I conceive there is more barbarism in eating a man alive than in eating him dead. . . .

—Montaigne

The Negro is America’s metaphor.

—Richard Wright

Of every hue and cast am I. . . . I resist any thing better than my own diversity.

—Walt Whitman

In the relation of the self (the same) to the Other, the Other is distant, he is the stranger; but if I reverse this relation, the Other relates to me as if I were the Other and thus causes me to take leave of my identity. . . . When thus I am wrested from myself, there remains a passivity bereft of self (sheer alterity, the other without unity).

—Maurice Blanchot

Born white and Jewish, the chameleon-hero of Woody Allen’s Zelig (1983) subsequently becomes not only black and Native American but also Irish, Italian, Mexican, and Chinese; judged a “triple threat” by the Ku Klux Klan, he embodies the “hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings” to which an intrepid Salman Rushdie dedicated his Satanic Verses (1988). When Steve Martin starts a comic film by recalling “I was born a poor black child,” when Karl Lagerfeld photographs the model Naomi Campbell as a black Scarlett for a fashion collection presented with a Gone with the Wind twist, even flippant contemporary approaches to racechange appear to tap its subversive potential, disrupting the racist complacency many earlier deployments bolstered. The performance artist Adrian Piper, who meditates in her essays on whether the idea of race might soon become obsolete, put together the exhibit and the volume Colored People (in 1987 and 1991 respectively) by coloring and categorizing sixteen people’s photograms according to such moods as “scarlet with embarrassment” or “tickled pink.” Also fascinated with the anarchic promise of double-crossing the color line, Iké Udé used computer graphics to produce in his Celluloid Frames exhibition (of 1995) racechanged versions of one of Marilyn Monroe’s most famous images and one of Mapplethorpe’s most infamous in order to criticize the tendency of consumer culture to portray “difference as ‘damned otherness.’” Like a surprising number of writers and filmmakers working at the close of this century, Piper and Udé concretize the denaturalizing of race implicit in the idea of racechanges as well as the diverse roles they have played over time in manifold settings and media.

Denaturalizing: To translate Simone de Beauvoir’s famous remark about femininity from a context of gender to a framework of race, racechange demonstrates that one is not born but becomes a white; one is not born but becomes a black. Diversity: Cross-racial imitations have appeared in startlingly different contexts throughout the pages of this book. Although racial masquerades seem murderous in their intent as they enact replacement (of the self for the Other), they appear loving as they emphasize resemblance (of the self with the Other). Conscious or unconscious, voluntary or involuntary, racial impersonations can be set within homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual, and ambiguously sexual scenarios. Not always the sites of erotic investment, they may constitute a political venture. We have seen, too, that cross-racial fantasies appear in nonironic, mimetic frameworks or they parade a parodic excess that turns them into self-mocking performances. Some racial masquerades act to police boundaries; however, others abrogate definitional limits. In various contexts and media, racial representations teeter between identification (the wish to be the Other), desire (the wish to have the Other), and disavowal (the wish to disengage from the Other).

Yet, oddly and disturbingly, cross-racial impersonations have often sustained racist conceptualizations. Why did the denaturalizing potential and diversity of racechange so rarely find egalitarian expression? In earlier chapters, I have primarily emphasized the motives for racechange; however, what exactly are its effects? If I ask and answer a question usually put to doctoral students defending their completed dissertations in the humanities—how did the material surprise you in the course of your writing?—I have to admit to finding myself somewhat alarmed that racechange (as employed by artists from D. W. Griffith to Zora Neale Hurston, from Mark Twain to Fannie Hurst and William Faulkner, from Vachel Lindsay and T. S. Eliot to Lois Gould) remained circumscribed so often within narratives that either endorse or acquiesce in racist totalizing as well as the social injustices such totalizing validates. I want to speculate in this postscript on why racechange has served racist ends in this country’s cultural past before I conclude by claiming that its structure nevertheless continues to hold out the promise of bridging the gap between black and white. What I will end up suggesting, then, is that racechange has historically buttressed the very totalizing that its dynamic calls into question. Thus the liberating potential of racechanging iconography is only now being tapped in various performances, meditations, films, and art works that use cross-racial imagery to enact or envision post-racist ways of being and perceiving.
Racist Totalizing

One of the more bizarre moments in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1837) occurs in an episode that forecloses any possibility of cross-racial interaction when a captive cannibal opens his lips to disclose black teeth. To the white hero who finds himself floating in a canoe in the Antarctic Ocean at the end of Poe's unfinished narrative, the dark-skinned savage appears so violently terrified by whiteness that he goes into convulsions, first, at the sign of a linen handkerchief and, then, as a fine white powder resembling ashes begins to fall from an apocalyptic sky. After being questioned about the motives of his countrymen in destroying Pym's companions, Nu-Nu's dread incapacitates him from affording a rational reply:

> He still obstinately lay in the bottom of the boat; and, upon our reiterated questions as to the motive made use only of idiotic gesticulations, such as raising with his forefinger the upper lip, and displaying the teeth which lay beneath it. These were black. We had never before seen the teeth of an inhabitant of Tsalal. (194)

Not just skin deep, racial difference permeates and saturates all aspects of being, dividing Europeans from Africans anatomically, genetically, skeletally, absolutely. The mark of racist totalizing inflicted by a fictional trope like black teeth on a character such as Nu-Nu depends on a simple mental trajectory. By the word "totalizing, I mean that trajectory to encompass two assumptions: that all blacks are alike and also that all blacks are completely and immutably different, utterly distinct from whites. (I use blacks in the place of those racially totalized since whites in America remain in the default position of a humanity presumed to be raceless.) The idea of race as absolute or monolithic—the notion that racial dissimilarity permeates every cell, each gene, all internal and external organs of the body, even its skeletal frame—surfaced repeatedly in Western history. For example, Poe's account summarizes a commonplace mindset described by Frantz Fanon with characteristic surrealism:

> And there one lies body to body with one's blackness or one's whiteness, in full narcissistic cry, each sealed into his own peculiarity. . . . (45)

As in the paintings of Horace Pippin and Robert Colescott that were reproduced in the last chapter, race operates decisively and divisively the way species does, to sunder the human race.

On Nu-Nu's home island of Tsalal, we are told, nothing white or light-colored was to be found. Similarly, Nu-Nu's black teeth accentuate difference, in this telling case the deviancy of his mouth which in turn draws attention back to his idiotic (yet somehow obstinate) silence as well as the obscene tastes of his blood-thirsty, barbaric people. Yet of course Nu-Nu's cannibalism camouflages the engorging dynamics of a white creativity that incorporates Africanist presences to reproduce them for its own purposes. Like Lynch, the black politician in *The Birth of a Nation* who wants to lynch white people exactly as much as his creator sought to expunge blacks, the supposed orality of Poe's savage captive screens the exorbitant appetites of a white author whose racial representations are themselves a form of cannibalism; with a nod toward Sigmund Freud and bell hooks, we might term this dynamic "the edible complex." The first epigraph of this postscript—Montaigne's critique of imperialists horrified by cannibalism yet themselves guilty of torturing natives "under the pretense of piety and religion"—remains pertinent vis-à-vis the dynamics of representation.

A quick glance confirms the fact that such different and differently situated thinkers as Herman Melville, Robert Lowell, and Thomas Jefferson meditated on a totalizing that permeated American thought and that in turn explains why racechange has historically served racist ends. At the very center of Herman Melville's fascinating "Benito Cereno" (1856), the tale of a slave mutiny, the brilliant rebel leader Babo strikes terror into the heart of his white captain not only by murdering the Spaniard's co-captain and displaying the dead man's bones on the bow (substituted for the ship's figurehead), but also by exulting in the whiteness of the skeleton (which Babo uses to prove his triumph over this particular white man and white privilege in general): "The Negro Babo" asks Benito Cereno repeatedly about his co-captain's remains "whether, from its whiteness, he should not think it a white's" (111). Just as Babo almost gets away with his conspiracy by playing on racist propositions (through his black black impersonation of a fawningly solicitous slave), his exultant display of the white bones uncovers the racist totalizing of his would-be enslavers. In contrast to the black skull and crossbones raised by the insurrectionary Africans in Robert Lowell's 1965 dramatic adaptation of Melville's tale stands the chalk-white skeleton dressed up in Benito Cereno's clothes and hailed by the slaves on board the ship:

> He is a white because his bones are white!
> He is a white because his bones are white! (208)

Although Lowell's Babu harbors some hope that Thomas Jefferson, the "King" of the American "Republic, would like to free his slaves," the rebel leader is immediately disabused of that illusion: "Jefferson [is] a gentleman and an American," which means "He's not lifting a finger to free his slaves" (195). And even a glimpse at the relatively liberal meditations of Thomas Jefferson in *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787) provides evidence that he had internalized not simply the most transparently utilitarian platitudes about slaves—that they "require less sleep" or feel "griefs [that] are transient"—but also a racist totalizing based upon immutable physical distinctions purportedly permeating all aspects of being:

> Whether the black of the negro resides in the reticular membrane between the skin and scarf-skin, or in the scarf-skin itself; whether it proceeds from the color of the blood, the color of the bile, or from that of some other secretion, the difference is fixed in nature, and is as real as if its seat and cause were better known to us. And is this difference of no importance? Is it not the foundation of a greater or less share of beauty in the two races? (138)

According to Jefferson, beauty cannot reside in "that eternal monotony . . . , that immoveble veil of black which covers all the emotions of the other race" (138). To be sure, Jefferson sounds relatively moderate when he admits that "The opin-
ion, that [blacks] are inferior in the faculties of reason and imagination, must be hazarded with great diffidence” (143). Still, he strikes a far more ominous tone when he melds race with species, judging the preference of slaves for whites to be as uniform “as is the preference of the Oran-oootan for the black women over those of his own species” (138).

As with fictional characters so with real people—at least with respect to the wound of such totalizing. Although Fanon tries on a “tight smile” when a little girl points at him—excluding to her mother “Look, a Negro!”—the psychiatrist admits that he “made myself an object” and that this process felt like “an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage that sapped my whole body with black blood” (112). Like Nu-Nu’s black teeth, Fanon’s black blood signifies his complete Otherness; however, he stages that estrangement in the context of his internalization of a totalizing “racial epidermal schema” projected on him by whites, one requiring very thick skin indeed from the point of view of the person seeking (without much hope) to extricate himself from a position of alterity. How should we position cross-racial passing and posing in terms of racist totalizing?

Especially before civil rights legislation, affirmative action programs, and the emergence of a substantial black middle class, the white imagination tended to conform to the pattern of an edible complex that depends upon totalizing, picturing blacks as so saturated by Otherness that their disruptive, demonized energies had to be contained since they threaten the status quo. Several decades ago, Zora Neale Hurston compared her own situation to that of whites; regardless of her entanglement in prejudicial modes of conceptualizing race, her conclusion that whites remained victims of the fears they projected onto blacks still rings true today:

The position of my white neighbor is much more difficult [than mine]. No brown specter pulls up a chair beside me when I sit down to eat. No dark ghost thrusts its leg against mine in bed. (153)

Brown specters and dark ghosts haunting the house of the white imagination attest to many artists’ sometimes conscious, sometimes unconscious efforts to buttress privileges made fragile by the inevitable awareness produced in a democratic society that such entitlements are indefensible. Often in the American past, race changes—undertaken by white artists for a variety of motives—testify to the construction of an Otherness compulsively annihilated.

Despite the anarchic potential of race change, then, the aggregate of epidermal fungibility, or what I am tempted to call “epidermatics,” almost always seems historically to have resulted in the subordination, muting, or obliteration of the Other. Whether driven by identification or disidentification, race changes spotlight the crucial question posed by Diana Fuss in her recent book Identification Papers: “How can the other be brought into the domain of the knowable without annihilating the other as other—as precisely that which cannot be known?” (4). Like the politics that Fuss sees at work in Fanon’s analysis of the violence of identification, cross-racial impersonations have illuminated “the material practices of exclusion, alienation, appropriation, and domination that transform other subjects into sub-

jected others” (14). The paradox of this study is that they did so despite the wildly divergent, conscious aims of performers.

Here, then, are the equations that constitute the edible complex shaping seemingly antithetical attempts at cross-racial impersonation. They must be read with some attention to numberings, for the first Proposition 1 begins with resemblance while the second Proposition 1 antithetically starts with disavowal. Indeed, the first Proposition 1 looks like the most libertarian form of racechanging mutability whereas the second Proposition 1 looks like the most racist form of totalizing. Yet, if scanned as two sequences, they shockingly end up in the same irrationally monistic place:

1. I am like the Other.
2. I display my similarity to the Other.
3. I am the same as the Other.
4. I admit the Other within me.
5. I contain the Otherness of the Other within me.
6. I represent the Other.
5. I contain the Otherness of the Other outside me.
4. I expel the Other outside me.
3. I am the opposite of the Other.
2. I display the Otherness of the Other.
1. I am nothing like the Other.

Starting from startlingly opposed attitudes toward Otherness, the subject nevertheless subjects the Other to ownership or control. If “I” represent the “Other,” the “Other” is “my” construction. (The prohibition against graven images of divinity in the Hebrew Bible or the fear among some peoples that a photograph constitutes a form of soul-snatching might help contextualize the idea that representation poses the threat of violation.)

Whether one begins with internalization or externalization of the Other, identification or disavowal of identification, professed amity or enmity, the logic of the self that occupies the position of the universally representative, representing subject ends us possessing or dispossessing, engulfing or expelling Otherness. A catch-22 or double bind, the syntax of self and Other inevitably leads to the disappearance of the Other’s Otherness.7 Regardless of the route by which it is attained, the central Proposition 6 inexorably transmutes the Other into a surd or a voiceless sound. Thus, the history of representations of racechange provides a cautionary tale about the expropriating mechanics of mimesis in general. More specifically, the cross-racial masquerades presented in this book often tally the same irrational numbers, though they are motivated by widely divergent desires and dreams. Like those vegematics advertised on late-night television, epidermatics grind out with mindless rapidity identical, predictable patterns and shapes (bringing to mind the old adage, “no matter how you slice it . . .”).

Although white representations of blackness have moved in the course of the twentieth century from the mean mockery of blackface through the adulterous mim-
icry of imperialist nostalgia, from the confused erotics of black envy to the loving emphasis on interracial mutuality and mutability at work in narratives of the mixed child and in visual graphics of morphed hybrid beings, even the best-intentioned and most aesthetically exuberant imitations veer into incorporations that threaten to obliterate the Otherness of the Other: not just The Birth of a Nation but also Swing Time, not just Vachel Lindsay’s “The Congo” but also John Berryman’s The Dream Songs, not just Saul Bellow’s Mr. Sammler’s Planet but also Norman Mailer’s “The White Negro,” not just Al Jolson’s but also Virginia Woolf’s and John Howard Griffin’s use of blackface, not just Mark Twain’s Pudd’nhead Wilson but also Kate Chopin’s “Désirée’s Baby.” (In an elegaic manner comparable to that adopted by Chopin, the racechanging works of such black artists as Anne Spencer, Charles Chesnutt, George Schuyler, Marita Bonner, Jean Toomer, and Gloria Naylor make this same point.) In other words, the purported politics of racechanges can vary dramatically, but the ethical problem that structures their performance tends to remain constant.

Keeping this in mind, what does it mean to return to the idea articulated in my introduction that America’s first national theater, first motion pictures, first radio shows, and first new journalism as well as Europe’s first experimental literature, painting, and photography were all marked by forms of cross-racial impersonation? Has a significant aspect of the evolution of modern Euro-American culture been achieved through the edible complex and the mudding or what bell hooks calls “the eating” of the Other? Just as The Birth of the Nation and the birth of the nation’s film industry depended upon staging the death of African Americans, could one contend that the genesis of twentieth-century radio, new journalism, experimental poetry, modernist painting, and avant-garde photography hinged at least in part on representations that possessed or dispossessed, engulfed or expelled the black Other? Edward Said’s argument about European modernism—that its most prominent characteristics derive from collisions between Western society and native cultures constituted by the colonized—can be extended to twentieth-century American aesthetic productions which repeatedly framed themselves in terms of multiple collisions in the persistent disparity in power between the white and the black (188–91).

Though I have not told the whole story of black passing and white posing, though I have refrained from a teleological plot with a comic or tragic resolution, I have found myself returning again and again to a question this study cannot answer, the ethical inquiry at the center of cross-racial interaction: How can white people understand or sympathize with African-Americans without distorting or usurping their perspective? In the conclusion to her book about theorizing race and gender, Robyn Wiegman raises the same problem about “the transformatory hope of identifying with the pain and suffering of others [which] seems ever more bound to an imperialistic cast,” and she goes on to ask, “is this the only fate for identification?” (200) Perhaps most of the racechanges recounted in these pages answer this question positively because they operate so intrinsingly within the categories of a sovereign, autonomous selfhood defined through whiteness and an Other colored black. As Fuss puts it,
working-class, second-generation, lapsed Catholic, Irish-American afford more than just more claustrophobic pigeonholes? Or can an inefable attentiveness to precisely those differences resistant to our analogizing save us from the erasures of Othering, as Wiegman has speculated (179–202)?

Whether “the Other” becomes an individuated “you” or multiply defined “others,” a shift in syntax combined with attentiveness to differences resistant to our analogizing might help make the relationship between “black” and “white” bidirectional. As the world population becomes darker and the Euro-American becomes simply another one, such two-way traffic encourages self and other to change places, so “the Other relates to me as if I were the Other” (Blanchot, 18). What can be said on behalf of the performances studied in this book is that they provide an explanation for, even a prognostication of, that future evolution. For regardless of its historic contamination in racist totalizing, the structure of cross-racial impersonation poses a dialectic between self and Other that posits a third term, pointing toward “transracial,” a word Michael Awkward uses “to describe the adoption of physical traits of difference for the purpose of impersonating a racial other” (19). To distinguish the concept from the various modes of cross-racial passing and posing we have reviewed thus far, I would stress the ways in which transracial performers seek neither to become the Other (blending into or integrating within the Other’s community like a passer) nor to flaunt their alienation from the Other (ridiculing the Other’s mores like a poser). The word “cross-racial” means crossing over racial demarcations; however, the word “transracial” should imply dwelling within racial borderlands.

Securely positioned in the place of neither the self nor the Other, the racechanger demonstrates through the motility of performance how impossible it is to ascribe fixed meanings to racial or, for that matter, gendered differences (19–20). To the “either/or, both/and” with which I began this book, the transraciality of the racechanger posits a “neither/nor”—not in the conflicted, sad cadences of the “tragic mulatto” whose neither white nor black spells disastrous exile but in the flagrantly foreign heterogeneity implied by Rimbaud’s “Je suis un autre” (“I is an other”) with its call for the acknowledgment not simply of accepting the Other but, as Julia Kristeva puts it, “of being in his [or her] place, and this means to imagine and make oneself other for oneself” (Strangers 13). In the thirties, the surrealist artist Claude Cahun explained her racechanging, sexchanging self-portraits by describing her principal pleasure as dreaming about alterity: “To imagine that I am another” (Phillips, 39). A whimsical approach to the vertiginous instability of “transraciality” might be furnished by the panethnic chameleon of Woody Allen’s Zelig who, in the words of Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, “renders syncretism visible by offering us a figure who is at once Woody Allen, and therefore White and Jewish, and Black, Indian, Chinese, and Irish” (238). Or, for that matter, Mel Brooks’s Blazing Saddles (1972) where whites sing “Ole Man River” and blacks sing “I Get No Kick from Champagne.” Another and the one Awkward uses is provided by Michael Jackson.

Because the transraciality of a figure like Michael Jackson—“the radical revision of one’s natural markings and the adoption of aspects of the human surface (especially skin, hair, and facial features) generally associated with the racial other”—insists on the mysteriousness of the racial other’s cultural life, it distinguishes itself from passing: In Awkward’s view, then, it may constitute “a distinct cultural and scopic possibility in our time” (181). To the extent that cross-racial performers neither abandon origins nor pass into the other group’s world, they create a new (volatile and not necessarily unified) racial category. In terms of its most liberating potential and despite its history, then, trans-racial transgressions can crack open any monolithic notion one might have about the coherent racial self. Two recent avant-garde films explore the scopic possibilities transraciality holds out by making white viewers self-conscious about the uses to which they put racial categories.

So boldly post-modern is the performance artist Sandra Bernhard in her approach to the recalcitrant mysteriousness of the Other’s cultural life that she sardonically turns her gaze onto herself as a prototypical white subject enrapured by black envy; she thereby seeks to dramatize the extent to which whiteness depends upon appropriative and patently synthetic presentations of blackness. From its beginning, Bernhard’s movie Without You I’m Nothing (1990) melds racechange with sexchange when the camera pans away from a white man in eighteenth-century costume playing Bach on a spinet to a contemporary black woman picking up the same piece. Repeatedly filmed in a cabaret and introduced to bored black patrons by an MC who misnames her “Sarah Bernhardt,” Bernhard—through heavily ironized performances, some in blackface—never captures anyone’s attention, despite what Stanley Kauffmann calls her “guilt-cum-envy toward blacks” (26).

What the self-satirizing routines enact is Bernhard’s understanding that her wish to gain the adulation of blacks is as morally reprehensible as her adulterated versions of their artistry. Invariably a bit off, the shuck and sham of Bernhard’s ersatz racial concoctions remind us that it is only as whites playing black people for our own narcissistic purposes (though Bernhard teeters on the edge of an imitative fallacy that rebounds against her own egomania). The film’s title captures some of the paradoxes at work in white psychology, a line of thinking (within the mind of the white entertainer brooding on her black precursors and audience) which might be captured this way:

Because “Without you I’m nothing,” I desire you more than anything; however, because “I am nothing without you,” I resent the way you make me feel dependent on you for my very existence. In fact, my loathing of myself for my dependency on you is only matched by my hatred of you. And so let me remind you, for once and all, that “Without me you’re nothing.” And the center here is how unwise you I make and re-make you up, rescuing you from the nothingness to which you must remain ontologically wedded. Only when we both agree that “You’re nothing without me” will it become apparent that “I’m something with or without you (aren’t I?)."

Another recent movie, entitled Suture (1993), dramatizes the instability of transraciality—and by extension of such transgressively malleable figures as Jean
Toomer and Mezz Mezzrow—through the odd juxtaposition between the color blindness of its characters and an inevitable awareness of racial markers on the part of the viewing audience. A decent but impoverished African-American man named Clay suffers amnesia after his nefarious but wealthy white brother Vincent unsuccessfully attempts to stage his own death by murdering Clay. Placed inside Vincent’s locale by deluded doctors and friends, the confused Clay inhabits his brother’s identity, living his white brother’s life without any of Vincent’s acquaintances ever in any way noticing the racechange the scoundrel has undergone. In other words, we-the-viewers repeatedly see the African-American Clay being mistaken for his white brother Vincent.

After an enamored white woman praises the Greco-Roman beauty of Clay’s nose and the slimness of his lips, the black man who has stepped into the white man’s shoes decides to become Vincent, even though an avuncular psychiatrist warns that such an abrogation of Clay’s originatory identity will lead to catastrophic consequences. When Vincent returns to reclaim his privileged life, Clay murders him and becomes him (even though Clay’s memory has returned and he knows now who he “really” is). By the film’s conclusion, Clay’s happily-ever-after proves the shrink wrong, just as all of the characters’ obliviousness about color hints that we viewers are stuck in old-fashioned notions about the significance of the visibility or the stability of racial identity, categories which in fact have no substantive reality within the world of the film. The black Clay therefore need not “pass” as the white Vincent since the African-American assumes and plays his brother’s roles without in any way altering his dark complexion or African-American features.

Different though they are in terms of aesthetic ambitiousness and mass marketing, Hollywood films have recently exploited various types of transracial narratives to complicate normative notions about the color line. In Silver Streak (1976), The Jerk (1979), and Heart Condition (1990), for example, transraciality triggers the reversals in perspective that racechanges often deploy. Silver Streak’s Richard Pryor mentions Al Jolson when he instructs Gene Wilder on how to disguise himself as a black man to evade police looking for a white suspect, so it is hardly surprising that, shoe polish and shades and radio notwithstanding, Wilder remains unable to display the rhythmic acumen necessary to pass (Fig. 7.1). This same lacking is what tells Navin R. Johnson (aka Steve Martin) that he is not the natural-born child of his black parents (Fig. 7.2). The Jerk, which opens with Martin explaining “I was born a poor black child,” includes a flashback to the “jump down, turn around, pick a bail of cotton” jamboree of Navin’s childhood when his mother’s confession about his adoption makes him burst out crying in horrified disbelief: “You mean, I’m going to stay this color?” Heart Condition remains just as sardonic about white deficiency when chubby, sweaty Bob Hoskins receives the heart of healthy, handsome, but murdered Denzel Washington. After Hoskins’s racist buddies joke about the sort of organ transplant he really wants by displaying a huge black dildo on his hospital bedside tray, Hoskins—with-a-black-heart regains his lost soul by saving the child Denzel Washington fathered with the vulnerable white woman Hoskins had himself failed to foster at an earlier time of his life.
The importance of transraciality in popular media may be bound up with what the novelist Trey Ellis views as a new phenomena extending the Black Arts movement into the eighties and nineties, namely the emergence of what he calls the "cultural mulatto," a figure "educated by a multi-racial mix of cultures [who] can also navigate easily in the white world" and who "no longer need[s] to deny or suppress any part of our complicated and sometimes contradictory cultural baggage to please either white people or black" (235). Ellis, pointing to the class basis of this new "post-bourgeois" movement, locates its origins in the production of a critical mass of black college graduates who are the children of college graduates (237). From the films of Spike Lee and the rap of Fishbone to the novels of Terry McMillan, samples of what Ellis jokingly calls the NBA (the New Black Aesthetic) empower a skeptical take on earlier black nationalist movements, flouting any "positivist black party line": Playwright George C. Wolfe's parodies of A Raisin in the Sun (1961) and For Colored Girls (1975) in his brilliantly satiric The Colored Museum (1987), for instance, refuse to whitenish the intricate experiences of African Americans whether or not white and/or black audiences (for whatever reason) wish to be given sanitized positive role models (236). When the extraordinary tap-dancer Savion Glover choreographed "The Uncle Huck-a-Buck Song" for his Broadway hit Bring in 'Da Noise, Bring in 'Da Funk (1996), he depicted what he judged to be Bill Robinson's limited repertoire as a reflex of his white audiences' demands on a black performer. Sardonically living out the dream of the little black girls in The Bluest Eye, Glover himself—mincing behind a life-size, floppy Shirley Temple doll strapped to his hands and feet—dances with a Bojangles who can be only as versatile as his racist viewers will allow.

As if exemplifying Ellis's vision of the cultural mulatto's multicultural mixing of traditions, Adrian Piper and Iké Udé focus on the portrait as a genre that can unravel racialized presuppositions about identity. Piper's Colored People consists of photographic self-portraits that sixteen subjects ("equal numbers of people of color and euroethnics, women and men") took in eight different shots of themselves, "each expressing facially the corresponding colloquial metaphor of color as mood." Presumably Piper herself colored them in as "Tickled Pink" or "Scarlet with Embarrassment," "Purple with Anger" or simply "Blue," "Green with Envy" or "Jaundiced Yellow," "White with Fear" or "Black Depression." The childlike strokes of crayon lines criss-crossing faces—often not staying within the heads' boundaries, at times looking weiblike, at times like a cloud or a vise—connect people together on the basis of fleeting feelings fixed and framed.

The colored people in Iké Udé's Celluloid Frames are featured in movie posters created for nonexistent films through computer graphics. One such ad, "Norma Jean," features a familiarly posed but racechanged Marilyn Monroe fighting to keep her billowing dress from exposing her panties; though African American, "Norma Jean" remains quite definitively the movie star Marilyn Monroe (Fig. 7.3), an off-hand homage to Andy Warhol's marketing of multicolored Marilyns. The title of this ersatz poster for a "virtual" movie emphasizes the woman with bronze skin and dark hair who pre-existed the marketed Monroe. As Udé himself puts it, "the dark-haired beauty Norma Jean passed when she became the Snow-White

Monroe, much as Madonna did too and via the same bottle of peroxide." That the executive producer is listed in the print below as "Material Girl" or that the production design is said to be by "Peroxide Magic" makes clear and abundant sense.

But what does Udé mean by listing the director of photography as "Leni Riefenstahl" or the editor as "Himmler" or the director as "The Fuhrer"? Seeking to eliminate their "darker roots," both Monroe and Madonna opted for a form of blond ambition that bought into a Nordic notion of beauty, for "the bestselling blond em-
braces notions of the Aryan whiter-than-white." An article in Udé's aply named magazine CRUDE explains about the marketing of Monroe as blond Venus, "Hollywood played Bosnia and she was ethnically cleansed" (33). Just as dedicated as Iké Udé to exhibiting what Kobena Mercer terms "the unfinished business of the post-Civil Rights era" and specifically to confronting the issue of ethnic cleansing, Daniel Tisdale's 1988 series of images Post-Plantation Pop contrasts "before" and "after" shots of several icons of ethnicity (like Harriet Tubman and Paul Robeson) so that the retouched, glamorized, often Westernized photocopy "documents the inexorable power of mass culture to drain off the aura of ethnic iconicity—and hence to 'deracialize' identity—all the better to colonize and cannibalize difference, and thus homogenize and hegemonize it under the supremacy of sameness" (Mercer, Welcome to the Jungle, 161).

Udé's most parodic approach to "ethnic iconicity," his "Man in Polyester Suit," exhibits a circumcised and racechanged version of Mapplethorpe's "Man in Polyester Suit" as a movie poster that attributes production design to "Newth Gengrich," editing to "Clarence Thomas," and directing of photography to "Jessey Elms," presumably to connect repressive right-wing censorship or self-righteous respectability with shockingly sexualized productions (Fig. 7.4). Mapplethorpe's black-and-white "artistic" photograph has been reproduced and colorized on a computer screen and therefore could presumably be mass marketed and plastered on the walls of subway and bus stations or urban construction sites all over the first, second, and third worlds. The contrast Udé highlights between the dark suit and the pinkish penis and hands brings out Mapplethorpe's allusion to Sloan Wilson's sociological novel Man in the Gray Flannel Suit (1955); popularized in the Gregory Peck film version, this critique of the corporate organization man's affluence, conformity, and cowardice in the fifties has been extended by Mapplethorpe's and his successor Udé's audacious retort to bourgeois puritanism. That the timidity of the Man in the Gray Flannel Suit is not unrelated to the vulgar bravado and abusiveness of the male character in Mary McCarthy's short story "Man in the Brooks Brother Shirt" (1941) suggests that repression must be gauged in terms of economic privilege and that it can breed sexual exploitation. Because Udé has circumcised the photographer's subject, he hints at a class (as well as a complexion) change. Is it more upsetting for white viewers to see a white, possibly Jewish, probably middle-class (or even (pardon the expression) pointedly professional) penis than one that always already embodied nothing but the brutishness of the black man?11

Just as Udé features various racechanged and sexchanged portraits of himself on the covers of parodic versions of GQ ("Conservative Skirts for the Working Man") and Town & Country ("The Noble Savage Is Dead") to stress not only the self's "constant want of re-invention" but also the need to affirm a "reverence for difference that will redeem and liberate us" (35), the art critic Thomas McEvilley has argued, "One is bound to betray one's own specific ethnic inheritance in the attempt to open oneself to the reality of others." He therefore goes on to advocate developing "the ability to switch value frameworks and cognitive frameworks at will"; "the search for the Other then is a search for the newness of one's changing

Figure 7.4 Iké Udé, Man in Polyester Suit (1995), from the Celluloid Frames series, cibachrome print, 34" × 48", computer manipulated photography. Courtesy of Wessel O'Connor Gallery.
self" (99–100, 104) or one’s own transraciality. If we return to the issues raised by the propositions governing epidermatics, or epidermal fungibility, from the perspective of the transracial at work in Ude’s computer graphics and McEvilley’s speculations, the central statement of the edible complex would itself undergo a transformation, for the self that represents the Other does not merely supplant others but also presents Otherness again. In other words, although the “re” in representation signifies displacement of the Other, it also signifies a replacement staged by the self put in the position of reenacting Otherness again and with a difference. Who knows, racechange may go on to become a crucial aesthetic means of comprehending racial distinction without entrenching or denying it, as it does in the transracial skits of the white performance artist Eleanor Antin (whose personae include the Black King, the Black Ballerina, and the Black Nurse) and of the comics Eddie Murphy, Lily Tomlin, Billy Crystal, and Whoopi Goldberg. Just as their stand-up routines contrast inner being and outer appearance to disrupt racial totalizing, the avant-garde plays of Caryl Churchill, Adrienne Kennedy, and Suzan-Lori Parks reverse the mechanics of Othering in the way Blanchot describes in my final epigraph.

“Few people speak a language about race that is not their own,” the performance artist Anna Deavere Smith cautions in her introduction to Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992, adding, “If more of us could actually speak from another point of view, like speaking another language, we could accelerate the flow of ideas.” Documentary theater involves Deavere Smith in listening to and then repeating the stories of a host of very different people responding to a crisis like the L.A. riots. According to her, working aesthetically and psychologically both within and beyond the “boundaries of ethnicity” might “develop multifaceted identities” as well as “a more complex language”: “Our race dialogue desperately needs this more complex language” (xxv). The consciousness she seeks involves neither the flattening-out of differences into sameness nor their exaggeration into ghettoized partitions but awareness of the sometimes harmonious, sometimes cacophonous connections between related (not equated) narratives.12

“One aspect of symbolic inversion may be to break people out of their culturally defined, even biologically ascribed, roles,” Victor Turner has commented. Just as psychologists employ sociodrama as a therapeutic technique that assigns to patients the roles of those with whom they are in conflict, ritual or dramatic symbolic inversion may topple age or sex or status barriers “to teach the meaning of the generic humanity; so that each person becomes the joker in the pack, the card who can be all cards, the method actor” (287–88). In addition, racechange uncovers the illusion of racial purity, or the inexorable reality of racial interdependency. Flying in the face of all insistences on racial totalizing or ethnic purity, transracial mutations put the lie to ideas of cultural homogeneity or authenticity, suggesting instead that mixing, merging, borrowing, and adapting remain inevitable and creative in the realm of the aesthetic. Pastiche and collage and parody, so characteristic of racechange representations, criss-cross the ethnic divides constructed by historians, abrogating all efforts at compartmentalizing discrete ethnic or racial productions. Cross-cultural, dialogic artistic productions address the analogies, competitions, frictions, juxtapositions, and distinctions between traditions that are thereby rendered strangely unfamiliar and new.

The influence of black culture on white (and vice versa) has such dizzying interactive effects that an artist like Colescott can play with the idea of an African-American painter translating hegemonic images of whites into portraits of blacks who in turn were created by whites. Questions of ethics—such as, should an ethnically specific tradition or genre be appropriated by outsiders?—operate on the illusion that cross-racial interactions can be regulated. Whether or not they should be, American history suggests that they cannot be.13 What Barbara E. Johnson has called “cultural apartheid” remains impossible “once cultures enter dialogue, or conflict”; “Cultures are not containable within boundaries” (“Response,” 42). If, as the folklorist Roger Abrahams posits about the Civil War period, “the motives of the Southern white dancers who engaged in the black jig at the end of their formal dances are not that removed from those of the white bluesman, rapper, or break dancer,” then the dynamic driving contemporary American culture may consist of an endless oscillation between white “aficionados of stylistically alternative performances” who adopt a distinctly Afro-American style and the invention of new, singular styles within black communities (157). From this perspective, many American aesthetic enterprises participate in what Sollors calls “ethnic transvestism,” especially those produced by artists who endorse Walt Whitman’s vision of himself (and by extension his view of humanity) as colored by “every hue and cast” and resisting “any thing better than my own diversity.”14

It seems significant, finally, that several racechanging episodes help the theorist Patricia J. Williams whistle away at the “irreducibility of the category of ‘black’” (Rooster’s Egg, 192) that elsewhere in her critical writing understandably distresses her. In one such scenario, she finds herself in a hip-hop dance class populated entirely by Japanese so adept that she knows immediately that she is “in deep hip-hop trouble” (193). Williams undergoes three racechanges. When she enters the studio, she becomes “conspicuously black” and is taken for “The Real Thing”; however, her ineptitude demonstrates that she is as far removed from hip-hop “as any American white person,” she finds herself undergoing a whitenizing until she returns to the street where “I was completely black again” (194). Since the Japanese dancers (whose martial arts influenced hip-hop) were more enmeshed in this black cultural form, it was theirs, but she “couldn’t help feeling that it was more ‘mine’ than ‘theirs,’ even though I had no claim” (194). Surprised—something like Hurston in “How It Feels to Be Colored Me”—“to feel both so black and so white,” Williams sees the event as an ambiguous “example of cultural hybridity that reasserts a co-optive status quo, or one that exceeds the limits of the body to imagine the harmonious potential of borrowed community” (192–93).

Williams’s second reverie about racechange returns to the issue of black and Jewish relations that have so frequently shaped the history of cross-racial imaginative force. She recalls seeing the vividly colorful paintings of an Auschwitz survivor, exquisitely lush in their brightness, but “in every last one of them there was a space of completely bare canvas, an empty patch in the shape of a human being.” To the painter’s wife, the bare patch presents the tragedy of unfinished
work; to Williams, it means "the erasure of humanity that the Holocaust exacted" (Rooster's Egg, 209). The law scholar later has a dream that depends on the arrival of an intervening letter: A sister sends Williams "a microfiche copy of a property listing from the National Archives, documenting the existence of our enslaved great-great-grandmother." In her subsequent dream of the survivor's paintings, all those vivid landscapes with the bare body-shapes, and suddenly my great-great-grandmother appeared in the middle of each and every one of them. Suddenly she filled in all the empty spaces, and I looked into her face with the supernatural stillness of deep recollection. From that moment, I knew exactly who she was—every pore, every hair, every angle of her face. I would know her everywhere. (209)

Cultural property and cultural identity remain paradoxically both fixed and fused through Williams’s powerful meditations on the vertiginous surprises of an appreciation of cultures not one’s own that strains against simple appropriative gestures to aim instead at a kind of palimpsestic homage. The surd at the center of the survivor’s paintings, the empty patch in the shape of a human being, remains a bare spot on his canvas but also becomes the only space poignant enough to hold Williams’s own hurtful past. Beyond a politics of coexistence and what she calls "the handwringing about subject position" (118), Williams’s negotiations hint at a visionary diversity that intensifies the reality of each unique inheritance.

Neither an erasure of the survivor’s anti-figure by Williams’s enslaved ancestress nor a conflation of the two, the dream refuses to reduce the Jewish experience of the Holocaust to the African-American experience of slavery or vice versa. Incommensurate, each heritage retains its own image, its own integrity. Yet the dream keeps the two figures and experiences in some sort of conversation—something like the momentary illumination that Fanon sees as the only solution to the separatism he imagines as two bodies, black and white, lying side by side:

And there one lies body to body with one’s blackness or one’s whiteness, in full narcissistic cry, each seared into his own peculiarity—with, it is true, now and then a flash or so, but these are threatened at their source. (45)

Uncannily, in a flash of insight threatened at its source Williams recognizes her relative—"I knew exactly who she was. . . . I would know her everywhere"—when the great-great-grandmother appears in the foreign space of another’s most poignant context of loss. Should the Auschwitz survivor be able to see his anti-figure filled in by Williams’s apparition, would he, too, "know her" or own her as a redemptive reincarnation of what he had feared destroyed? Even if he viewed Williams’s use of his space as appropriative, might he understand how appropriate it would seem from her point of view as a marker of "borrowed community"? Given this logic, would he have asked the question voiced by Bernard Malamud’s Job-like Manischewitz: "So if God sends to me an angel, why a black?" (47).

Not in any way definitive, Bernard Malamud’s vision of racechange in his story "Angel Levine" (1958) will nevertheless furnish the penultimate image of racial mutation in this extended study of the troubling friction between the aesthetics and ethics of the skin trade that helped to shape American culture in the twentieth century. Although in The Tenants Malamud finds no solution to inter-racial animosity, in this tale he gains sufficient distance from it to gauge the possibilities of achieving dialogues of understanding in a syncretistic society. After suffering as many reverses as he can possibly stand—a fire in his shop, a son dead in war, a runaway daughter, a wife wasting before his eyes—Manischewitz is visited by one Alexander Levine, a "bona fide angel of God, within prescribed limitations" (46). A disbeliever initially, Malamud’s Jewish sufferer goes to Harlem in search of the black angel only when further misery breaks down his skepticism. First he sees "four Negroes wearing skullcaps" and reading "the Holy Word"—"On de face of de water moved de specieit"—and then he finds an inebriated, carousing Levine—spruced up in "shiny new checked suit, pearl-gray derby, cigar, and big, two-tone button shoes"—to whom Manischewitz must summon all his conviction to assert "I think you are an angel from God" (52–53, 54–55). The parodic black talk of the worshippers at the Harlem Ark, like the Harlequin pimp suit in the all too familiar honky-tonk, reflects only the most obvious forms of stereotyping in this story. Yet the proliferating ironies of the tale’s final line—Manischewitz’s marveling to his now cured wife, "Believe me, there are Jews everywhere" (56)—disrupt all racial complacencies. For probably one of the least remarkable aspects of the remarkable character of Angel Levine is his Jewishness.

Why is Malamud’s Job not astonished that he joins the ranks of the biblical immortals—Abraham and Lot—when his grief produces a sign from God? Why is he not amazed that such a phenomenon as Jewish angels still exist, no less that they visit the earth? Shouldn’t he be surprised that simply and only his own act of believing in the divine presence can empower Levine’s agency? Why does this contemporary Jew never express any shock about the uncanniness of natural supernaturalism when Angel Levine manages not only to heal his wife but also to ascend to heaven on what look like "a pair of magnificent black wings" (56)? Instead, the miracle that blacks are not goyim takes precedence in Manischewitz’s mind, much to the amusement of his creator.15 Parochial though he may be, Manischewitz has derived a lesson from his racechanged angel that demonstrates what extraordinary magic it would take to transform individual cultural consciousness into a multicultural conscience adequate to American society: Whether or not Malamud and his readers agree, Manischewitz operates under the assumption that crucial meanings reside not simply in the cultural or ethnic or religious heritage he claims as his past but also in their continual entanglement in issues of self-definition.

Yet of course Malamud would no more ascribe to the idea that cultural identity can ever fully stand for subjectivity or personhood than would Patricia J. Williams. Like Henry Louis Gates, Malamud and Williams would probably "rebel at the notion that I can’t be part of other groups, that I can’t construct identities through effective affinity, that race must be the most important thing about me" (Gates, Colored People, xv). Shedding the excessive physicality and sexuality usually attributed to blackness, Malamud’s Angel Levine refutes Western notions of whiteness as purity, absence, the universality accorded disincorporated being. An intoxicated
Manischewitz has been guarded and guided by an immortal spirit in the shape of a human body, an uncanny better and othered self. If not he then his creator understands that racial dialogues and interactions begin to evolve when the bloated term “white” no longer is allowed to stand for spirituality or identity. To repeat a point I made earlier, only by understanding the complex heterogeneity hidden beneath the term “self” or “one” or “I” can we avoid facile assumptions about a single, homogenized Otherness.

Is Manischewitz himself white, when his spiritual doppleganger is black? Since there are African-American Jews, can’t there be—aren’t there also—Canadian Islamics, Italian Buddhists, Ethiopian and Korean Catholics? And how are they related to Islamic Canadians, Buddhist Italians, and Catholic Ethiopians or Koreans? Of course blacks and Jews remain different (since Malamud does not deny blackness by putting it into an Old Testament costume), but neither absolutely nor diametrically so. And if blacks are Jews then Jews can be blacks, and after such knowledge, who can keep the categories sequestered? Manischewitz’s black angel underscores the mystic manner in which we understand our relatedness to each other or the ways in which inferiority never collapses simply into socially ascribed, racial or ethnic or gender or class positions.

This, it seems to me, is the point of John Edgar Wideman’s albino character Brother Tate in Sent for You Yesterday (1983), a novel about a man described as “lighter than anybody else” who nevertheless “wasn’t white,” but whose “color changed.” Whereas albinism for Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man (1952) eventually means being turned “transparent” by a “cruel, invisible ray” (434), for Wideman’s narrator it signifies the fear that seeks out color as a category so as to camouflage the real terror about the common vulnerability all fleshly things remain heir to:

I was a little afraid of him, afraid I’d see through him, under his skin, because there was no color to stop my eyes, no color which said there’s a black man or a white man in front of you. I was afraid I’d see through that transparent envelope of skin to the bones and blood and guts of whatever he was. (15)18

The pervasive color-coding of human beings does assuage—but cannot defend against—generalized discomfort about the susceptible, live organism pulsing behind the fragile “envelope of skin.” Albinism makes Brother Tate into something like an empty patch in the shape of a human body, one so alarming to a community organized along separatist lines that his light-colored, six-year-old son is burned to death as a human sacrifice.

“Depending on the time of day, on how much light was in a room, on how you were feeling when you ran into Brother Tate, his color changed” (15). In this regard, Wideman’s seemingly eccentric character typifies the syncretic or hybrid self—the physical and aesthetic mutability of the racechanger whose performances undermine the notion that any racial type can posit a unified or fixed or epistemologically privileged term. The passage I have used as a second epigraph to this coda—Richard Wright’s famous claim that “the Negro is America’s metaphor”—sounds strikingly similar to Fanon’s assertion that “The Negro is comparison” (211). Metaphor: the substitution of the one for the other, from the Greek metaphor, meaning transport. Ideas about who constitutes “the one,” what functions as “the other,” and how such a substitution signifies transmute mysteriously under the pressure of those changing faces of every hue and caste that use their “elective affinities” to put the lie to “cultural apartheid.” What will happen to our society when we understand Americans as not necessarily white or black people in thrall to the transporting figures of the edible complex?
decades or even centuries, but it would happen. And sooner than that, racism and the concept of race itself would become completely obsolete” (247).

35. On the very complicated relationship between Jews and blacks, see Regin, Blackface, 251–68 as well as see Cornell West’s foreword to Anna Deavere Smith, Fires in the Mirror, xvii-xxi and Takaki, 406–9.


37. Elizabeth Bartholew explains in her chapter on “Adoption and Race” that “Racial matching policies represent a coming together of powerful and related ideologies—old-fashioned white racism, modern-day black nationalism, and what I will call ‘biologism,’ the idea that what is ‘natural’ in the context of the biological family is what is normal and desirable in the context of adoption” (93). She concludes about the large number of black children in need of homes (because the black adoptive families demanded by policies remain unavailable) that “the current racial matching regime, by barring and discouraging white parents from transracial adoption rather than welcoming them in the agency doors, denies adoptive homes to large numbers of minority children” (101). Finally, she argues that “Current racial matching policies are in conflict with the basic law of the land on race discrimination” (106).

38. Consider the popularity of a group of TV shows that presented the cute little black child adopted by white parent surrogates: Webster, Diff'rent Strokes, etc.

39. Such a devaluation is related to resistance to oppression. One thinks, for example, of Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s dramatic monologue “The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim’s Point” (1850) in which an infantalicious slave mother maddened by rape exclaims, “I am black, you see.—/ And the babe who lay on my bosom so, / Was far too white, too white for me” (1.113–15) so she retaliates by murdering the too-white infant.

40. Grounding her political disaffection from whiteness in a colonized past, Michelle Cliff in Claiming an Identity They Taught Me to Despise also views whiteness as a mistake, for she uses the same language Jean Rhys’s heroine exploits in Wide Sargasso Sea (1966) to identify racial lightening with the degradation of sexual colonization:

White cockroaches
white niggers
quadroons
octroons
mulattos
creoles
white niggers. (44)

41. For an extensive reading of Dante’s influence, see Catherine C. Ward.

42. As Henry Louis Gates, Jr., has explained in his response to Homan’s “The Woman in the Cave,” “the confusing phenomenon of the black bourgeois” in Naylor’s novel may be modeled on white affluence without its citizens ever becoming integrated into white society; mimicry does not collapse into identity “(Linden Hills, the same as its white echeons of corporate success; Scarsdale in blackface)” (618–19).

All the characters in Linden Hills remain entrapped in structures that preexist their individual existences, enforcing identities upon them. To the extent that their thwarted lives demonstrate how different structures of domination operate to suppress difference differently, they exhibit the fear that keeps Naylor’s closeted homosexual from risking a new life. Indeed, the speech composed of Whitman’s lyrics about “the love of comrades” that marks the demise of the homosexual couple’s union can be extended to encompass the leap of faith none of her characters dare to make:

Chapter 7. The Edible Complex

Epigraphs: Montaigne, 185; Wright, 74; Whitman, Song of Myself, 16 (“I am of old and young, of the foolish as much as the wise”), lines 346, 349; Blanchot, 18.


2. Indeed, what does it mean that racist dualisms seem more effectively challenged by racechanges in physiological rather than in cultural venues? Despite the efforts of many theorists to debiologize race so as to emphasize the possibility of socially reconstructing non-racist values, the most optimistic racechange scenarios seem to involve actual or electronically imagined physical (not social) transformations that are visible to the eye: the hybrid child, the morphed image. At the present moment, when magazines devote many words and pictures to illustrating the propositions that inter-racial marriages have escalated from 310,000 to more than 1.1 million in the past two decades and that the incidence of births of mixed-race babies has multiplied 26 times as fast as that of any other group (Time, 142, no. 21 (Fall 93): 64), we may find ideas about race forced to shift because of transformations situated more in the genetic than in the political realm. (Needless to say, however, “the simplistic antidote of More Miscenegenation” cannot counter the past “pervasive anti-miscegenation horror of tainted bloodlines,” as Patricia J. Williams has warned, at least in part because that horror was preceded by judicial justifications of miscegenation between white men and their “chattle” during slave times (190–91).)

3. Lest such a view appear happily fantastic or anachronistic—ensconced in a mythic past—consider the story told by the Mississippi bluesman Big Bill Broonzy about a man in his home town called Mister White whose property was surrounded by a white fence:

Trees, he painted them white, up as fur as he could git... And all the cattle...uh, and the sheeps, the goats, and the hogs, and the cows, mules, horses, and everything on his place was white. And any time that his cow, or his goat or whatsoever it was have a black coat, anything like that...he'd give it to the niggers. He didn't want nothing on his plantation black, see...

When a state highway is run through his plantation, Mr. White builds a bypass and puts up a sign entitled Negro Turn so as to ensure the purity of his place. Though told as a hilarious tall tale to the folklorist Alan Lomax, Broonzy’s account describes the psychology of separation.
The CD Blues in the Mississippi Night (as told to and recorded by Alan Lomax) features Memphis Slim, Bill Broonzy, and Sonny Boy Williamson, who tell stories about African Americans led to refer to white mules as “Mister Mule” and asking for a can of Prince Albert tobacco (which had a picture of that white man on the can) with the sentence “Gimme can of Mister Prince Albert.”

4. John Carlos Rowe argues that Nu-Nu’s dead corpse functions as one aspect of “Poe’s poetic mastery, his poetics of postmodern colonialism” in his reading of Pym (132).

5. Besides Freud’s Oedipus complex, I am alluding to bell hooks’s stimulating essay “Eating the Other” in Black Looks, 21–39.

6. It is interesting to juxtapose these passages with the novel written about Jefferson’s slave mistress, Sally Hemings. In William Wells Brown’s Clotel, or, The President’s Daughter (1853), an abolitionist text centers on the child Jefferson fathered as a symbol of the injustice of slavery. See Sollofs, Ethnicity, 225.

7. Diane Elam examines Derrida’s claim that “This obligation to project the other’s otherness is not merely a theoretical imperative” in the final chapter of Feminism and Deconstruction, 111.

8. See also Fuchs, 23–24.

9. See the useful comments of bell hooks on the film’s conclusion and specifically her argument that the bored black woman has no need of Bernhard’s performance and thus inscribes her ironic condemnation of her own efforts to perform blackness (esp. 38) and of Jean Walton, who points out that the black woman, filmed reading Harold Bloom’s Kabbalah and Criticism, remains linked through Jewishness to the white star (in “Sandra Bernhard,” esp. 254).

10. Phone conversation with the artist, March 18, 1996.

11. Another project undertaken by Udé, who clearly focuses on the importance of commercialized Hollywood images in his native Nigeria and elsewhere, involves an experiment in living art for which he constructed a magazine kiosk to display Glamour, Mirabella, and Town & Country magazines whose covers feature his own face transmuted through a series of costumes and cosmetics into multiple racial and sexual guises.

12. When during the 1980s and ‘90s an all-white New York theatrical troupe called the Wooster Group used burnt cork—in reenactments of Pigmeat Markham’s blacked-up vaudeville routines juxtaposed with a videotaped performance of Wilder’s Our Town and in Eugene O’Neill’s The Emperor Jones staged with a blackfaced actress playing the title role—they did so precisely to draw attention to the ironies of racial representation. I am indebted to Andrea Most for information on the Wooster Group. Shohat and Stam discuss what they call “the possibilities of epidemically incorrect casting in Seeing Double (1989), a San Francisco Mime Troupe play” about Israeli-Palestinian conflict (191).

13. In this regard, see Sollofs’s essay “A Critique of Pure Pluralism,” in which he argues that “the ethnic perspective”—when taken exclusively as an emphasis on a writer’s descent—all but annihilates polythetic art movements, moments of individual and cultural interaction, and the pervasiveness of cultural syncretism in America” (256).

14. Perhaps this is the reason why Charles Johnson’s novels about slavery remain fascinated with what he calls “the theater of tattoos” in which his characters read “the profound mystery of the One and the Many” (Oxherding Tale, 195–6). Both Oxherding Tale (1982) and Middle Passage (1990) hinge on an “epiphany of skin,” a vision of phantasmagoric images on epidermis that dramatize the boundaries and borders Americans perpetually race and erase (Gysin 289).

15. See the somewhat different reading of this tale in Ozick, 43.

16. For Malamud, as for Williams, the fact that cultural identities have been shaped by