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White Sight: Visual Politics and Practices of Whiteness; Nicholas Mirzoeff; Cambridge, Massachusetts and London; The MIT Press; 2023; 352 pp; Includes references and index; \$29.95; ISBN 9780262047678; e-book available.

Visual culture theorist Nicholas Mirzoeff's *White Sight* is both a continuation of his bold intervention on visibility and countervisibility presented in his earlier book, (*The Right to Look*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), and an urgent call to dismantle 'white sight' in this moment of crisis for white supremacy. Both books are concerned with developing a decolonial framework for the field of visual culture studies. Both consider the surveillance structures of plantation slavery and empire building, whilst also aiming to 'de-invisibilize' and 'unbuild' the infrastructures of white reality (p. 16; p. 19). There is also a sense of continuation in the sheer magnitude of erudition woven into this project: the analysis of artworks and visual practice is combined with historical, anthropological, and geopolitical knowledge, enfolded into a cultural and economic history of the Atlantic world. This new book is also a call to action: to strike against whiteness.

'White sight' does not refer to what an individual white person sees, but to 'a learned cultural system' (p. 1), a set of infrastructures that work to sustain a dominant white reality while surveying and surveilling from above. The ideal white reality is illustrated via paintings, maps and classical statues, where whiteness is offered as 'perfect beauty' (p. 69). The strike against whiteness is 'the refusal to live within white sight's erased, patriarchal, racializing, violent reality' (p. 1). Inspirations for the strike include the Haitian Revolution (1791-1801), the Suffragettes, Rhodes Must Fall, and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. Crucially it is not only the iconoclastic destruction of statues or breaking windows that Mirzoeff emphasizes here, but also the abolitionist Frederick Douglass' formula of 'pictures and progress', where the image of white supremacy is overturned and humans are united through their shared experience as 'picture making beings' (p. 82).

The Black Lives Matter movement and the 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville provide a renewed impetus for this work, convincing Mirzoeff 'there was more now to do' (p. x), as a response to the political shocks in an era of overt white supremacy under Trump, culminating in the US Capitol insurrection on 6 January 2021. Alongside a number of contemporary scholars starting to rethink whiteness (Houria Bouteldja, Alana Lentin, to name two), Mirzoeff draws upon a longer history of decolonial thought and philosophy, with key figures such as Frantz Fanon, George Lamming, and Stuart Hall providing inspiration. Indeed, the author recounts how the notion of a 'way of seeing', most often associated with John Berger's classic 1972 BBC documentary series and book on art history (*Ways of Seeing*, London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2008 [1972]), had already been used by Barbadian poet George Lamming to denote a practice of anticolonial resistance to the hostile environment he encountered in exile in 1950s' London: 'It was a way to see himself by seeing how others excluded from English whiteness were seen. It was at once reflexive and deeply empathetic

to others' (p. 149). Mirzoeff later queries whether Lamming had in fact adopted the expression from Frantz Fanon, who had used it in an address at the first International Congress of Black Writers and Artists in 1956, held in Paris. Either way, 'the two were thinking in related anticolonial and decolonial fashion' (p. 186). Mirzoeff wants to revive this 'way of seeing' because it holds the possibilities of envisioning a 'different kind of culture altogether' (p. 186), free from hierarchies imposed by racialized surveillance capitalism.

As an example of Mirzoeff's abilities to mix detailed historical analysis with broader intersections and implications of visual politics, Chapter 5 ('The Anticolonial Way of Seeing') provides a focused account of Lamming's postcolonial 'way of seeing', setting the scene in the postwar Notting Hill area of London captured in Roger Mayne's photographs and Stuart Hall's writing. Whereas Chapter 6 ('The cultural unconscious and the dispossessed') then extends Fanon's and Lamming's ideas to the Algerian Revolution, the Black Panthers, mass media culture as the 'collective unconscious' (p.183), and Anti-Jewish prejudice through the concept of the scapegoat. To use a visual metaphor, the aperture closes and opens in such a manner throughout, while maintaining its polemical focus.

The book is structured in three parts following the Introduction: (1) White sight in the world of Atlantic slavery; (2) Imperial visions, anticolonial ways of seeing; and (3) The crisis of whiteness. It is also beautifully illustrated throughout. The three-part structure suggests a roughly chronological discussion, but as noted, there is also a satisfyingly unbounded nature to Mirzoeff's analyses. At one point he notes that Fanon expected the reader 'to follow along as he opened up points of tension' (p. 181), which prompted me to wonder if this was also a model for Mirzoeff's own approach.

One particularly intriguing strand is the recurrence of birds throughout the book. At the end of the Introduction the author teases the reader: 'the strike against whiteness must find a different, communal relation to each other and other species. Like birds.' (p. 26). Killing, stuffing and displaying birds in museums might well enshrine settler colonial authority (Chapter 3), but the bird (alive) also embodies freedom. In the final chapter (8) on the changing social formation made visible by BLM among others, Mirzoeff imagines the strike against whiteness as a 'murmuration' (p. 255), referring also to John Akomfrah's three-screen film projection *Five Murmurations* exhibited in New York City in 2021. 'The murmuration embodies consent not to be a single being' with 'as many ways to see as there are birds' (p. 256). Mirzoeff imagines the birds, following centuries of de-birding and near-extinction, murmuring to create community and waiting for the end of whiteness. With the book detailing so much violence and oppression under the white heteropatriarchal gaze, it's a heartening vision to end on.

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