ConspiraCities and Creative Paranoia: Ellis’s Glamorama, Hustvedt’s The Blindfold, and Whitehead’s The Intuitionist

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ABSTRACT

La paranoia et la théorie du complot on souvent été considérées comme des symptômes d’une culture urbaine contemporaine postmoderne. Par une étude critique de trois romans urbains récents (Glamorama de Bret Easton Ellis, The Blindfold de Siri Hustvedt et The Intuitionist de Colson Whitehead) cet article tente de découvrir les fonctions divergentes du motif littéraire de la pensée de la paranoia et des structures littéraires de la paranoia, en complément ou en substitution du sujet universel fragmenté de la culture postmoderne.

Keywords: urban paranoia, novel, B.E. Ellis, S. Hustvedt, C. Whitehead

Many scholars today discern an all-embracing "cultural paranoia," symptomatic of a detotalised postmodernity in which master narratives have lost their authority. (O’Donnell, 16)1 Patrick O’Donnell, a scholar of culture, describes paranoid thinking as a technique which binds the individual to the dominant national imaginary, thus constructing totalizing versions of this imaginary. (O’Donnell, 13) History under paranoia, he argues, evolves as latent destiny; its course and outcome serve as apparently predestined authorizations localizing the individual self within a national narrative.

It is indeed convincing to describe paranoia as a strategy which constructs national history and individual identity, arranging the contemporary world according to Western, patriarchal norms with the aim to exclude the other. This construction of a national self, I will argue, has become paranoid also because it is challenged by various competing narratives. Cultural paranoia, therefore, is not only a paranoia of the

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1 Following Frederic Jameson (1984), schizophrenia is seen as one of the defining conditions of postmodernity. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s (1982), on their part, celebrate the schizophreniac as a figure who transcends capitalism’s territorialization while Jean Baudrillard famously depicts late capitalism as characterized by a complete loss of individuality and agency in an all-embracing schizophrenic logic of hyperrealism (esp. Baudrillard, 1988 and 1990). Angela Woods (2004) very convincingly applies these stances to her reading of Glamorama by Bret Easton Ellis. For O’Donnell, schizophrenic multiplicity and paranoid rigidity can be regarded as compatible traits of postmodernity. (xi, 1)
fragmented postmodern self but has also to be considered a symptom of a specifically Western, white, male identity crisis. In his insightful study on race and American urban space, Liam Kennedy shows precisely how white paranoia constructs a racialized urban imaginary in which "the street" signifies as a threatening other,
as a frontier space in which ethno-racial difference is played out in symbolic conflicts centered on the insecurities of a white male subject. Presented as an aberrant space of disorder and decline the street is voyeuristically reclaimed as a privileged site for the production of a paranoid urban imaginary. (Kennedy, 46)

Conspiracy fiction as a genre, Steffen Hantke argues, is predisposed precisely to a re-evaluation of white male subjectivity:

Although writers like Marge Pierc, Diane Johnson, Kathy Acker, or Ishmael Reed have also made use of the conspiracy genre, their efforts are often directed toward describing the encounter with America, almost by definition, as a foreign culture, [...] The author's social "marginality" seems to predispose the narrative toward another conceptual paradigm altogether [...]. (31)

I am going to challenge this notion in the following. Categorizing the narratives by female and minority writers as belonging to other genres and other conceptual paradigms than those of their white male counterparts, the latter narratives alone, paradoxically, are perceived as the universal representations of a subjectivity purportedly characteristic of postmodernity in general. Comparing both groups of texts, however, it turns out that more functions are ascribed to the literary trope of "paranoia" than the ones elucidated in O'Donnell's concept of "latent destiny."

Calling someone paranoid might in fact be a strategy, as Michael Barkun points out, of "labeling people whose ideas we disapprove of." (9) Daniel Hellinger consequently demands to "move beyond the 'paranoid-style thesis'" and to identify "the group(s) who hold the belief [...]". (208) Such a move in turn reveals deeper functions and meanings behind seemingly paranoid concoctions. In my discussion of three contemporary novels, I discern "paranoia" as a theme, a motif, and/or a narrative structure within literary texts. Making use of complex "paranoid" structures, these novels involve the reader in a process of deciphering hidden signs of a postmodern society which, ostensibly, is founded on the indeterminate reign of surfaces without deeper meaning. Realities of economic, racial, and gender discrimination, however, turn out to be concealed behind these very surfaces, and it is the paranoid logic the texts in question employ which allows to perceive what is not visible on first sight.

ConspiraCity: Urban Paranoia and City Discourses

The city as social arena and discursive field is prone to evoke a variety of paranoid perspectives. By introducing the term ConspiraCity, I try to denote this discursive real—a discourse constituted both by the depiction of an urban experience that induces paranoid patterns of explanation, of paranoid images of a "city of dreadful night," and
personifications of the city as threatening Moloch.³

Already early sociological approaches define the city as characterized by the anonymity and isolation of the individual in the urban realm—a condition that can be expected to lead to anxieties. Individual freedom in the modern city arguably increases, but so do fears of the unknown but ever-present stranger. With less social control in comparison to rural settlements but more technological surveillance, the city today creates a climate of deep insecurity and, to use Timothy Melley’s term, agency panic, which he describes as the "intense anxiety about an apparent loss of autonomy […]" (7) Concepts of the city have long been characterized by the trope of anti-urbanism, which might be described as inherently paranoid.³ Such concepts either focus, Elizabeth Wilson points out, on idealized versions of a city of the past, on utopian images of one the future, and on a paranoid fear and perceived helplessness toward the city of the present.

There are, however, other approaches to the contemporary city which use a paranoid imagery but to more specific ends. In the following, I will examine Bret Easton Ellis’s *Glamorama* (1998), Siri Hustvedt’s *The Blindfold* (1992), and Colson Whitehead’s *The Intuitionist* (1999), paying special attention to how tropes of a paranoid rhetoric—vision, visibility and opacity, truth and manipulation—are employed and which functions are attached to them. The generally paranoid perception of the threatening city is, in these cases, substituted by visions of a city which bears dark secrets: secrets of discrimination, violence, and exclusion. Involving the reader in a paranoid quest, these texts demand a closer, suspicious reading of urban surfaces.

"Reality is an illusion, baby": The Coded City in Ellis’s *Glamorama*

*Glamorama*, Ellis’s fifth book, makes use of generic conventions of conspiracy fiction to finally subvert them.⁴ The text relates a blurred version of the life of semi-famous Victor Ward, a male model and boyfriend of a supermodel. Unsuccessful as the manager of a fashionable nightclub, he flees to Europe where he is forced to join a terrorist group. With its title, the novel evokes a world ruled by the visual sense and dominated by appearances: the suffix -orama signifies "display, spectacle." (Sheehan, 60)¹ The word "glamorama" accordingly conjures up a device that focuses vision in a specific way while provoking in the reader a chain of associations that circle around the perception of a world of glamour and of appearances. Inside the glamorama, reality and simulation become undistinguishable for the text’s protagonist who is trapped in a simulation room, unaware, however, of his imprisonment. The novel is hence engaged

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² James Thomson coined the image of the "city of dreadful night," an epithet for a late 19th century London, in a poem of the same title, written in 1874.
³ In a classical essay, Leo Marx (1981) outlined an anti-urban tendency in American literature. For a more recent discussion of the phenomenon of anti-urbanism, see Beauregard (1993).
⁴ For a discussion of the criticism brought forward against *American Psycho*, see Elizabeth Young’s insightful article from 1994. See also Ribbat (2003).
⁵ The word "glamorama" is formed parallel to a number of neologisms which originated within a modern discourse of seeing in the late 18th century—words like panorama or diorama. Cf. Friedberg (1993).
in an investigation of the truth of images and the terror of the visual, asking what lies behind seemingly objective visual representations.

Two elements of the novel's presentation deserve closer attention: namely the structure of the text's narrative instance and the function of the presentation's close affinity to filmic narrative codes. With Glamorama, one is increasingly drawn into a reading which can be characterized itself as "paranoid," and the text offers no final clear-cut closure to the many inconsistencies the unreliable character-bound narrator Victor relates. Narration is nearly exclusively linked to his voice and to his visual "point of view" while the experiencing and the narrating self seem to overlap. The resulting mode of presentation seriously limits the narrator's authority for he mostly relates his immediate experiences without achieving any critical distance. Furthermore, the text hardly offers any openly descriptive passages, which could have given indirect characterizations of its protagonist/narrator. Consequently, a character emerges in this narrative who tries to hold pace with devastating events, and who is unable to arrange and relate them in a coherent order.

Still, there is something else even more disquieting about the novel's narrator than his unreliability. I will argue that the unsettling effect the narration exerts has a lot to do with the novel's uneasy relation with realism as a narrative convention. If we look for deep insights—manipulated or real—into a character-bound narrator's personality, we are justified to do so based on the expectations that arise from conventions of first-person narration. The expectation that a character should be able to self-reflectively comment on his or her personality and personal history is itself a literary convention, not an empirical reality. Ellis's brand of (neo)realism in fact refrains from giving psychological insights the text's narrator cum character does not possess. Victor's very volatility is highlighted by the way he perceives his surroundings: for what he sees and then relates is not the familiar spatial reality of realist fiction. Any such a reality, if it ever existed, has unquestionably disappeared in the novel's fictional world. What Victor sees are pre-arranged, manipulated images which he accordingly presents through codes borrowed from film.

Glamorama indeed develops a narrative language parallel to that of film. Most chapters of the book are introduced by a technique that much resembles the filmic establishing shot used as a central narrative device not only in classic Hollywood film. Victor, for instance, visits the premises of the club he intends to open in secret:

On a small soon-to-be-hip block in TriBeCa and up a flight of not-too-steep stairs and through a dark corridor: a long bar made of granite, walls lined with distressed-metal sconces, a medium-sized dance floor [...]. You see a flashing light and you think you are the flashing light. (50)

The closeness to the filmic establishing shot is further affirmed by the fact that the narrator hardly ever refers to the story's setting a second time once it has been

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6 According to film theorist James Monaco, an establishing shot is "a long shot—establish[ing] place, often time, and sometimes other necessary information." (Monaco, 173)

7 This passage, the first sentence of chapter 26, duplicates a long camera movement, complete with a slow pan. The last part in which the flashing light is equaled with the person of the observer/narrator underlines that it is this very observer who structures his perceptions according to cinematographic codes.
introduced in the very first opening lines of a chapter. This is a technique familiar from narrative cinema: once a specific setting is established, films move indoors, not commenting again on their spatial situatedness. The seemingly objective perspective created by the establishing shot, generating the illusion of omniscience characteristic of narrative film, is then replaced by shots and counter shots, signifying a subjective narration. Applying this code, it is as though Victor repeats to himself where he is, how he should experience his being in this exact space, just to forget everything about it. Markedly, however, it is still his narrative voice and his visual perspective through which the story is presented. This constitutes an important difference to film narration where the code of establishing the narrative space and the character within it is used to naturalize the text. In *Glamorama*, this code is used with the opposite effect, and consequently space appears as thoroughly artificial. Space and time merge without Victor taking notice of it; visual perceptions, traditionally establishing a sense of authenticity, become increasingly questionable. Paris and London, perceived by Victor, are New York's mere reflections, and they are even inhabited by the very same people.

All along, Victor rides a Vespa, reminiscent of the filmic motif of a male protagonist riding a scooter through a city. In *Roman Holiday*, for instance, the moving through narrow and crowded Roman streets is presented as a form of flanerie—a flanerie undertaken in fact by the film's spectator, the apparent master of god-like visual freedom who lets his glance roam freely. On the other hand, riding a scooter allows for a higher degree of mobility within the city. The filmic motorcyclist, accordingly, masters the city in two respects: both in the authorization of his gaze (or rather the spectator's gaze) and in the mobility of his locomotion. Victor's ride through New York, however, is not framed by a city characterized by its historical places and sights: its historicity, on the contrary, is made illegible. New York is cataloged, but not presented by means of something equivalent to the long shot characteristic of the filmic establishing shot which signifies normalcy and authenticity of perception. In *Glamorama*, locations are presented by a technique reminiscent of a close-up, a filmic code often used to depict instability, evoking a feeling of claustrophobia. The city in *Glamorama* is thus not represented by prominent buildings and sights; perception instead is limited to the narrator's eye level. Thereby, movement is not only described as following paranoid patterns, the discursive presentation forces a similar perception upon the reader.

Unlike in other literary representations that use film as a metaphor of presentation, filmic codes are decidedly not applied here to signify a higher degree of objectivity. Victor's perception of urban reality is thoroughly structured through media codes, mindful of Jean Baudrillard's notion that "[t]he American city seems to have stepped

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8 Audrey Hepburn clutching Gregory Peck in William Wyler's *Roman Holiday* (1953) is probably the earliest example in this tradition.
9 The perspective of the so-called "camera eye" as a narrative instance was used within the *nouveau roman*, but also, some years earlier, in Christopher Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939), where it signifies a high degree of objectivity of narration. The narratorial instance seems to disappear (whether or not deceivingly as in Alain Robbe-Grillet's *La Jalousie* (1957) is an interesting question).
right out of the movies" (Baudrillard, 1988, 56). The novel, however, proposes a possibility of individual distance, although markedly not at the story level, but on the part of the reader who is forced into the text's—in fact illuminating—paranoid logic. For, ironically, the way Glamorama is presented would be highly unusual in film: film scholar Oliver Speck shows that a conflation of the instances of narrator and focalizer undermines the realist illusion characteristic of narrative film and leads to texts that are in themselves hysterical or paranoid. In his analysis of Robert Montgomery's The Lady in the Lake (1946), Speck argues that the exclusive presentation of the film's story through the eyes of its main character, the detective Marlowe, destroys the spectator's illusion of being in an omniscient position, in possession of supreme vision. (Esp. Speck, 133-145) In Glamorama, a similar effect is achieved, an effect which is only possible because the novel establishes a firm link to filmic codes of presentation, seriously questioning the visual reality of the city.

"It never could have happened in Webster": The Female Subject in Hustvedt's The Blindfold

Siri Hustvedt's first novel The Blindfold similarly revolves around motifs of vision and urban paranoia. The Blindfold, however, is not so much interested in the epistemological value of the visible. It investigates how the visual realm serves as an arena in which bearing someone's look establishes power over the subject that is looked at, transforming it into an object. The city is the paradigmatic space in which this gendered spectacle of the visual is acted out. Still, it becomes evident that the urban space in itself is not only the sinister place of coded experience, but also a space of potential emancipation.

The novel relates the story of a female protagonist and character-bound narrator, Iris Vegan from Webster, Minnesota, oddly out of place in New York. Within a period of roughly three years, Iris Vegan lives through what can only be described as a series of nervous breakdowns, caused by the process of adapting to life in the big city. This is, as Kristiaan Versluys points out, "[i]n and of itself [a] topos [that] is an old mainstay in the description of urbanity [...]." (Versluys, 102) Drawing attention to the generic structure of the text, Versluys astutely remarks that The Blindfold has hardly been examined as an urban novel. This genre, I would add, seems still to be regarded as predominantly a province of male authors. The few discussions of Hustvedt's novel, for instance, mostly focus on the protagonist's psychological affliction, which again is a well-established trope in the theorization of literature by female writers. In the process of labeling texts according to generic specificities, effectively, the experience of urban paranoia in texts by female authors is often pathologized while a similar experience in texts by male authors is perceived as emblematic of postmodernity. This dilemma of categorization points to a problem which was long overlooked in urban theory, too: namely that what was described as the urban experience in fact was a gendered and racialized experience which had become essentialized. With The

10 Cf. Flieger (1997) and Johnson (2002). Here, the character of the "mad woman" is foregrounded. In contrast to these discussions, Rohr investigates The Blindfold within the tradition of realist urban writing by male authors (2003).
In The Blindfold, a dominance of tropes of vision is achieved through an over-accentuation of the act of seeing for which the image of the protagonist who watches herself being watched is emblematic: "I could feel George's eyes on me while I looked at Stephen [...]." (61) The ability to see is counteracted by the recurrent motif of blindness, the inability to see. Iris experiences episodes of migraine which are conducive to a dimness of vision (93). Her lover Rose finally blindfolds and then rapes her, admitting in advance: "I want you blind [...]." (203)

Vision is the epitome of power in The Blindfold, very much in accordance both with Freudian and feminist theories: for Freud, the fear of becoming blind equals the ultimate male fear of castration, of impotence and powerlessness. Feminist scholar Laura Mulvey argues that, within the cinematographic realm, the male gaze is all-powerful, the male being the bearer of the look that objectifies the female, dissecting the female body into fetishes. The urban public realm has often been conceptualized as a stage, similar to the screen, with the flaneur as a distanced spectator. Already with Baudelaire, the flaneur's "divine" eye watches the women walking in the streets. It is no coincidence that these women are often presented as prostitutes: moving within the urban realm submits the female figure to the male gaze and, fetishized, she becomes indeed purchasable. No wonder, then, that the flaneur is "resolutely male," as Anne Friedberg points out. (Friedberg, 29) What happens, however, if a young woman, recently arrived in the city, tries to transgress gender boundaries, puts on a man's suit and roams nocturnal streets in the very manner of a flaneur? This is, in fact, the question The Blindfold asks.

To wrap up the novel's story, it is the force and violence inherent to the male look, the objectification that this look engenders, that is the main source of the female protagonist's anxieties. This look is best symbolized by a photograph a friend has made of Iris, a photograph she wholeheartedly hates but everybody else seems to admire: "It wasn't a full-body shot. I was cut off below my breasts, and my extended arms were severed at the elbows." (63) This photograph in its fragmentizing form is a fetish, and the experience of male power subjugating her drives Iris's attempt to become herself a "bearer of the look," an endeavor which seems possible in the city. She puts on the suit, shaves her head, seemingly becomes genderless. Strange symptoms set in, however, just after Iris has roamed the streets of the city at night. It turns out that it is not only impossible to cast off her gendered identity. Iris realizes that there is a certain brutality inherent in the position of the disembodied "roving ear" (165). Her perception of an apparent "conspiracy" of the male gaze proves to be astute on a symbolical level: paranoia for her is a valid method of perceiving the patriarchal realm of power.

The Blindfold, by evoking paranoid motifs and provoking a paranoid reading through its unchronological presentation and unreliable narrative instance, effectively leads to a re-evaluation of the meaning of vision and visibility within the urban space. It becomes clear that the apparently "innocent" figure of the flaneur in fact expresses a deep-rooted urge to submit the (female) other. While the flaneur's position is not accessible to a female figure, the novel argues that its problematic ideological base
should be made more explicit for men, too, whom the text casts as the ones most deeply engrossed in a paranoia the female protagonist finally is able to escape. For her, the city becomes an ambivalent space. In contrast to the cinematic screen, the city is not only a field of submission, a ConspiraCity, but also a space of potential empowerment.

"All Safe"?: The Divided City in Whitehead’s The Intuitionist

The Intuitionist, Colson Whitehead’s debut novel, draws a striking picture of how the concepts of modernity and the city, each often taken as a metaphor for the respective other, are highly racialized while claiming to be all-inclusive. As in the examples discussed before, the urban surface turns out to be, in this novel, too, a scopic regime rather than a factual given. By interrogating and deconstructing the familiar imagery of the modern city, its sublime skyscrapers and forbidding streets, Whitehead’s novel not only unveils that these images are constructed as "racialized metaphors." It also outlines the contours of another modernity yet to be achieved. While most of the more obvious conspiracies its protagonist at first suspects are in the course of the novel revealed as non-existent, it turns out that the paranoid thinking she employs is indeed necessary to make hidden structures of discrimination visible.

The novel is set in a time and place which are not clearly specified, a kind of parallel universe, roughly equivalent to the New York of the 1940s or 1950s (cf. Bérubé, 169). In this city, the profession of the elevator inspector has attained a special significance: inspectors are guardians of the—in fact most prestigious—vertical urban space. Elevator inspection has to be studied in much theoretical detail at special colleges, and the subject itself is divided into two fractions: Empiricists are traditionalists who believe in dexterity and craftsmanship. Intuitionists, on the other hand, have emerged on the scene only recently, following the doctrines of James Fulton, a recently deceased professor at the Institute for Vertical Transport. Intuitionists believe in a theoretical approach toward elevator inspection, actually attempting to make contact with the elevator at a spiritual level.

Lila Mae Watson, the novel’s protagonist, is an Intuitionist. But she is also black and a woman, which makes her an outsider in her job on several accounts. Within the novel’s universe, African Americans have only recently gained access to professions as that of the elevator inspector and to colleges such as the Vertical Institute where Lila Mae has received her education. Against some odds, she has secured the highly prestigious job of inspecting the elevators of the Fanny Briggs Memorial Building, named after a former slave. Lila Mae realizes that both this name and the fact that she is given this particular job have little to do with a genuine wish to finally integrate the city’s black population but rather follow strategic goals. At the novel’s very beginning, she is on her way back from an inspection when she finds out that one of the elevators in the Fanny Briggs Building has crushed down. Persuaded of her own innocence but aware that she will be an easy scapegoat, she decides not to go back to the elevator inspectors’ headquarters, but to lay low and try to solve what she immediately thinks

must be sabotage perpetrated by a number of possible suspects.

Michael Bérubé draws our attention to the intertextual parallel between The Intuitionist and Pynchon’s The Crying of Lot 49 (1966). Indeed, both novels depict the search of a woman for the legacy of an influential male. In Pynchon’s novel, Oedipa Maas becomes the executor of Pierce Inverarity’s, her former lover’s will and, in the course of the novel, detects a variety of apparent conspiracies. Similarly, Lila Mae finds out that James Fulton has left behind the blueprint of a "black box," an elevator which would finally initiate a "second elevation." There is, however, an even more striking parallel between the two novels. On closer inspection, The Crying of Lot 49 can be read as a meditation on race in American society. While the city of San Narciso, the novel’s main location, signifies Inverarity’s power and influence, there exists another world Oedipa can hardly make out, a world of the poor and the outcast in which race as a category of discrimination is ever-present. This is a meaning which is made especially clear when The Crying of Lot 49 is read parallel to "A Journey into the Mind of Watts," an essay published the same year the novel came out. Here, Pynchon argues that "[w]hat is known around the nation as the L.A. Scene exists chiefly as images on a screen [...]" (Pynchon, 2005) Watts, however, a predominantly black neighborhood and starting point of violent riots in 1965, "lies, psychologically, uncounted miles further than most whites seem at present willing to travel." (Pynchon, 2005) While Oedipa Maas is unable to chart the territory of a fictional Watts in Pynchon’s novel, the change of perspective in The Intuitionist from that of a white middle-class housewife to a black professional woman’s, Lila Mae’s, allows for a different and more inclusive view on the American city.

This city at first appears to be the very symbol of a modernity of technological progress for which Elisha Otis’s famous guarantee at the New York Crystal Palace Exhibition in 1853 when demonstrating the first functioning elevator, quoted several times in the course of the novel, stands: "All safe, gentlemen, all safe." (82) This city seems to be a place of perfection. An ominous narrative voice within the novel consequently asks "If we were to take a barbarian and place him, loincloth and all, before one of our magnificent cities, what would he feel?" (37) We soon realize, however, that the city the novel presents is not as magnificent as it at first appears. Noticeably, an imaginary of a ConspiraCity is established: "Nothing but teeth. This is on purpose." (17) This city is a threatening organism whose teeth are high rising buildings; it consists of "unforgiving [...] boulevards," with buildings that wear "angry facades" (158). In short: "This was a dangerous city and you never knew." (173) But only in its totality is this place imagined as threatening. While the skyline, its very verticality, constitutes the monster’s outlines, the streets offer a promise of social contact. Thereby, the traditional metaphorizations of the sublime vertical and its opposition, the threatening street, are literally turned upside down. The opposition between the up of modern progress and the down of the street is deconstructed.

The streets, indeed, become a utopian place of contact, much in Jane Jacobs’s sense when she famously demands: "There must be eyes on the street, eyes belonging

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to those we might call the natural proprietors [...]." (Jacobs, 35) The novel describes a
black neighborhood which meets these demands:

[E]ach neighbor greets a neighbor, hats are doffed extravagantly, smiles are currency, no
strangers. A toddler strays tow steps from her mother and almost falls [...] if not for the
sure hand of Mr. So-and-So from up the street, who never leaves the street, who always
has a redemptive hand or hard candy or arcane wisdom for the children. (190)

Lila Mae, however, is told that this vision of lived urban public space will not last:
"You see them kids play ball? Ten years from now half of them be in jail, or dead [...]." (194) While *The Intuitionist* evokes images similar to the ones Liam Kennedy
describes in which the street becomes a signifier of white male urban paranoia, here
they are used to completely different ends. The street as a threatening space is not the
symbol of a forbidding other, but rather depicts the breakdown of African American
inner-city communities due to structural racism within the American society.

The novel, however, does not end in this low key. Lila Mae realizes that in fact
both factions of elevator inspection were chasing her not because she was held
responsible for the catastrophe in the Fanny Briggs Building. Rather, she is believed to
hold the key to Fulton's legacy, the "black box," which both parties did not want
constructed for such an elevator would necessitate new cities. What, however, is this
new elevator? Lisa Mae can only answer this question after she has understood that
James Fulton had been a black man, passing for white. Reading Fulton’s theories once
again, she finally realizes that everything he wrote amounted to a racial metaphor.

"He told me—these are his words—'They were all slaves to what they could see.' But
there was a truth behind that they couldn’t see for the life of them."
"They looked at the skin of things," Lila Mae offers. (239)

The second elevation and the city of the future thus are metaphorical concepts
which stand for a part of modernity which indeed is not completed: the promise of
equal rights and chances for all, of safety, is not yet fulfilled. This second elevation
becomes the protagonist’s task: "She returns to the work. She will make the necessary
adjustments. It will come. She is never wrong. It’s her intuition." (255)

Conclusion

In *The Intuitionist*, paranoia is depicted as a method to discern deeper truths, to go
beyond "the skin of things." Thereby, it becomes possible to unveil racist structures
underlying visual representations—both at the level of the story and at a discursive
level by deconstructing the ideological surplus behind seemingly innocent visual
metaphors. Here, a parallel can be drawn to *Glamorama* and *The Blindfold*: while
*Glamorama* aims at pointing out the very constructedness of visual codes, *The
Blindfold* shows the violence inherent in the visual. In all three texts, paranoia works at
different textual levels but is in the course of the narratives partly deconstructed and
self-reflectively ironized at a discursive level. "Paranoia" thus becomes a powerful
motif and a structuring element, always evoking the reader’s direct involvement and
his or her capacity to synthesize. These texts, as many "postmodern" others, effectively
offer alternative readings of an urban reality, involving the reader in what can only be called a "creative paranoia."\(^\text{13}\)

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