

Future Directions in Feminist Phenomenology
The University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario
May 23-25, 2013
David Chu International Centre, WSS 2130

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Friday May 24, 3:30 p.m.

The Power of Hesitation: Interrupting Racializing Habit and Rethinking Agency

ABSTRACT

This paper asks how perception becomes racializing and seeks the means for its critical interruption. My aim is twofold. First, to understand the recalcitrant and limitative temporal structure of racializing habits of seeing, a structure that restricts their responsiveness and improvisational openness. While racializing perception can be understood to build on the intentionality and habituality of all perception (as Linda Martín Alcoff has shown), its distinctive intransigence and de-humanization call for further phenomenological study. In this paper, I argue that racializing perception is both more and less than habitual perception: more in its representational over-determination, less in its affective closure to difference and change. Drawing on the phenomenologies of Frantz Fanon and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, I show how this perception is reductive and naturalizing; it constitutes racialized bodies as bodies that *cannot be seen otherwise*.

As a counterweight to the closure of racializing perception, the second part of my paper uncovers resources within the temporality of perception for a critical awareness and destabilization of racializing habit. In dialogue with Iris Marion Young and race-critical feminism, and by drawing on Henri Bergson and Merleau-Ponty, I find in hesitation the phenomenological moment (and ontological structure) when racializing habits of seeing can be internally fractured. Hesitation, I claim, can make visible the exclusionary logic of racializing and objectifying perception, countering its affective rigidity and opening it to critical transformation. It is crucial, I argue, to distinguish two forms of hesitation: the paralyzing hesitation of interiorized objectification (following Young) and the productive hesitation that keeps habit fluid and allows improvisation and responsiveness to take place. By recuperating hesitation for feminist and critical race thinking, my aim is to rethink the models of agency and subjectivity which we assume as desirable.

At the conference on *Future Directions in Feminist Phenomenology*, I will summarize the first part of this paper and present in more detail the second.