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MULTICULTURALISM AND MORPHING IN *I'M NOT THERE*

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Abstract: ‘Passing’ narratives question fixed social categorisations and prove the possibility of self-determination, which is why they are such a popular literary and cinematic trope. This article explores ‘passing’ as a performance of identity, following Judith Butler’s (1993) idea of all identity as a performance language. The performance of multiple roles in *I'm Not There* (Haynes, 2007) draws our attention not only to ‘passing’, ‘morphing’ and cultural hybridity, but also to the nature of acting as inhabiting multiple identities.

I'm Not There is a biopic of the musician Bob Dylan. It is a fictional account of a real man who, through his ability to plausibly ‘pass’ for a range of personae, has achieved legendary status. It uses four actors, an actress and a black child actor to perform this enigma.

The performance of multiple identities in this film explores the ‘moral heteroglossia’, that is, the variety and ‘many-languagedness’ (as Mikhael Bakhtin put it) of identity, through its use of multiply raced and gendered actors. But the film’s use of representational strategies is problematic. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1994) note that mixed-race and black representations are often distorted by a Eurocentric perspective. And, as Aisha D. Bastiaans notes, representation is a process which operates ‘in the absence or displaced presence, of racial and gendered subjects’ (2008: 232). This article argues that *I'm Not There*, like Michael Jackson’s *Black or White* (1991) video, exploits racial and gendered difference through ‘passing’ and ‘morphing’ narratives, to reinforce the white-centrism of American visual culture.

‘Passing’, Racial Dynamics and Otherness in *I'm Not There*

‘Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* and *them*’ (Anzaldúa, 1987: 3). ‘Passing’ for white/black, male/female and so on, crosses the racial/geographical/cultural borderlands separating *us* from *them*.ⁱ It has become a cultural meta-narrative for exploring the uncertainty of a new globalised culture, where identities are no longer fixed. In this article I will explore the transition of ‘passing’ into morphing and the

racial issues raised by this transition. I will consider the use of 'passing' and the depictions of 'race' and the artist in *I'm Not There* (Haynes, 2007), with reference to Michael Jackson's *Black or White* music video (1991), both of which focus on the multi-layeredness of identity. I do not want to essentialise either but rather to analyse their 'passing' identities and their relation to 'whiteness',ⁱⁱ power and audio/visual language, as hybrid figures. I consider them hybrid in terms of their musical style, their androgynous bodies and voices, and their shifting identities (in terms of colour, attitude, politics, commitments and families). They are both actors who enact the language of performance,ⁱⁱⁱ as well as being 'social actors'^{iv} who exemplify the human desire for change through multiply performed identities.

I'm Not There, the biography of musician Bob Dylan, is a performance of many actors, all 'passing' for Dylan. It is influenced by Godard among others, and, like his work, is both humanist and fluid, changeable and constructed. The film cuts between multiple representations of Dylan, thus avoiding a conventional chronological or coherent study of the star. The film's shifting style reflects Dylan's shifting identity and the transformative nature of the artist.^v By emphasising Judith Butler's (1993) idea of identity as performative, the film reveals how Dylan has 'passed' for various identities over his lifetime, e.g. folk hero, electric guitar hero, preacher, star, French poet, enigma, etc. Like *Perfect Stranger* (Foley, 2007), in which the protagonist Ro (Halle Berry) 'passes' for different identities, *I'm Not There* reflects the postmodern concept of the self as fragmentary and unfixed.

Dylan seeks throughout the film to erase the stain of his class, sexual, and ethnic history by becoming unknowable – when he becomes categorisable, he disavows this state and shifts to a new selfhood. He is portrayed by men and women, young and old, short and tall, heterosexual and heteroflexible, god-fearing and godless, black and white. They are both him and not-him; non-mimetic, fantastical reflections of his 'becoming' selves at different key points of his life from youth to old age, named according to the context of that phase. The representations of the artist, which construct him as multiply Other, reflect Todd Haynes' body of work, a film career which has focused on ethnic/sexual difference (see *Far From Heaven* (2002)), masculine/feminine representation (see *Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story* (1987)) and homosexual/queer politics (see *Poison* (1991), *Velvet Goldmine* (1998)).

Rebecca Scherr's (2008) analysis of *Far From Heaven* forms a useful framework for analysing *I'm Not There*. In *Far From Heaven*, the remake of *All That Heaven Allows* (Sirk, 1955) (also set in 1950s America), the poor gardener of the original story becomes a successful black businessman (widowed with a child), the dead husband is given life as a gay man in a heterosexual marriage (who carries the central 'passing' motif as he tries to hide his

dark secret), and the wife is forced to concede that while her husband may leave her for a man, she can never leave him for a black man, due to the impasse that was ‘the colour line’. Thus blackness replaces class as a signifier of difference and acts as a tool to convey the invisible difference of homosexuality. In the film’s denouement, as Scherr notes, ‘heterosexual, interracial desire could... be seen as even more “queer” than homosexuality’ (2008: 9), given that miscegenation is ultimately visualised as more socially deviant than homosexuality.

Both *Far From Heaven* and *I'm Not There* choose to focus on white non-normative identity at the expense of exploring black identities and to use Scherr’s term, the politics of ‘racial otherness’ (2008:11). They evade a full questioning of whiteness through the prism of black representation, as by doing so they are more palatable (and commercially viable) to a mainstream, i.e. majority white audience.^{vi} As Scherr observes, they explore ‘sexual otherness’ (2008: 11), to an extent, from a counter perspective but revert to a normative discourse of “whiteness” or “white vision” as the dominant film lens’ (2008: 11). It is this process which ultimately renders *I'm Not There* impotent in advancing any discussion of non-white class, gender, or sexuality. As a ‘passing’ narrative, it, like *Soul Man* (Miner, 1986) – in which a white college student ‘passes’ for black in order to get a scholarship – highlights the limitations of the ‘white lens’ and heightens the need for more balance, critique and reflection in American cinema.

The film’s first exploration of Dylan is through a black child called Woody (Marcus Carl Franklin) in what appears to be 1950s America. This could be said to reflect colourblind casting and the racial diversity of America. It seems however to be a dilution of any positive message on black representation or artistry, and provides the audience with a fetishistic moment where they may engage with the ‘natural’ rhythm and blues of Dylan through the black body. Most critics named Franklin as a delightful discovery but it is Jude’s (Cate Blanchett) and Robbie’s (Heath Ledger) white bodies which act as the primary sites of identification and affiliation.

As Woody is integrated into a romanticised, almost exclusively white world, he is removed from his ethnicity, culture and history. In the same way the truth of Jim Crow America and segregation is erased. The de-essentialisation of Dylan which the film attempts, fails in this section as Woody becomes an African-American stereotype, a travelling hobo storyteller with a guitar (the myth Dylan created for himself as a young man). Like Raymond (Dennis Haysbert) in *Far From Heaven*, Woody is reduced to the associations of his blackness and functions as a cinematic prop, denied subjectivity or a world of his own. As

the first Dylan to be characterised, his difference becomes a backdrop which allows us to understand the freewheeling, outsider nature of Dylan.

With regard to Dylan's well-known position as a civil rights activist (overlooked by the film), his ethnicity was key. As a white man who supported equal rights for all, he symbolised a new America. When he marched on Washington with Rev. Dr King Jr and a million other civil rights activists in 1963, and performed 'Blowing in the Wind' for the crowd, his difference proved the universalism of the fight for equality (i.e. that civil rights were a human, not a colour or blood, issue). Yet by making him black, his support for the cause becomes diluted and de-politicised.

Dylan's decision not to publicly discuss his involvement in the movement was perhaps motivated by his desire to, as Greil Marcus writes, be 'the slave on the auction block, the whore chained to her bed, the questioning youth, an old man' (1998: xii). As an artist, he is nomadic and has shifted between identities, roles and positionalities, refusing to be pigeon-holed. As a result, he became not merely 'the voice of the civil rights movement' ('Blowing in the Wind' became a civil rights anthem and was re-recorded by black artists) but also 'the voice of his times and the conscience of his generation' (ibid). In a later parallel, around the same time the film was released, he was publicly endorsing Barack Obama for the presidency. Yet again, the film evades this connection to political reality.

I'm Not There's interchangeable style does not form a relevant challenge to racial dynamics of representation anymore than *Far From Heaven* did by replacing the working class man with a black man. To paraphrase W.E.B. Du Bois, *I'm Not There* rewrites history through Woody to portray his life as 'the fairy tale of a happy slave civilisation'. Woody is untroubled by the vagaries of inequality, institutional racism, lynching and so on. A white middle-class family invite them into their home to play, he enjoys conversations freely with whites everywhere he goes and only worries about his music. Just one scene shows him with black people, and as they play music together they show no evidence of difficulty or oppression. However, the exclusion of blacks from most of the film belies their social exclusion. And, as Scherr noted earlier, interracial desire is denied (despite Dylan's well known series of black girlfriends), implying its inherent deviancy in the white lens of dominant cinema, and belying its contemporary illegality.^{vii}

Woody does not idolise black musicians but regards the folk musician Woody Guthrie as his god and master (for whom he is a servant and an obedient mouthpiece). The real Dylan idolised Guthrie in his youth, but his idolisation of this white icon takes on a different context in a black body, positioning Woody as an Uncle Tom stereotype and suggesting his

slave history (he bears the name of his master).

Guthrie's influence led Dylan to African-American Blues, and his fame surpasses that of many of the (black) Bluesmen who inspired him.^{viii} The film thus exemplifies the appropriation of African-American musical culture by white culture. In *In Search of the Blues: Black Voices, White Visions* (2008) Marybeth Hamilton explores the history of the Blues and its appropriation by whites, by exploring the lives of those white ethnographers and folklorists who made the first recordings. She describes their attachment to the music as an attachment to racial difference, motivated by a desire for the natural authenticity of black experience and expression, and the belief that white people had – through civilisation – lost their connection to the primitive sensual earthiness evoked by the music.

As Hamilton observes, the Blues has traditionally been regarded completely differently by white and black audiences. While the music recalls the history of oppression, poverty and exploitation for blacks, white commentators have endowed the black Bluesman with the legendary status of the romantic outsider, purer and closer to nature and the truth than our advanced, urbanised, computerised selves. This raced reception has led to a mixture of reverence and condescension towards the Bluesman from whites, who both envy and mock his primitivism. It is therefore highly problematic to produce Dylan as a Bluesman, although it is yet another method of communicating his romantic loner image.^{ix}

Nothing about Woody's representation (except his working class costume – flat cap, boots, dungarees, all too clean and neat not to look affected) attempts to authentically recreate the lived experience of black people or indeed black homeless, jobless artists in the segregated, war-torn, anxious America of Dylan's youth. As Scherr notes, films like *I'm Not There*, *Far From Heaven* and *Transamerica* (Tucker, 2005), 'do not successfully confront the implicit whiteness of U.S. cinema' (2008: 3), or, as Courtney writes, challenge its 'history of white vision' (2005: 4). *I'm Not There* absorbs blackness into whiteness, eroding black history, slavery, civil rights and culture in the process.

The Black Panther movement is reduced to a vague footnote in *I'm Not There*'s socio-historic depiction, present only to serve Dylan's characterisation; in one brief sequence Huey Newton is shown trying to illuminate the revolutionary insight of Dylan's songs for Bobby Seale, however as there is no introduction to who these men are, they are unrecognisable. Their inclusion seems superficial and irrelevant and adds to the film's confused position between fantasy and reality. Still, it may reflect the absence of detailed Panther history in dominant American culture, which the film *Panther* (Van Peebles, 1995) sought to address.

The fact that Dylan is 'outed' as Jewish later on in the film, recalls the common

oppression of blacks and Jews in history (paralleled in *Métisse* (Kassovitz, 1993) and *La Haine* (Kassovitz, 1995)), but erases the significant differences between them. In this way, like *Transamerica* (which parallels racial and sexual exclusion) and *Far From Heaven, I'm Not There* simplistically draws links between oppressed minorities while de-historicising and de-contextualising these groups. Franklin's casting can thus be read as an example of 'boutique multiculturalism',^x that is, an uncritical use of 'racial others' which is designed to act as a metaphor for Dylan's transgressive positionality in American society.

The film privileges constructions of whiteness by centralising blackness as an infantile stage, and using this racial construction to signal Dylan's otherness. Whiteness is located in the stars Heath Ledger, Christian Bale, Ben Whishaw, Cate Blanchett and Richard Gere, all international sex-symbols. By contrast the film's representation of blackness seems to reflect an 'inner psychological need to view Negroes as less than men in the skin' (Ellison, 1967 cited in Marriott, 2000: 76). By locating black masculinity in the body of a child, the film evades the fear the black male body evokes as a threat to white society (hence Woody's invitation into a white middle-class home). It also avoids any representation of black male sexuality, which has long been regarded as highly controversial and as such was absent from our cinema screens for 60 years.^{xi}

Dylan's sexuality is treated mysteriously throughout the film. But by evading the challenges of black male sexuality, the film denies the spectator a real engagement with this identity. It also rejects the opportunity to challenge fixed ideas of race and gender. Instead, the film's affront to the white patriarchal order occurs in the phase where Dylan is played by Cate Blanchett. The use of a female actor, and – to a lesser extent – a black child, was regarded as sensational and garnered the film a lot of attention.^{xii} Yet, if they had used a female child rather than adult to play Jude, it would no doubt have been limiting and one-dimensional, as Woody's sequence seems.

Although each actor 'passes' for Dylan at different phases of his life and none convincingly visualises the real Dylan but rather externalises an idea of him, the least plausible 'passers' are Woody and Jude. The use of these agents to embody the icon shifts the film's form into fantasy. Although acting is a performance language dependant on gest and voice rather than biology, the use of these actors is strange because no attempt is made to establish continuity with common elements that symbolise the artist in other sections of the film, except a musical interest. The distanciation one experiences when watching these sections is not Brechtian but rather enables the spectator to enjoy the constructedness of identity. This feminised and coloured form of 'passing' could be seen to refer to many

artists' morphing personae, particularly those who shift from mixed-race/black to white in their colour and inhabit black and white musical/cinematic worlds, e.g. Prince, Whitney Houston, Mariah Carey^{xiii} or Michael Jackson, whose personal and artistic morphing which we will discuss shortly.

In the Jude phase of the film, Dylan is 'covering'^{xiv} his middle-class Jewish roots, while Blanchett is 'passing' for male. This part of the film has been of most interest to the media, due to Blanchett's excellent performance as Dylan (although she is visibly Cate rather than Bob, she lacks the awkward male-impersonator flaws of Felicity Huffman as Bree in *Transamerica*). The film's ethic here appears confused, as Jude is referred to as 'her' as well as 'him', exhibits a bisexual attitude (signified by her gender neutral name, a name also used for the female de-feminised terrorist in *The Crying Game* (Jordan, 1992)), but behaves like a sexist man driven by power (she viciously traumatises another woman). She might be read as a queer challenge to all essentialisms, if she were not so rooted in a male essence.

Jude's omnipresent black sunglasses act as shield and mirror to his/her position as the feminised object of the male gaze. He/she is objectified by Mr Jones, a white journalist who hounds Jude and reveals the truth of his/her ethnic identity. Mr Jones mirrors Jude as a white, ordinary, quantifiable man. He represents the hegemony against which Jude fights to assert his otherness – as metrosexual, liberal sympathiser, etc. – but to which Jude ultimately belongs. Thus Jude's difference cannot be paralleled with Woody's, as the latter refuses access to the hegemony. Jude can assimilate in a way Woody cannot because he/she is white.

Like *Far From Heaven* – and *Black or White* – *I'm Not There* could be read as an attempt to queer whiteness, or, as Scherr suggests, mark 'whiteness as strange' (2008: 8). It draws attention to that which is usually invisible,^{xv} i.e. whiteness is marked as an ethnicity through the visibility of racial difference embodied by Woody, and masculinity becomes a spectacle and scopophilic pleasure (the pleasure of looking at a beautiful woman) when performed by Blanchett.

By locating Dylan's origin in Woody, the dynamics of whiteness' definition and power seem dependent on blackness, i.e. it is black culture that makes Dylan the star he becomes in the film just as it is the position of blackness as Other which allows whiteness to retain its privilege and remain the invisible norm in society and (as Scherr noted earlier) within American cinema. It is impossible however, to ignore the exploitation of blackness in the film and its reduction by the filmmakers to a mechanism for white construction to the elimination of any alternative vision.

I'm Not There's director Todd Haynes is a pioneer of the New Queer Cinema

Movement^{xvi} and yet chose a cast of well-known heterosexual actors. It could be argued that Heath Ledger's roles in *Brokeback Mountain* (Lee, 2005), *Casanova* (Hallström, 2005) and *The Dark Knight* (Nolan, 2008) posit him as a queer actor. But the absence of any non-heterosexual actors in a film which plays with identity, especially given Dylan's implied bisexuality, seems to be a commercial choice. In order to attract a mainstream audience and avoid offence, Haynes has chosen to fetishise Dylan's suggested bisexuality in the Jude phase (as a 'lipstick lesbian chic' fantasy) rather than engage with it, just as he has reduced Dylan's interest in the civil rights movement to a black fantasy.

I'm Not There could be seen as an abstraction of identity morphing, as Dylan shifts from one body to another, always 'passing' for something else. This concept is also the basis for the digital racial identity morphing of Michael Jackson's *Black or White* music video (1991), which focuses on the layering of identity involved in 'passing' and hybrid culture.

'Passing', Performance and Morphology: *Black and White* and *I'm Not There*

Scott Bukatman (2000) suggests that ethnicity as morphology is, like 'passing', a performance. Digital morphing can thus be read as the latest reinvention of the 'passing' discourse. Through morphing the individual can play with constructions of identity, experience declassification and the loss of imposed definitions, which although liberating is also destabilising as it reduces cultural identity to surface cosmetics:

Morphing, a celebration of endlessly transmutable surface, becomes a sign only of itself, hardly even eluding to the complexities of history and ethnic culture behind its digital gloss. By "rendering" everything as surface, and all surfaces as equal, morphing becomes a *caricature of blackface* (2000: 240).

If we apply Bukatman's argument to the use of Franklin in *I'm Not There* it becomes clear that, given that he is a signifier of Dylan's otherness and blues roots and little else, he can be read as an extension of the blackface tradition. Just as the white Jewish protagonist of *The Jazz Singer* (Crosland, 1952) adopts blackface to become a star in America, Dylan's authenticity is marked by this blackface caricature.^{xvii} By contrast the morphing in *Black or White* seems to undo America's divided history by exposing 'race' as an illusion (i.e. revealing its cultural rather than scientific basis).

As *Black or White* concludes, a series of the heads and shoulders of (predominately

non-white) people of different colours, features, hairstyles and genders morph into each other (an illusion mimicking Jackson's real-life self metamorphosis from a handsome black man into a feminised, white man). They sing along with the chorus "she's black, she's white... yeah, yeah, yeah". As such each 'becomes' Jackson, and Jackson 'becomes' them. The language of the lyrics and moving images seem to insist that 'race' (and perhaps all identity labels – gender, sexuality, etc.) are irrelevant to love, beauty and truth: "if you wanna be my baby/brother, it don't matter if you're black or white". Yet the majority of the video enforces ideas of 'race' through a series of stereotypes who dance with Jackson: African men wearing only animal skins around their groin, with lions for company; marauding Native American men on horseback terrorising the plains with guns; delicately meek Asian women in traditional costumes. In this way the language of the video differentiates Jackson as contextually white; he is the white cinematic hero in close-up, filmed alone and in the centre of the frame, dominating the narrative, while the non-whites and women are decentred, filmed mostly as collectives at a distance, and denied a voice.

Vivian Sobchack argues that the interchangeability of the morphing sequence in *Black or White* suggests a singular human identity, negating pluralism:

In the name of all ill-conceived multiculturalism, the music video collapses both difference and otherness into self-sameness as we watch a range of human faces distinctly marked by their difference and otherness morph one into the other in a reversible chain not of resemblance but of smiling similitude (2000: 139).

This similitude, also evoked in *I'm Not There* produces a homogeneity that has no basis in reality, whilst the interchangeability of ethnicity and gender simplifies complex human relations. The video's opening privileges whiteness through an extended scene with a white family – the only people given a voice and a characterisation – while the final scene cuts back from the morphed images to an attractive mixed-race woman (later to become supermodel/TV star Tyra Banks), who suggests the post-racial imaginary of SimEve.^{xviii} This final image refuses heterogeneity by merely reinstating white beauty ideals and privileging an image of racial mixing which is Europeanesque.

As Angharad Valdivia (2005) notes, while morphing may create a figure who can represent multiple groups, it also may create a figure so undifferentiated as to become meaningless.^{xix} This argument has been extended to mixed-race figures such as Vin Diesel and Jessica Alba, whose hybridity makes them universally appealing and yet racially

indistinct (albeit with an ability to appear white). It can be applied to the representation of Woody, and indeed to the collated representation of Dylan which *I'm Not There* offers, as a figure who is both male and female, old and young, black and white, and yet none of these. In trying to represent Dylan's universality, the film reduces an American icon to a non-cohesive community of identities which removes his personal subjectivity. It uses him as a symbol of diversity and yet erases difference rather than celebrating it. The political issues of his era are ignored and he is depicted as a musician who exists solipsistically, thus negating the reason for using such a variety of actors. Similarly, Jackson's universality is suggested by the multicultural morphies in his video and yet, he is simplistically cast as a white ideal.

Given that the morphed faces of *Black or White* are held in close-up and the shoulders are naked, the images are sexualised. Spectators are invited to consume these images as seductive spectacle and at the same time to consider the people presented as equals – the eye-line match between actor and spectator equates the two, while the movements of the actors (head twists, shoulder rolls, changing expressions, visibly dancing turning bodies) insist on our common humanity. However, as they are digitally constructed cyborg images detached from reality, they are false images. Like the various agents of *I'm Not There* (who sexualise, exaggerate and celebratise Dylan, in contrast to his non-starry, somewhat unattractive, intensely private reality), they do not reflect social realities but entertaining ideals. They are removed from any physical, historical or social context and exist simply for our consumption. They signify the racial and ethnic diversity of the film's *mise-en-scène* yet do not actually represent either an end to racial boundaries or an establishment of multicultural tolerance but rather the commodification and exploitation of de-humanised non-white beauty. Ultimately, in *Black or White* the spectator is encouraged to identify with the two agents with a voice – Jackson and Culkin – rather than these decorative bodies, while in *I'm Not There* it is white male Hollywood heroes Ledger, Bale and Gere who command identification.

As cultural icons Dylan and Jackson have a degree of power to navigate, supersede and negotiate 'passing' images and public images without reduction to a single essence. They may be subject to reductionism by others and this may lead to the performance of public personae (e.g. 'Wacko Jacko' appearing in public with his monkey Bubbles), but they also have the power to challenge such images (e.g. Jackson's *Leave Me Alone* (1987) video, where he mocks the media's depiction of him as a monkey-mad recluse). They are also able to appropriate the power of language by renaming (e.g. The King of Pop) or re-imaging themselves (e.g. Jackson as Third-Wordlist, anti-authoritarian in the video *They Don't Really Care About Us* (1996); Dylan as rock star radio show host^{xx}). The plethora of iconic images

of Jackson since his death in July 2009, none of which alone sum up the artist or the man, are evidence of the free-floating signifier that he became (albeit through his appropriation of ‘whiteliness’).

These icons use ‘passing’ images as tools to symbolise their constructed identities and changing fashions, as well as to rewrite themselves as artists, in contrast to the tradition of ‘passing’ only to hide one’s identity and gain opportunity in a WASP (white Anglo-Saxon Protestant) society (although both have played down their minority selves – as Jewish man and as black man).

Still, it is questionable whether the biopic of Jackson or indeed, another non-white superstar, would be afforded the representational freedoms of *I'm Not There*. It is also questionable whether these freedoms would be beneficial. Consider whether the portrayal of, for example, African-American composer/saxophonist/singer Louis Armstrong by white actor Paul Giamatti, or mixed-race composer/pianist/writer Philippa Schuyler by white actress Emmanuelle Béart, would add to the power of the biography or take from the history of the real-life artist. Whilst it is admirable to offer diverse casting opportunities in filmmaking,^{xxi} it seems that the fun freedoms of morphology may only be beneficial to white male representation, i.e. to making transgressive and exotic that which is inherently hegemonical and ordinary.

Lisa Nakamura (2002) describes digital morphing as a form of identity tourism, which rather than liberate those oppressed by the identity imposed upon them, allows freer agents to experiment with different masks, and acts to reassure the social hegemony that cultural differences can be safely suppressed:

This is a form of tourism, benefiting from difference in order to make the American/Western self feel well-rounded, cosmopolitan, *postracial*. This is not digital identification, but digital *disidentification* — disavowal of the recognition of race in local contexts in favor of comfortably distinct global ones (2002: 22).

The casting of white actors in non-white roles,^{xxii} can thus be expressed as a form of identity tourism or to use another of Nakamura’s phrases ‘cosmetic multiculturalism’. The ‘passing’ of Dylan as a series of sex-symbols, as black and as female, is a false, superficial spectacle designed to entertain spectators and exoticise the familiar. It suggests a future where race and gender are no longer important and yet does not interrogate this future. It refuses the local political reality of Obama’s realisation of civil rights gains, for a global fantasy.

In both *I'm Not There* and *Black or White*, the ‘flow’ of the images appears alien and disjointed. This sequencing is artificial and futuristic, conveying a sense of the imaginary, alluding to science fiction rather than film as social mirror. It is an unnatural and exciting transition which exists only in the realm of the digital or imaginary, yet for many people historically designated black, ‘passing’ has long been a painful and necessary reality.^{xxiii}

Black or White can be read as an example of multiculturalism’s hegemonic tendencies in that it suppresses ethnic tensions by neutralising ethnicity through morphology.^{xxiv} This suppression is required to maintain a multicultural myth of sameness and equality. Each skin tone or geographic identity is applied like a mask, a layer that can be removed and reapplied over and over. Like the layering of genders and races in *I'm Not There*, this reduces difference to the level of make-up and dismisses ethnic or gender difference as a problematic in society. As Lisa Lowe warns: ‘These narratives are particularly dangerous because they ignore the interlocking functions within a social structure, especially those in conflict with each other’ (2003: 537). As we have seen, by ignoring the position of black men, or women, in society or in the music industry in the 1950s, *I'm Not There* ignores a history of racial and gendered conflict which divided access to the public sphere. *Black or White* signifies this history but negates it through a focus on universal humanism rather than the politics of difference. And both films do little to disturb what Scherr referred to earlier as ‘the implicit whiteness’ of American visual culture, despite their deployment of transgressive forms.

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NOTES

ⁱ For more on the historical event of ‘passing’ see Adrian Piper, “Passing for White, Passing for Black” in *Passing and the Fictions of Identity*, ed. Elaine Ginsberg (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996).

ⁱⁱ The construct of ideological white domination - see Frye, 1995.

ⁱⁱⁱ See Stanislavsky, 1938.

^{iv} See Nichols, 1991.

^v See also the biopic, *Derek* (Julien, 2008), a film which cuts between time and place, film and photograph, installation and documentary to recreate a sense of the man and the artist, in this case the independent homosexual British filmmaker Derek Jarman.

^{vi} This historical, social and political decontextualisation could be read as a commercial strategy; as Jane Parks (2008) notes, filmmakers tend to remove the cultural Otherness of mixed figures in order to appeal to mass audiences.

^{vii} The continuation of these views despite the decriminalisation of interracial marriage in 1967 in America were publicised on October 15th 2009 when a justice of the peace in Louisiana refused to give an interracial couple their marriage license. See Mary Foster's article 'Interracial Couple Denied Marriage License in La. [Internet], 16 October 2009. Available from: http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20091016/ap_on_re_us/us_interracial_rebuff [Accessed 16 October 2009]

^{viii} See Marcus, 1997.

^{ix} The film also uses the iconography of the Western to solidify this romantic mythology in the Billy (Richard Gere) phase though it is present in each incarnation of Dylan. Billy is Dylan as white hero. The Western is a genre rooted in ideas of nation and race and given the film's setting in the 1950s could have been used to consider ideas of colonialism and invasion (e.g. the settling of Alaska), which tie into (Woody's) black history.

^x See Stanley Fish, "Boutique Multiculturalism, or Why Liberals Are Incapable of Thinking about Hate Speech" in *Critical Inquiry*, 23.2 (1997): 378-95.

^{xi} After *Birth of a Nation* (Griffith, USA, 1915) physically aggressive/sexual black men were not visualised again in mainstream cinema until the 1970s blaxploitation era.

^{xii} See Porton, *Cineaste*, Winter 2007.

^{xiii} While Carey has often played up her roots in black popular culture in her music career (while cultivating a white beauty ideal), her latest film *Precious* (Daniels, USA, 2009), depicts her untanned and white-skinned with dark hair, emphasising her mixedness and more so, her whiteness.

For a fuller discussion of the privileging of Eurocentric features in cinema and music, see: Conrad et al, 2009; Beltrà, 2008; Kubrin, 2005; Dixon & Maddox, 2005; Oliver, 1994.

^{xiv} Kenji Yoshino observes that many non-whites utilise a racial 'mask' in order to achieve success in white societies: '[they] cover – the race-salient traits that distinguish [them] from the white mainstream' (2006: 133). Yoshino adopted this term from sociologist Erving Goffman who suggested that people living with a stigma of some sort would try their best to 'cover' it in order to live with ease and avoid tension. See Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968).

Lisa Nakamura (2008) suggests that 'covering' is the postmodern equivalent of 'passing'. See: Nakamura, L. 'Mixedfolks. com: "Ethnic Ambiguity," Celebrity Outing, and the Internet'. In Beltrà, M. & Fojas, C. eds. *Mixed Race Hollywood*. New York: NYU Press, 2008.

^{xv} See Dyer, 1997.

^{xvi} See Michael DeAngelis, "The Characteristics of New Queer Filmmaking: Case Study – Todd Haynes" in *New Queer Cinema*, ed. Michele Aaron (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004).

^{xvii} See also Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); Karen Brodkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

^{xviii} SimEve appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine (September 1993) and was labelled the 'New Face of America'. She was a phenotypical average of specific racial types digitally created by the artist Kim Wah Lam

to show how racial mixing will change the appearance of future societies.

^{xxix} See A. Valdivia, "Geographies of Latinidad: Constructing Identity in the Face of Racial Hybridity" in *Race, Identity and Representation in Education*, eds W. Critchlow, G. Dimitriadis, N. Dolby & C. McCarthy (New York: Routledge, 2005).

^{xx} He has a weekly American show, Bob Dylan's theme-time radio hour.

^{xxi} American cinema remains a white-centrist, male dominated arena. A 2007 study by the UCLA School of Law and UCLA Chicano Studies Research Centre found that 69 percent of film/TV roles were reserved for white actors and another 8.5 percent were open to white actors as well as non-white actors. Thus non-white actors were limited to between 0.5 percent and about 8 percent of the roles. It also found that men were almost three times as likely as women to work in the first-billed lead role. Women made up 44 percent of second-billed roles and 40 percent of third-billed roles, but they were outnumbered by men in each category. See

<<http://www.chicano.ucla.edu/press/briefs/current.asp>> [Internet] [Accessed 17 April 2007].

^{xxii} See also Angelina Jolie as a mixed-race character in *A Mighty Heart* (Winterbottom, 2007); the depiction of black marine hero, Sgt. Jason L. Thomas, as white in *World Trade Centre* (Stone, 2006).

^{xxiii} For example, American writer and critic Anatole Broyard 'passed' for white until his death in 1990 in order to evade prejudice (see Gates, 1997).

^{xxiv} See Lowe, 2003.

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