization—the fact, for example, that it is hard to compute these words and hold them in mind—is part and parcel of what it is to be socialized and educated within the white theoretical and aesthetic systems this chapter has aimed to analyze. This difficulty is indicative of one of the ways in which systems of aesthetic racialization and racialized aestheticization have worked to foreclose reflection on questions of whiteness and blackness.

64. I would like to note that, notwithstanding the impersonal terms of my analysis, I take myself to have spoken as the white individual I am. In an important sense of the idea of “speaking as” one cannot fail to speak as the socially positioned individual one is. This is not a matter that is within authorial control. Intentional abstraction from the particulars of one’s epistemic location, for example, does not undo this. Nor can it be avoided by adopting an authorial *persona* that deviates from one’s social identity, or by taking on voices that ask to be read in terms of identities one does not instantiate, and so forth. In these cases, one writes as the socially positioned author one is, although one’s articulations proceed through a complexly mediated voice, or through a personification of someone else. In analyzing structures of aesthetic relationality, furthermore, I have explicitly addressed important *particulars* of my own white, aesthetic life. Given that aestheticized whiteness and blackness, as I argue, pervade the minutiae of our lives, I also examine significant personal dimensions of my existence. Accordingly, I then address personal details of my own whiteness, as a white person, speaking in an impersonal form.

65. It applies also to self-declarations that become attractive by ostensibly refusing such attractiveness, or by actively undercutting straightforward models of seduction.

66. The fear is that rather than genuinely destabilizing white normative ground, public autobiographical testimony may supply whites with a new way of remaining in the center, one that sustains an appearance of critical self-analysis but in fact allows for a restabilization of whites’ centrality, now under the guise of an intersubjective, reciprocal, relational gesture. I elaborate the question of aesthetic reciprocity further in my “Aesthetic.”

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