# Social Identities and Representation

## How Art Can Affect Epistemic Injustice

# Sosiale Identiteter og Representasjon

## Hvordan Kunst Kan Påvirke Epistemisk Urettferdighet

## Federica Genesini

Master's Thesis in FILO350

Supervisor: Franz Knappik

Department of Philosophy
University of Bergen
Fall 2022

# Contents

# Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to show how representation through art, both when it comes to the subject of the work of art and when it comes to the artist, can support epistemic - specifically, hermeneutic - injustice of marginalized social identities. Beginning with the claim that race and gender identities are socially constructed, I will critique the arbitrariness of social hierarchies, social roles and the expected behaviours tied to them. I will, then, use the constructed character of social identities as foundation to develop a discussion over the potential of art to challenge the expected social behaviours that come with belonging to a determined social identity. Specifically, I will tie artistic expression with epistemic injustice, explaining how art - as a reflection of social realities - can support oppressive systems by proposing images that replicate the situations of marginalization and precluding the access to places of popularization of art to individuals from marginalized social locations. At the same time, however, I will explain how art, thanks to its great imaginative potential, can be used as the instrument to re-think social roles and identities and to expand people's horizons by providing hermeneutic tools tied to marginalized perspectives that help in understanding people's experiences and that can improve the ways in which we think reality, thus bringing to more - epistemic and non - justice.

2

# Abstrakt

Målet med denne oppgaven er å vise hvordan representasjon gjennom kunst, både når det gjelder emnet for kunstverket og når det gjelder kunstneren, kan understøtte epistemisk – spesifikt hermeneutisk – urettferdighet av marginaliserte sosiale identiteter. Fra og med påstanden om at rase- og kjønnsidentiteter er sosialt konstruert, vil jeg kritisere vilkårligheten til sosiale hierarkier, sosiale roller og forventet atferd knyttet til dem. Jeg vil da bruke den konstruerte karakteren til sosiale identiteter som grunnlag for å utvikle en diskusjon om kunstens potensiale for å utfordre den forventede sosiale atferden som følger med å tilhøre en bestemt sosial identitet. Spesifikt vil jeg knytte kunstneriske uttrykk med epistemisk urettferdighet, og forklare hvordan kunst - som en refleksjon av sosiale realiteter - kan støtte undertrykkende systemer ved å foreslå bilder som gjenskaper situasjonene med marginalisering og utelukker tilgang til steder for popularisering av kunst til individer fra marginaliserte sosiale steder. Samtidig vil jeg imidlertid forklare hvordan kunst, takket være sitt store fantasifulle potensial, kan brukes som instrument for å tenke nytt om sosiale roller og identiteter og utvide folks horisonter ved å tilby hermeneutiske verktøy knyttet til marginaliserte perspektiver som hjelper i forstå folks erfaringer og som kan forbedre måten vi tenker virkeligheten på, og dermed bringe til mer - epistemisk og ikke-rettferdighet.

# Introduction

In the summer of 2020, we witnessed a new surge of the Black Lives Matter movement. Hundreds of manifestations, ignited by the death of George Floyd at the hand of a white police officer, started in the US and quickly spread all over the globe . However, more than the protests claiming equality of human rights and justice for the millions of black folks systematically marginalized when not straight out brutalized and murdered, what seemed to stir the watching audience was the tearing down of statues around the US and Europe by the protesters. The choice of statues was definitely not arbitrary: slave owners, slave traders and colonialists were the main targets. These events raise two main questions: why did the protesters choose statues as the target of their rage? And why did the toppling and disfigurement of these statues caused so much anger and reproach by much of the public opinion? The first question is easy to answer. Not only the statues represent and praise individuals who built their fame and success over the lives of thousands of people - in a straightforward discriminatory way - but they are placed in public spaces, under the eyes of everyone, with the clear intent to celebrate and remember these individuals. Additionally, these statues support a clear idea of what values the society holds and of the relationships between individuals from different communities. Placing in public places commemorative sculptures of people who took active part in the persecution and enslavement of black people and mass extermination of natives definitely says something about who has the firmer hold over the public opinion - and about who occupies the highest place within the social hierarchy. This, in turn, helps us answering to the second question. The public opinion had a strong, negative emotional response to the tear down of the statues because these actions directly attacked a worldview that had seldom been questioned so publicly and widely. Statues of slave traders and colonialists in public squares are only one of the manifestations of the hierarchical division of society that supports a

4

predominantly white and male perspective. Not only they reinforce the idea of the superiority of one over the other, but they also strengthen a belief on the inferiority or inadequacy of people from marginalized categories - in this case, black folks - both in black and white people. When everything around you, from schools to work places, from movies to public sculptures, tells you that you are not worthy enough, chances are that, sooner or later, you are going to start to believe it.

In Bristol, England, the statue of slave trader Edward Colston was tore down and dumped in an harbour by protesters and then replaced by Marc Quinn's sculpture of black activist Jen Reid. Reid's portrayal, standing on a plinth with her fist raised in the Black Power symbol, was removed just after one day. Placing the statue of a black, female activist where once lay the statue of a slave trader is a powerful symbol. Not only it challenges and denounces the dominating, oppressive perspective of white supremacy, but it also creates a deep sense of solidarity within marginalized communities, telling them that there are millions if not billions of people who share the same fate and who are ready to fight back the oppression. Jen Reid's statue gave a strong *representation* of a black, activist woman, something that has been largely, if not altogether, missing from the social imaginary - and it gave people an idea of what kind of impact representation can have.

These episodes from the Black Lives Matter protests aid us in understanding the pervasive power of art and representation over our world view. They show how art reflects the framework inside of which we are taught to act and behave. And they show what happens when the shortcomings of this framework are uncovered. This discussion does not want to be focused on aesthetics or on what it means for something to be art. These topics, albeit interesting, are not part of what I am trying to convey. The way in which I consider art in this work is, primarily, as reflection of the social realities that make up our world and of the epistemic framework that rules our everyday interactions. I am interested in the imaginative power of art to represent identities and relationships as they are and as they could be and how this reflects - and is reflected by - the social division of our world.

The discussion in this paper revolves around socially constructed identities, in particular when it comes to the marginalization of some of these identities and their systematic oppression. Even though my discussion revolves primarily around the social identities of race and gender, my intent goes beyond them. I focus on race and gender as two instances of social identities that engender oppression, but the same discussion can potentially

be extended to all the social identities systematically and institutionally oppressed; I am talking about homosexuality, transexuality and all LGBTQ+ identities, as well as people with disabilities, people from lower economic classes and, in general, all people that are not recognized in the "average universal" generally represented by the white, able-bodied, cisgender male. Moreover, my discussion takes in consideration only some of the subjects that fall within the race and gender identities, namely black folks and women. These identities are much bigger that this and I think it is of the greatest importance to acknowledge that, when talking about race-based marginalization, we can also talk about Latinos and Asian people, while in the case of gender-based oppression this involves also non-binary and gender-fluid individuals - just to mention some possibilities. My intent is not to assimilate different kinds of marginalization to one, overarching oppressive system.

The ways in which different systems of oppression operate over different identities are peculiar to the specific identity itself. This also explains the distinct case of intersectionality, namely when individuals find themselves at the *intersection* of different identities - for instance, a transgender Latino woman. The dynamics of the systems of injustice towards an individual that is at the intersection of two or more marginalized identities will not simply superimpose one another, but they will appear in a unique way specific to the intersection of the identity. In light of this, my intent is to examine the mechanisms that underlie regimes of oppression - trying to give a picture of how injustices and marginalizations are supported and perpetuated through time. Specifically I consider the cases of gender and race, but the greater aim is to be able to read different kinds of identity-based oppression through the same lenses - while keeping in mind that every identity-based kind of oppression has its peculiar content that cannot be assimilated to other instances of oppression.

I decided to talk about regimes of oppression through the concept of representation - specifically, representation through art. The reason why I use art as the principal way to describe mechanisms of oppression comes from peculiar features we can find in artistic productions: first, art is all around us, it is an integral part of our everyday life; second, art's meaning is often accessible to everyone - it does not always require an active intellectual engagement to be understood; and third, art has the ability to reflect our social reality and has a great imaginative potential that can challenge said reality. For these reasons, I take art in a wide sense: this means taking in consideration not only traditional forms of art as paintings and sculptures but

also forms of popular art, such as books, movies, street art and music. When talking about representation through art, we can understand representation in two main ways. According to the Oxford Dictionary (2022), representation can be taken as: the action of speaking or acting on behalf of someone or the state of being so represented, or the description or portrayal of someone or something in a particular way. Following the latter definition, representation through art takes in consideration the content of the artwork, the particular way in which a subject from a specific social location is portrayed in art, while, following the former definition, what is taken in consideration is who - meaning from what social location - is the author of the artwork. The reason why both of these definitions are important is to be found in the connection between art and the system of values that supports the hierarchy within our social world. Specifically, core of the discussion will be the connection with art and the epistemic - primarily hermeneutic - injustice that it can support and how art can be the instrument to combat this type of injustice.

Finally, one last clarification regarding the scope of my inquiry. When I talk about oppression, social divisions, hierarchies within diverse art forms and who occupies the places that determine what kind of art is worth to be pursued, I am mainly looking at the so-called western world. Indubitably, identity-based types of oppression exist all around the globe, however, since I use as a starting point of my discussion the specific content of injustices affecting women and black folks, I decided to focus primarily on the western society and its white and male dominated social hierarchy.

The work is divided in three main chapter. In chapter 1 I introduce the concepts of race and gender and how they can be considered as socially constructed identity. Through the works of pioneering feminist philosophers such as Judith Butler, Colette Guillaumin and Linda Martìn Alcoff I expose the mechanisms of (social) construction of identities and the ways in which this process is hidden behind the - also socially constructed - connection between identity and nature. I then outline the division between public identity and lived subjectivity, where the former indicates the conferred identity within the social context and, consequently, the roles the individual is allowed to fill, while the latter refers to the perceived identity of the subject. Public identity and lived subjectivity are closely tied to each other and continuously influence one another; their relationship is what creates the two extreme cases of alienation, namely the surrendering of one's lived subjectivity to the externally imposed identity, and of rebellion, or the rejection of the imposed identity and the affirmation of one's subjectivity.

In chapter 2 I expand the discussion by introducing art and representation. By relying on Alcoff's concept of hermeneutic horizon introduced in the previous chapter, I focus on the connection between art and dominating regimes of oppression, art's alienating potential. Here I examine how art is used to reproduce relationships of subjection through stereotyped and stylized depictions of marginalized social identities and how this portrayal influences the hermeneutic instruments available to people from different social locations. The thesis in this chapter is that a lack of truthful portrayals or the presence of mainly stereotyping images of some social identities influences the collective imaginary by reinforcing the already present idea of a social hierarchy all while hindering the access to hermeneutical resources that would be an aid to marginalized social locations in having a better grasp over their own social experience. Moreover, I discuss how the access to places of popularization of art is generally precluded to individuals from marginalized social locations or, when this access is granted, it is granted generally only through the appropriation, by the white, patriarchal system, of the originally marginalized form of art - as in the case of hip hop - or through the submission to the white, male epistemic horizon - as in the case of the soap opera.

Finally, chapter 3 is oriented towards art as the instrument to rebel against the oppressive regimes. Here, I examine art's potential to challenge the social imaginary by proposing new, more truthful representations of marginalized social identities. Using the concept of epistemic friction, I explain how works of art can provoke the audiences and their pre-conceived images about different social identities and how these can be thought and rebuilt in a different way. Through examples from, again, hip hop culture and female gaze on the screen, I show how works of art are able to create new images of race and gender identity and how they can offer hermeneutic tools that allow the viewers to have a better grasp over their own - as well as others' - experiences. In order to create a solid foundation for fruitful epistemic friction I refer to José Medina's concept of social relationality, according to which we need multiple and diverse perspectives to be in a state of openness to interaction in order to strive for justice - epistemic and non - in our everyday social life and relations. Eventually, the chapter concludes with an exploration of how forms of art from marginalized social locations can create a sense of community and collectivity, and how their practices are rooted in a need to challenge the destructive culture of one-sided representations.

# Chapter 1

# Socially Constructed Identities

## 1.1 What Do We Talk About When We Talk About Gender And Race?

When we talk about gender and race, we should ask ourselves first who the subjects of our inquiry are. The identities of race and gender - while often appearing as natural - are, in truth, the result of values, beliefs and practices that are deeply entrenched in social, political and legal relationships. In fact, they *originate* from these relationships and are fed and kept alive by their daily unfolding. In this sense, gender and race are intrinsically *social* identities whose meaning and practical consequences are strictly dependent on the socio-historical background in which they are employed. Although my belief, as I argue for the socially constructed character of race and gender, is that there is nothing as race or gender - or better, there is nothing that can justify the usage of race and gender as evaluative categories - I acknowledge the need to use them in discussion in that they still have practical, often painful, consequences over the lives of the people they involve. Albeit logically one would think that these categories would, as they do, cover every individual, it is relevant to emphasize that they become relevant only towards specific people. In a world that is mainly dominated by a white patriarchy, the white man becomes the standard for humanity. The white man is not white and is not a man - he just *is*. While everyone else is defined in his comparison - non-white, non-man.

In the first chapter of their pioneering *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler describes how "the category of 'woman', the subject of feminism, is *produced*

and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought" [1] [Butler, 1990]. Specifically, Butler holds that gender is performatively constituted, meaning that the expressions through which we culturally determine one's belonging to a gender identity are, on the contrary, what make up gender in the first place. Gender is, then, constituted through the "stylized repetition of acts" [Butler, 1988] which sediments into the social imaginary as the natural expression of gender itself. However, always according to Butler, this does not imply the existence of an identity preceding the performed gender. Rather "gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed" [Butler, 1990]. We now understand that the identity of woman is restrained in seeking emancipation in that it is tied to and produced by the stylized repetition of acts *believed to be* the natural expression of gender and which constitutes the framework of intelligibility of one's identity. Nevertheless, Butler leaves space for the possibility of gender transformation, precisely in the "arbitrary relation[s] between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style" [Butler, 1988]. The possibility of changing, re-thinking the images and acts that make up gender opens up the field for different kinds of representation and construction of identity that will be the focus of the next chapters.

What does it mean, then, to be a woman? Finding an exhaustive and inclusive answer would be close to impossible. That is because, on one side, gender is not comprehensive of who a person is, hence its extension and limits in different individuals tend to be vague and to not coincide, while, on the other side, the identity of women does not have a stable and univocal history - rather, it is an arbitrary ensemble of ritualized acts, culturally and historically determined, as well as dependent on socio-economic and racial discursive practices from which it cannot be considered separately [Butler, 1990]. Sally Haslanger provides a definition woman that is useful for our purposes. She affirms that

> S is a woman iff S is systematically subordinated along some dimension (economic, political, legal, social, etc.), and S is "marked" as a target for this treatment by observed or imagined bodily features presumed to be evidence of a female's biological role in reproduction. [Haslanger, 2012]

---

[1]Emphasis added.

A commonly shared belief is that gender is the cultural expression of sex, where the latter would be the biological data determined by nature. Haslanger affirms that, outside of the academic world, "the term 'gender' has come to function as the polite way to talk about the sexes. And one thing people feel pretty confident about is their knowledge of the difference between males and females" [Haslanger, 2012]. Gender and sex often tend to be conflated into each other given their supposed reference to the presence of some relevant physical characteristics. In other words, gender would be the social role filled by an individual that possesses - or is believed to possess - some relevant physical characteristics, belonging to a definite sex. One of the main reason why gender bias and discrimination is hard to eradicate - or even to see - is because it sinks its roots in the idea of a biological difference that, as such, is determined by nature - hence unalterable, fixed. If gender stems from sex, then gender-specific traits are natural consequences of "belonging" to a given sex. In her discussion of the relation between gender and science, Evelyn Fox Keller argues that, even though gender is not determined by sex, it still "is never entirely independent of it [...]. It means *something*" [Keller, 1987]. What this"something" is we can understand better in terms of performativity. The necessity of culturally intelligible actions and their repetition within the daily network of social relationships - forming the framework of intelligibility through and within which our everyday life unfolds - brought to the reification of socially acceptable and socially expected behaviours linked to a gendered existence. In Butler's words, gender as an act means the "reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation" [Butler, 1988]. These gendered acts not only constitute the individual's identity, but they constitute "identity as a compelling illusion, an object of *belief*" [Butler, 1988], meaning that there is no *a priori* gender identity from which gender distinctions are originated and justified, but that it is these very distinctions in culturally defined and encoded acts that create gender differentiation, a differentiation that we are brought to believe natural and necessary. Since the affinity of sex and gender is culturally dependent, this relationship tends to show itself through culturally encoded and accepted behaviours that are learned and performed since childhood. As in Keller's example of female scientist Barbara McClintock, the "emphasis on intuition, feeling, connectedness, and relatedness [which] conform so well to our most familiar stereotypes of women" [Keller, 1987] as the traits that enabled McClintock to reach her scientific discoveries comes from the gender

specific practices that are generally developed by - and taught to - individuals of female sex in that they are considered as appropriate to their gender. In this sense the relation between sex and gender *means something*, because it often brings to different ways of experiencing, perceiving and expressing (in one word, *perform*), where this difference comes from culturally embedded traits and practices rather than being determined *a priori*.

What much of the modern and contemporary debate in feminist and gender studies argues, however, is that the very idea of a "natural sex" is culturally defined. The practice of seeing sex as natural is, as Butler shows, gendered in itself, in that the "'natural sex' is produced and established as 'pre-discursive', prior to culture, a politically neutral surface *on which* culture acts" [Butler, 1990]. The "sex as nature" is, hence, determined by the very same discursive practices that control what belonging to a gender entails. Belonging to the "female sex" did not always have the same meaning - once again, its connotation heavily relies on cultural and historical influences. Its meaning its fleeting, transient and subject to change. "What is 'sex' anyway?" Butler asks. "Is it natural, anatomical, chromosomal, or hormonal [...]? Does sex have a history? Does each sex have a different history, or histories?" [Butler, 1990]. Through these series of questions, Butler mines at its basis the legitimacy of a "natural sex", its pretense of objectivity and universality, while reminding us of its culturally defined limits and traits. Following this reasoning, Butler affirms that there is no such thing as a gender/sex distinction, insofar every individual is gendered from its birth - if not already in the womb.

That sex is itself gendered can be seen in the approach used by biology when it comes to fertilization and reproduction studies. In fact, following a research by The Biology and Gender Study Group in a paper titled *The Importance of Feminist Critique for Contemporary Cell Biology*, it is easy to see how "narratives of fertilization and sex determination traditionally have been modeled on the cultural patterns of male/female interactions" [The Biology and Gender Study Group, 1988]. This, for instance, includes the textbook example of the "passive egg" that is fertilized by the "active sperm" as well as the development of the male and female condition being "inscribed by the concept of active masculinity and passive femaleness" [The Biology and Gender Study Group, 1988] - an interpretation of the process of fertilization that turned out to be wrong. The sexed body becomes, then, gendered even before being a body - seen as intrinsically passive if female and intrinsically active if male. After the fertil-

ization, the nucleus of the cell becomes the masculine head of the process, while the cytoplasm remains the passive feminine material on which the nucleus acts. The gendering of these processes and the consequent objectification by science ended up reversing the direction of the interpretation and "support[ing] the social behaviours which imposed it in the first place" [The Biology and Gender Study Group, 1988]. While it is the cultural distinction of male/female that informs the interpretation of biological phenomena in terms of maleness/femaleness, we are brought to believe that - given the "objectivity" of science and the *a priori* of nature - it is from this biological distinction that male/female gendered traits stem from.

At this point, it is legitimate to ask where gender differs from sex. We have seen that Butler denies a difference between the two, however we cannot deny that human beings display biological differences that, in some cases, need to be accounted for. If we concede that sex is always gendered, to talk about sex as a set of biological characteristics can become tricky. Keeping in mind the discussion made so far, we can distinguish sex as determined by a set of biological differences that takes in consideration the presence of some kind of organs, chromosomes, hormones and so on. What we need to remember in order to avoid falling into the trap of claiming that sex differences are natural is that the way in which this difference is determined is always already gendered - and it is susceptible to change. Developing a critique of gender does not mean to develop a critique of sex as a set of biological features, but to critique the way in which these biological features are laden with cultural prescriptions and values, as the research from The Biology and Gender Study Group demonstrated. It is important to remind of this difference, especially when it comes to safety, health and medicine. Too many times, as Caroline Criado Perez denounces in her book *Invisible Women*, female bodies - and minds - have suffered and still do because they are assimilated to what Criado Perez calls the "default male". What this means is that "the lives of men [are] taken to represent those of humans overall" [Criado-Perez, 2019], where the biological specificity of female bodies gets lost as background noise or, again in Criado Perez's words, as a "female-shaped 'absent-presence'" [Criado-Perez, 2019]. The aim is not to sweep these physiological difference under an idea of sameness, but to get rid of the differentiation between gender categories that charges simple physiological features with values that are then used to justify systems of oppression and domination. To strive for equality does not mean to consider everyone as the same, but to give everyone the same values and opportunities while

recognizing their own individual specificity.

Even though my general intention is to get rid of the characterization of gender altogether, I recognize that this is nothing but the final objective, what we should strive for in our quest for equality. It would be a potentially critical mistake to try to get rid of the category of gender at this historical moment. To eliminate gender would mean to get rid of what makes the oppression intelligible. By getting rid of the categories of gender altogether, believing that it would make the differences disappear, we are doing nothing but hiding the processes and institutional mechanisms that make oppression possible and help perpetuate it. Even though gender is socially constructed, it is real in the sense that it has practical consequences, it has a tangible - often painful - reality in our social relationships and lives.

Not surprisingly, the discourse on the elimination of difference is very similar when it comes to the category of race. That colourblindness is an issue we struggle with daily is not a secret. What is more detrimental about it is that it usually presents itself as a positive effort to eliminate racial biases and discrimination, while what it actually does is hiding the processes of discrimination behind a facade of integration and equality, thus maintaining the real problem - namely a whole cultural paradigm that, in its own constitution, tends to marginalize and exploit black people. As French sociologist Colette Guillaumin states, "to ban these terms can unfortunately serve to hide the relationship which gives birth to them, and it will certainly not bring about the eradication of racism and sexism" [Juteau-Lee, 1995].

When it comes to race identities, again we find ourselves dealing with a set of discursive practices, whose mechanisms act in the same way as in the case of gender. However, dealing with a different content requires a separate explanation that takes into account the specificity of its development as well as its consequences. Resorting to Haslanger once again, she provides a definition of race as follows:

> a group is racialized iff its members are socially positioned as subordinate or privileged along some dimension (economic, political, legal, social, etc.), and the group is "marked" as a target for this treatment by observed or imagined bodily features presumed to be evidence of ancestral links to a certain geographical region.

The case for racism differs from the one of gender/sex in that nowadays the connection between race and biology seems to be mostly - although not

14

completely - overcome. Now, when people make racist claims, often these are justified by referring to the cultural environment of black individuals - although a connection with biology remains. Even after "work in the biological sciences has informed us that our practices of racial categorization don't map neatly onto any useful biological classification", says Haslanger, there still exists a "tendency to classify individuals according to race [...] on the basis of physical appearance" [Haslanger, 2012]. Thus the biological feature, the color of the skin, becomes the unifying factor: rather than the justification, the recognizable, shared characteristic. "The use of allegedly deep-seated cultural differences as a justification for hostility and discrimination against newcomers from the Third World in several European countries has led to allegations of a new 'cultural racism'" [Fredrickson, 2002] writes George M. Fredrickson in his *Racism: A Short History*. Culture - understood in this declination - is a vague term used to encompass and simplify the whole of beliefs, values, actions that would, supposedly, determine non-white individuals, or - as Saladdin Ahmed rightfully describes it - a "collectively applicable 'way of life', which operates in culturalisation as the ideal paradigm to substitute for any real theories of history, political thought, and sociology" [Ahmed, 2015]. Ahmed understands culturalisation as the phenomenon through which whites estimate the Western Enlightenment ideals as superior to the value systems - i.e., culture - of non-whites. In this sense, appeal to culture becomes the apparently neutral declination of what used to be "biologically justified" racism. And even though its very name - culture - is generally thought as the categorical opposite of nature, it ends up repeating the same mechanisms, where the difference between two "cultural groups" are irreducible in that they are natural, ahistorical differences, thus "implying that culture is something the Other is born with" [Ahmed, 2015]. Not only, reducing a group to this simplified and stylized idea of culture forces individuals into a homogenizing caricatural representation of their supposed "way of life". The individual is thus denied recognition as such, while their whole personhood is reconnected to a mystified and stereotyped idea of who they are supposed to be. There exist other expressions of cultural racism. Next to its essentialist form in which culture is seen as part of the nature of racial groups, Lawrence Blum describes three more types of cultural racism: non-inherentist culturalism, where the group is considered to possess inferiorizing but malleable cultural characteristics, colonialist culturalism, according to which the subjects of colonialist domination are considered as uncivilized but capable to become civilized under the directive of the colonialist power, and finally

15

neo-racism, where other racial groups are seen in an inherentist manner and incompatible with white, western culture [Blum, 2020]. Although diverse, all these expressions of cultural racism share a belief on the inferiority of certain racial groups, next to the attribution of essentialized and stereotyped characteristics to said racial groups.

Defining race - as we have seen in the case of gender and sex - is a tricky endeavour, in that, despite what many believe, there is nothing that justifies the creation of the identity and its application on individuals. In spite of this, race identity still has a tangible reality and material effects on the lives of people. As Kwame Anthony Appiah argues in his inquiry on race identity in the history of America, if "you understand the sociohistorical process of construction of the race, you'll see that the label works despite the absence of an essence" and that even though the criteria of applicability of the race identity often have vague boundaries, "they always definitely assign some people to the group and definitely rule out others; and, for most of America's history, the class of people about whom there was uncertainty [...] was relatively small" [Appiah, 1994]. It should be reminded here that Appiah supports the idea that there are no races and, therefore, that the term could not refer to anything real in the world due to the fact that what it is supposed to refer to does not exist. While, as I mentioned already, I support the idea that there are no races, I disagree with Appiah in that even though races have no essence, they are still used as justification for behaviours, acts and beliefs. While Appiah insists that races do not refer to anything real in the world, my aim - and what the focus of this paper is about - is not to analyze the concept of race in itself, but to explore how the concept of race is used, supported and how it influences people's lives and social hierarchies. That is why I take the concept of race not in its supposed reference to some kind of essence - whether this exists or not - but in reference to the whole set of behaviours and beliefs that inform and are informed by the idea of the existence of races. Going back to Appiah's definition on the applicability of the race identity, one could argue that this formulation does not really help in delimiting its area of utilization. Then again, the very point he tries to make is that the identity itself is so geographically, historically and often subjectively shaped that to sort a complete list of criteria would be impossible. And that is because race-based identity - conflated into the concept of culture - is so vague and arbitrary that it does not carry any "substantial designation that could aid us in understanding the fundamental features of any human being" [Ahmed, 2015]. In accordance with this, Appiah develops a loose framework

of racial identity that is helpful for the purpose of my discussion. He outlines racial identity as a label that is associated with ascriptions by most people and identification by those who fall under it, "where there is a history of associating possessors of the label with an inherited racial essence (even if some who use the label no longer believe in racial essences)" [Appiah, 1994]. We can understand "racial essence" with the more contemporary use of "culture" as seen above - which not so implicitly still encompasses the idea of a substantial otherness. What Appiah calls "racial identity" is what Ahmed referred to as the process of Othering, meaning that - even when used with integratory purposes - to delimit individuals between the borders of culture will always end up supporting an irreducible alterity. Far from being neutral, the creation of a racial identity sinks its roots deep into the idea of an everlasting difference with, and superiority of, the western, white values - i.e., culture [2].

As in the case of gender and sex, even though I support the idea that there are no races, I still make use of the concept of race. Even though the usage of term undergoes a fair amount of criticism - not unreasonably -, I still find it necessary to use it. It should be clear by now that the way I - as most of the literature I refer to - apply it is as descriptive of a phenomenon that tangibly invests people's identity and lives. To get rid of the term altogether in the name of equality and end of stigmatization would not solve the problem - in fact, it would simply hide it, as we have seen with the case of gender. We need to keep talking about race and understand the way in which the concept is generally utilized in order to recognize "how people respond cognitively and how they act in a culture that has a concept of [race]" [Appiah, 1994]. In other words, to get rid of the differences adduced by the idea of race, we need to recognize how this idea works in the first place and what values it supports.

At this point we should have a good idea of how impossible it would be to give an exhaustive description of race and gender that would include all of their facets and expressions - not only including supposed phenotypical and biological feature, but also all those behaviours and attitudes that come with belonging to a determined race or gender identity. As a matter of fact, I do not find this detrimental to our purposes. I recognize that, by making

---

[2]I would like to remember that, in this work, I am primarily focusing on occurrences of racism within the western world. Other instances of racism around the world exist, however, here I am specifically interested in practices of oppression within the so-called western world perpetrated to the detriment of black folks.

oppression the main focus of this discussion, one could make the mistake of seeing as unifying thread the status as victims of oppression. This is something we should be aware of and try to avoid. If we want to challenge the framework of oppression and domination, we need a more solid basis on which relying to subvert the racist and sexist structures that shape our experiences and onto which build new, more equal ones. And this can be done through finding solidarity in purposes. To use bell hooks's words - rather than "an identity-based bonding we might be drawn together [...] by a *commonality of feeling*" [hooks, 1994]. In such manner, we can build a criticism that is "not just interested in racism [or sexism], but in the whole question of *domination*" [hooks, 1994], where the common purpose is to get rid of every form of oppression.

## 1.2 Problematizing Normality: Getting Rid of Naturalism

Seeing the familiar as problematic - as Friedrich Nietzsche professes - is often the hardest task we are required to do. It is almost "contradictory and absurd [...] to take the not-strange as one's object" [Nietzsche, 1974]. That is because it is virtually impossible to see from a distance what we take for granted in our daily life, especially when that is what grounds our every day social practices. It is, however, our job as philosophers to search for the unquestioned and place it under the light of uncertainty.

Problematizing normality means to take a careful look into our everyday social practices and ask ourselves what kind of - more or less conscious - assumptions underlie our acts. If racist and sexist systems have been perpetuated throughout history and are still largely present in the contemporary world it is because of the very nature of these systems - which are able to reproduce themselves in time thanks to their structural invisibility. This structural invisibility is guaranteed by a process of naturalization of the relation of oppression, or, to use Ahmed's words, "this metaphysical or natural (ahistorical) facade is exactly where ideology lies because ideology functions qua ideology by disguising itself and, thus, presenting itself as natural" [Ahmed, 2015]. We have briefly seen in the previous section how gender and race are often connected to and legitimized by the idea of nature, which also supports the idea of its inevitability - "that's just how nature *is*".

Following the naturalization process, we can define racism and sexism as practices of discrimination that use natural characteristics - e.g., phenotypical traits like skin colour or reproductive organs - as the criteria of ascription of their status as subordinate. According to an essentialist approach, these natural traits would be intrinsically tied to social characteristics and behaviours that would underlie a hierarchical division of society. In short, according to a naturalist/essentialist approach, biological characteristics determine the roles and behaviours one must assume in society.

Many would - and do - argue that, nowadays, racism and sexism are completely eradicated, using as argument the fact that segregation does not exist anymore and that women are allowed to study, get a job and even vote. Not only this is far from the truth, but it is the perfect outcome of the process of naturalization. As a matter of fact, while these facts can be considered *legally* true - yes, there is no law that directly segregates black people as well as there are laws that give women the possibility to study, work and vote -, this does not hinder the existence of social structures that prevent people from having the same possibilities as if they fit within the categorization of white male. However, these structures of oppression tend to be made invisible in that they are built around attitudes and behaviours that are believed to be natural - rather than socially and culturally acquired - and, as such, unchangeable.

Guillaumin defines the idea of race - although her discussion can include also the idea of gender - as, on one hand, "an aggregate of somatic and physiological characteristics" and, on the other hand, "an aggregate of social characteristics that express a group" [Guillaumin, 1977]. Although I claimed that it is not possible to provide an exhaustive definition of race and gender, the most simple and most common way in which people determine one individual's belonging to a determined race or gender identity is by simply looking at them. This is a very simplified way of the processes socially used to determine people's gender or race, however what really interests us is what it means to determine which identity someone belongs to. Guillaumin welds together physical and social characteristics claiming that it is precisely this connection that gives birth to the "belief that [race and gender] [are] a material - natural - phenomenon" [Guillaumin, 1977]. Guillaumin's discussion refers to the connection of physical and social traits as a *mark*. A mark, with its proximity to the body, denotes "the assumed permanence of the [social] position that it is a sign of and the degree of subjection that it symbolizes" [Guillaumin, 1977]. Due to its vicinity to the body - to the "natural" - the

19

mark becomes the "intrinsic *cause* of the place that a group occupies in social relationships" [Guillaumin, 1977]. In this way, by considering the mark as *cause*, the process of construction and perpetuation of a hierarchical social structure becomes invisible. In other words, the mark, being so close to the body, can be easily considered as natural, thus the social role connected to the presence of said mark becomes natural as well. That is why, for instance, women are considered as more suitable to raise children and take care of the elderly: rather than a conferred social role, a natural "motherly instinct" would make women more appropriate for care jobs than men, who do not have to go through pregnancies and nursing.

By strongly arguing against any kind of essentialism, one might raise the question of from what standpoint, then, we are allowed to talk about gender and race discrimination. Once again, the answer is simply that, while I believe that there is no natural basis or essence on which to justify practices of oppression, this does not mean that they do not exists. Icelandic philosopher Ásta explains, through her conferralist account of social identities, that belonging to a certain race or gender identity is a "conferred property where the aim is to track certain physical features, but where the resulting property is an institutional property, in fact a legal one" [Ásta, 2018]. My believing that there is no natural property that legitimizes exploitation and domination does not render the exploitation and domination less real - more so when this domination is not supported by actual biological differences, but by the institutions and social structures that regulate our social life. As Danielle Juteau-Lee portrays Guillaumin's position, considering marginalized people as simply *different*, as the naturalist discourse would want us to believe, rather than recognizing the context of subordination and domination in which this difference has a weight, "renders invisible the social construction of the naturalist discourse and perpetuates it" [Juteau-Lee, 1995]. That is why - even though my utopic aim is to eventually get rid of the evaluative charge of these identities - we still need to stress a point of commonality between the individuals that are part of these marginalized identities - a commonality that does not come from their status as subordinate - or, at least, only partially - but that comes from a shared strive against oppressive and unjust life conditions.

The pervasiveness of the naturalization process makes the connection between biological traits and social roles part of the framework through which we make the world intelligible. This connection is so entrenched in our everyday life that we are almost blind to it, in that it forms the very structure

of society over which we are able to intelligibly act and behave as well as understand other people's actions and behaviours. What we need to do is to take a deep look into our everyday social practices and ask ourselves in what values they are rooted. Only when we recognize what underlies our common practices we can take radical steps to transform them in the name of acceptance and equality. The pervasiveness of racist and sexist structures makes it a long and strenuous work, but absolutely necessary to change the world for the better.

## 1.3    Social Identities

So far, we have outlined the mechanisms through which oppressive systems like sexism and racism are sewn into the fabric of our everyday social practices. Let's now turn to what these mechanisms act on, namely *identities* - specifically in our case, *social* identities. The debate around identity has a long history, however, what interests us most here is a more recent instance that started to catch the attention of the public and academic debate around the second half of the twentieth century, namely identity politics. The discussion revolves around the idea that certain social groups experiences injustices *qua* member of said social group. As we have seen, many scholars argue for the socially constructed character of social identities ([Butler, 1990], [Haslanger, 2012], but also [Alcoff, 2006], [Mallon, 2016]), while other support the existence of some kind of essentialism ([Bach, 2012], [Stoljar, 1995]). What I am interested in is, clearly, the socially constructed character of social identities and, specifically, how belonging to a specific social location influences people's grasp over the world as well as people's possibility for action.

Social identities are part of the framework of intelligibility from which we perceive the reality that surrounds us and through which we are able to act in an understandable way. They define the limits of what Linda Martìn Alcoff calls the "hermeneutic horizon", stressing how differences in social locations come with considerable differences in epistemic resources [Alcoff, 2006]. A description of social identities needs to consider their fluidity and instability, both historical and geographical, the way they inform our interactions as well as the way in which they shape our self-understanding. Through defining one of the main ways in which we are supposed to perceive the reality that surrounds us and the way in which we are supposed to act, it does not come as

a surprise that social identities, while being an important source of meaning, can also be deeply oppressive.

Alcoff defines identities as "positioned or located lived experiences in which both individuals and groups work to construct meaning in relation to historical experiences and historical narratives" [Alcoff, 2006]. She goes on by stating that identities are "a site from which one must engage in the process of meaning-making" [Alcoff, 2006]. Thus identities form the epistemic framework - Alcoff's horizon - through which we are able to make meaning out of our experiences - a framework that substantially changes when it comes to different social identities . especially when they are marginalized ones. Moreover, Alcoff describes social identities as "relational, contextual, *and* fundamental to the self" [Alcoff, 2006] where fundamental does not mean essential to the nature of an individual, but rather it refers to the fact that social identities shape and alter one's orientation to the world as well as the way one is perceived and interacted with by others [Alcoff, 2006]. The way in which we characterized social identities so far can help us in improving our understanding of race and gender as social identities. Rather than understanding race and gender in reference to biological features, we can now recognize them as social identities, strictly tied to historical experiences and narratives, that distinctly shape the one's perception of the world as well as one's self-understanding and, because of this, can be positive sources of meaning and belonging as well as oppressive and marginalizing factors. As a matter of fact, belonging to certain social locations often comes with a lack of resources needed in order to fully understand one's experiences, especially when these experiences are the result of relations of domination and exploitation. As Ásta describes it, while gender and race can be "a positive source of identity and belonging, they often are oppressive, and membership in them can put serious constraints on a person's life options" [Ásta, 2018]. But one thing at a time.

What I am interested in doing is to discuss an account of social identities that takes in consideration two aspects: the public identity on one side and, on the other, the lived subjectivity. These two aspects are not to be seen as clearly separated, but rather as elements that continuously inform and model each other. As Alcoff puts it, "our 'visible' and acknowledged identity affects our relations in the world, which in turn affects our interior life, that is, our lived experience or subjectivity" [Alcoff, 2006]. Individuals are not the exclusive creators of their own identity but neither are they absolutely determined externally. Identity, as well, is not something set in stone, but rather it is

always adjusting, reacting and answering to the world around itself. In this discussion, I will take as a starting point the phenomenological concept of lived body or embodied being, according to which individuals "exist neither only as a thing nor only as consciousness", rather they are connected "to a world immersed in meaning that [they] constantly interpret and make meaningful to [themselves] through interaction with others" [Zeiler, 2013]. Social identities like gender and race are deeply relevant within this "world of meaning" in that they have a strong influence over the way in which the world is presented to us in terms of practical possibilities. In other words, they determine and delimit the ways in which we can meaningfully and intelligibly approach the world and other people.

### 1.3.1 Public Identity

Race and gender are identities that tend to be imposed on individuals from birth - if not before - and that heavily determine the role that individuals are allowed to fill within society as well as the epistemic framework from which they will be able to read the world around them. Using Butlers words, people "only become intelligible through becoming gendered [or racialized] in conformity with recognizable standards of gender [or race] intelligibility" [Butler, 1990]. While, as we mentioned earlier, these kind of identities imposed from the outside can be a positive source of meaning, what we want to focus on at the moment is the way in which they can be oppressive, insofar they place constraints over people's possibility to act and over their epistemic resources. As a matter of fact, social identities like race and gender are not simply descriptive but come with a load of social practices, behaviours and beliefs charged with a value judgement over individuals and a distinct place within the social hierarchy.

We do need social identities in our everyday life in order to be able to act intelligibly with our peers. Following this, we have a need to place our peers in some socially recognized identity in order to understand their actions and behaviours. When talking about the identities of race and gender, the way in which these are placed upon a person is through the attribution to said person of some kind of feature or property that has some degree of relevance in a given social context. Notice that it does not matter if the individuals actually posses the relevant feature as long as it is *believed* that

they do [3]. Icelandic philosopher Ásta developed a *conferralist* account of social identities according to which every individual is believed to possess a certain property - or rather, every individual is *conferred* a certain salient property - that places "the person in one of the recognizable social categories in that context" [Ásta, 2018]. According to the conferred salient property, said person will have to fill out a role - with all the behaviours and social practices that come with it - otherwise their actions would not be intelligible by others. In the case of race and gender, the answer to unintelligible or non-conforming behaviour often takes the form of benevolent racism and sexism. We can easily imagine a mother reproaching her daughter for "not sitting like a girl" or the general sense of surprise every time a black person excels in a predominantly white workplace. These reactions are the natural consequence of a system that squeezes people in boxes outside of which their behaviours are not considered as appropriate anymore. Moreover, the benevolent form that these reactions take makes this kind of oppressive behaviour much more difficult to see and to eradicate. Thanks to the reification and naturalization of race and gender that we have seen in the previous section, benevolent - and non - racist and sexist behaviours are a perfectly normal response to unintelligible acts. The public identity and the accepted behaviours that come with it available to someone are not always that same - they are dependent on the context. For instance, a black man could have restricted access to predominantly white workplaces due to the fact that racist stereotypes and biases prevent him to be considered as a viable candidate, while, at the same time, be considered a leader in his community.

At this point it should be more clear what Butler means when affirming that there is no such thing as gender - or race. As a matter of fact, according to their theory of performativity, it is the "various acts of gender [that] create the idea of gender, and without these acts, there would be no gender at all" [Butler, 1988]. It is through acts that meaning is both constituted and performed [Butler, 1988]. Here lies the distinction between expression and performativeness: considering acts as expressive of race and

---

[3]That people need simply to believe in the presence of the feature is what enables, for instance, the act of *passing*. Individuals who would normally be considered part of a determined race or gender identity are, instead, able to be accepted in a different one in that the relevant determining feature is not perceived in them. An example would be black individuals, especially during the years of segregation, who were able to disguise themselves as white in order to escape persecution in that they presented lighter skin color.

gender would inevitably require a reference to the pre-existence of gender and race categories whereas performativeness eliminates this connection to an *a priori* identity and stresses the socially constructed character of the attribution of acts to gender and race identities. Hence public identities are not expressions - or consequences - of individuals belonging to a gender or race category but, on the contrary, are the intelligible behaviours that individuals are expected to perform in accordance to the conferral upon them of a certain salient property. In other words, gender and race are externalized through acts where the peculiar double nature of these acts - as both constituting and performing meaning - conceals the socially constructed genesis of race and gender identities and "compels one's belief in [their] necessity and naturalness" [Butler, 1988]. Once again, we assist to the reification of gender and race norms which results in the persistence of oppressive systems.

### 1.3.2   Lived Subjectivity

The public identity that we are given in our everyday life has a tremendous impact on how we perceive ourselves, although it represents only one side of the story. As I mentioned before, our identity is not completely determined from the outside. A substantial part it is played by how we accept - if we do - the role that has been given to us. In other words, by our lived subjectivity. The two concepts of public identity and lived subjectivity, being two different side of the same coin, are closely tied to each other - they could not exist without the other and they continuously inform and shape one another. To render these two aspects more clear, I try to analyze them separately, although the borders that divide them are often vague and might overlap.

Alcoff defines lived subjectivity as "who *we* understand ourselves to be, how we experience being ourselves" [Alcoff, 2006]. If we apply once again the performative account employed so far, the way in which we understand ourselves can be spelled out as the way in which we shape our lives and projects "by reference to available labels, available identities", a process that K. A. Appiah defines *identification* [Appiah, 1994]. In this way, we shape our course of life by using available possibilities of behaviours that are compatible with our conferred gender or race identity. I, however, disagree with Appiah in referring to this process as "identification". If we take identification as a person's sense of identity with someone or something, this sense does not necessarily stem from the available labels through which individu-

als can shape their lives. In other words, individuals can shape their lives around available identities because that is what is expected of them if they want to intelligibly act within society, not because of a sense of belonging to the identity conferred upon them.

Ron Mallon introduces an useful concept for our discussion, what he calls "the puzzle of intention and ignorance" [Mallon, 2015]. What this puzzle hints at is that performative accounts of race and gender believe that gendered and racialized behaviours are "intentionally acted, but also [they] are widely and mistakenly believed to be products of a natural kind" [Mallon, 2015]. Mallon's answer to this is the individual's "failure of self-knowledge with regard to the mental states and processes producing her behaviour", where this failure is, specifically, a "failure to locate a mental state" meaning "a failure to accurately represent its causal and rational role in our mental and behavioural economy" [Mallon, 2015]. This is what happens, for instance, as a consequence of the naturalization process that we have seen earlier. Our epistemological framework, our hermeneutic horizon, defined through the conferred social identity, delimits also our ability to accurately represent the causes of our mental and behavioural state. If we believe that some behavioural characteristics stem directly from gender or race, then seeing "nature" as the cause of our intentions becomes perfectly plausible. Since individuals, due to their being confined in a marginalized social category, often lack access to epistemic resources to understand their position and their experiences, they "instead construct a causal explanation of [their] thoughts and behaviours on the basis of [their] background theories about what is and is not a plausible cause" [Mallon, 2015].

So far we have investigated the connection between public identity and lived subjectivity mainly when the latter largely coincides with the former. However, what we want to look at now is what happens when the two diverge. We have seen in the previous paragraph how this looks like on a public level: surprise, reproach and/or rejection are some common and socially accepted responses to someone not acting in conformity with the unwritten rules appropriate to their social role. The question we want to investigate now is what happens at the individual level.

Recognition plays a vital role in our everyday life [4]. By recognizing the social role we and the people around us are playing, together with the context

---

[4]Discussions on the connection between recognition and identity can be found in [Taylor, 1994], [Ásta, 2018].

in which these behaviours unfold themselves, we are able to act in an appropriate and intelligible way and have meaningful interactions with others. When this recognition is not present, the very basis for interaction becomes shaky. The lack of recognition is a consequence of someone acting in a way different than what their conferred social role tells us, which, in turn, often brings to unpleasant outcomes: anger, hatred, rejection. The person who acts out a social role different than the one conferred onto them is often victim of repudiation and marginalization, in that their actions and behaviours are often judged as inappropriate, unintelligible or altogether wrong in the context they are presented. How, however, can we defend an account of identity that does not always conform to the rules applied upon the individual without falling into the voluntaristic trap? "If gender is constructed," asks Butler, "could it be constructed differently, or does its constructedness imply some form of social determinism, foreclosing the possibility of agency and transformation?" [Butler, 1990]. These are the pivotal question around which I will develop my argument in the next section. If we consider gender and race as constructed, especially in the specific ways of performativity, I believe this opens up the way for a transformation of the oppressive categories of race and gender - even better, it opens up the possibility for their complete subversion and, eventually, dissolution [5]. Specifically, in the next chapters I will look at how, through representation, we can imagine new ways of thinking and acting social roles and identities that evade the white, patriarchal oppressive epistemic framework.

When looking at the individual level, the consequences of the clash between lived subjectivity and public identity are various, but I will focus on the two most radical expressions: rebellion and alienation.

## 1.4  Alienation and Rebellion

Alienation and rebellion are the two extreme reactions that may occur when someone's lived subjectivity does not correspond to their given public iden-

---

[5]When I talk about dissolution of the categories of race and gender I refer specifically to their being *oppressive* categories. As stated several times already, the specific purpose of my discussion is to get rid of the specific evaluative character of the categories of race and gender. Race and gender will probably keep on existing, but hopefully devoided of the relation of subjection and domination that infuses them and simply used as descriptive categories.

tity. What this means is that the lived subjectivity of an individual does not correspond to the way said individual is perceived and is expected to act or behave by others. In brief, we could describe alienation as the surrender of one's own lived subjectivity to the pressure exercised by the imposed social role, the unconscious acceptance of an epistemic framework that oppresses the individual and hinders their ability to understand their own experiences, while rebellion would be, quite literally, the rejection of these imposed rules and the attempt to subvert stylized and limiting social roles. To understand what I called a clash between lived subjectivity and public identity, I will refer to Kristin Zeiler's use of the term *excorporation*, meaning the process through which "something that has been part of one's lived body on a pre-reflective and practical level becomes a thematic object of one's attention" [Zeiler, 2013]. This happens when the system of beliefs and norms that individuals use semi-unconsciously to move through life seems not to work anymore. Both alienation and rebellion are processes that take time to sediment - they do not just happen without warning. Both processes start to come to life through the institution of a framework of belief, a system of intelligible social identities and behaviours which delimits the space of collective practices that, in turn, is based on the possibility of predicting and coordinating people's actions. So far, we have seen how these social identities can be a source of oppression in that they harshly delimit the space for action of individuals as well as they hinder the access to hermeneutical resources that could be used to contrast the situation of oppression. The alienation we talk about here is the process through which subjects experience the loss of their lived subjectivity to the strength of a public identity imposed from the outside. This is not only a psychological loss, but it reflects - or rather, it is a consequence of - the material, socio-economic and political conditions under which marginalized categories are placed.

Franz Fanon is one of the great theorists of alienation. In *Black Skin, white Masks* he describes vividly and excruciatingly the condition of the black man from the colonies moving to France and being met with the unforgiving white gaze. The chronicle, reaching its peak in chapter 5, "The Lived Experience Of The Black Man", recounts the passage through which the white gaze slices the black man open and gives him back "a feeling of not existing" [Fanon, 1952]. Here we see the black man who, after a continuous and prolonged confrontation with imposed social behaviours and roles that do not fit his lived subjectivity - Zeiler's excorporation -, is forced away from himself and brought to alienation. What this means on the individual level

is the experience of "a loss of agency" in front of the conferred social roles and expectations, and the identification "with a passivity imposed on her or him by others" [Zeiler, 2013]. Moreover, as Fanon theorizes, alienation does not only work as to make the subjects strangers to themselves but, in its perverse and wicked ways, works to assimilate the subjects to the main social framework. Fanon writes:

> The oppressor, through the inclusive and frightening character of his authority, manages to impose on the native new ways of seeing, and in particular a pejorative judgement with respect to his original forms of existing. [Fanon, 1967]

While Fanon talks specifically about colonization, we can widen his discussion to today's racism (and neo-colonialism) and sexism. The semi-destruction of one's self in the name of acceptance of the imposed way of existing does not mean liberation from oppression. Rather, it perpetuates this oppression through the invisible ways of naturalization of the relationship of subordination. Even when accepting the dominating framework and the imposed social role, "the oppressed is shocked to find that he continues to be the object of racism and contempt" writes Fanon [Fanon, 1967]. The oppressed does not find liberation in accepting a new form of existing, but finds the perpetuation of his situation in the ways determined by the oppressor in that he accepts a framework that is built around a social system that is hierarchical and exploitative at its core.

Unlike what it might seem from the discussion provided so far, social identities are not exclusively oppressive. On the contrary, they can be an important and positive source of belonging. It is far from being my intention to see and describe marginalized communities as exclusively oppressed categories, with no voice and existence outside of their status as victims. What I tried to describe with the process of alienation is the effect that generations of institutional and systematic exploitation can have on people's minds and existence. What I now want to illustrate is how belonging to a determined social identity can be an important source of meaning and solidarity and, ultimately, the foundation of a movement of rebellion against the oppressive conditions imposed on some social categories by exploitative systems. Alcoff, describing race and gender as "visible identities", affirms that this "visibility is both the means of segregating and oppressing human groups and the means of manifesting unity and resistance" [Alcoff, 2006]. In being part of

a social identity - especially when this is a marginalized one -, individuals can find a sense of belonging, as well as a shared understanding of their experiences, representation and validation of their way of life and a solidarity aimed at resisting to oppression and injustices. Often attributed to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the idea of *strategic essentialism* explains how

> the subjugated group, in order to move beyond binaries such as colonized/colonizer, develops an essentialist identity to promote group pride and unity, to advance and achieve specific, socio-political goals, and to foster healing. [Nielsen, 2011]

After arguing against the existence of any kind of essence when it comes to social identities such as race and gender, it may sound incoherent to refer now to the notion of essentialism. What we need to understand, though, is that this is, as Cynthia R. Nielsen says, a constructed *therapeutic tool*, not the idea of the existence of an essence shared between people belonging to a social identity. The reason why we need this kind of strategic essentialism is because by arguing that there is no essence that defines belonging to a social identity, someone might counter that - for the same reason - there is nothing that justifies race and gender-based injustices. This kind of strategic essentialism can be more easily seen as a sense of belonging to a specific community or social identity. To quote Nielsen again, "a Fanonian strategic essentialism affirms the reality of black identity as a social reality constructed for specific purposes by black subjects under particular historical constraints and contexts" [Nielsen, 2011], meaning that this essentialism is a consequence of the conditions under which marginalized communities are placed and can be used a a powerful way to combat the loss of agency caused by alienation through the feeling of belonging provided by the idea of a community in which people share similar material conditions. This strategic essentialism so becomes the starting point for marginalized communities - in which individuals now recognize themselves as sharing the same socio-historical background - to rebel against their conditions as subaltern.

The concept of excorporation is deeply useful when it comes to resistance and rebellion. As a matter of fact, "in order to be able to criticize beliefs and norms about sexed or racialized embodiment, we need to become reflectively aware of them" [Zeiler, 2013]. Thanks to excorporation, we can become reflectively aware of the oppressive social roles and norms that we embody. This awareness makes it possible to channel the excorporation, rather than

towards old, oppressive schema, towards new ways of expressing one's "own body in new ways [that] can be seen as embodied resistance to particular 'solutions' articulated by others" [Zeiler, 2013]. The very idea of gender and race as socially constructed identities implies, as Butler suggested, that they could potentially be constructed in a different way. Combining excorporation with the sense of belonging to a community provided by strategic essentialism, what is left to do for the subjugated identities is to insurrect against the dominating epistemic framework, meaning "resisting the omissions and distortions of official histories, returning to lost voices and forgotten experiences, relating to the past from the perspective of the present in an alternative (out-of-the-mainstream) way" [Medina, 2011]. When the main framework of reference is one that systematically oppresses and exploits, in order to recognize and find liberation from this subjugation is necessary to develop ways of seeing that elude from said framework. In order words, there is a need to rebel against the dominating framework and create a new one in its place that counts for all the perspectives that were consistently ignored and belittled.

One of the ways in which subjugated and marginalized perspectives can express themselves and rebel against the restrictive roles imposed upon them is by going outside of the widely accepted framework of reference through artistic expression. As a matter of fact, art has a enormous epistemic potential in that not only it can creatively imagine new possibilities of expression, but also it can have a strong impact on the way we perceive ourselves and each other through its ability to provoke reflection over concepts that we take for granted in our daily lives.

# Chapter 2

# Representation and Epistemic Injustice

So far I have talked about gender and race as social identities, the way in which they are constructed and the way in which they unfold and are perpetuated through time. We have seen how gender and race identities can influence people's lives and how they help in supporting a system of domination and exploitation. Through creating a series of images that constitute intelligible social roles, race and gender help maintaining a hierarchical division of society as well as liquidating chances of social change by restricting people's hermeneutic horizon - namely, impairing the access to resources that people need in order to fully understand their experience and be able to act on it.

There are several ways in which oppressive systems act in order to maintain their hegemony, but the one I am most interest for this purpose is the realm of representation. As Stuart Hall argues, "representation *is* an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a community" [Hall, 1997]. In order to have productive and effective social relations, we need to have a shared social imaginary in which people are given a social location that will help in predicting people's behaviours as well as having meaningful interactions with one another. However, this social imaginary also supports a hierarchical division of society and that has a lot to do with the ways in which different social identities are represented. Remember Butler's theory of performativity we examined in chapter 1, according to which gender and race identities are determined through stylized repetitions of acts. These stylized acts are what make up

the social imaginary that we use to carry out social interactions in our everyday life. Specifically, we can use representation in two distinct ways: one meaning the action of speaking or acting on behalf of someone or a group, the other concerning the portrayal of someone or something in a specific way. Specifically, what I am interested in investigating is how representation influences and is influenced by art. I take art in a wide sense: next to more traditional kinds of artistic expression, I will also focus instances of popular art, of which some expressions can be movies and TV-shows, novels and comic books, as well as performative art and street art. The reason I chose to use works of art - and popular forms of artistic expression - in order to talk about gender and race issues lies in three specific features of art: first, art is especially pervasive in our everyday life - it is not relegated to museums and galleries anymore, but it surrounds us continuously through music, movies, street art and books -; second, art has a distinct accessibility of meaning - as a matter of fact, much of it does not require higher, specialized levels of education in order to be understood or simply grasped -, and third, not only art can easily reflect our social reality, but it possesses a great imaginative potential that can challenge said reality. Thus, through representation - as portrayal of someone (in our case, social locations and identities) in a specific manner - art is able not only to depict the so-called "real world" but it can also "reference imaginary things and fantasy world or abstract ideas which are not in any obvious sense part of our material world" [Hall, 1997]. This is what I call art's cognitive potential - its ability to reinforce the idea of the world we already possess as well as, most importantly, the capacity to produce new meaning from the pool of cultural imaginary within which it is immersed, to picture new realities that encourage the viewer to challenge the existing social order and positively think about new ways to rebuild our social environment. But representation through art can also be intended as what kind of artists are allowed to be part of the art world - namely, which social identities have access to the places of production of art and which ones are systematically left out. This, in turn, profoundly influences the types of representation that will be proposed in works of art. It is not a case that, recently, much of the discussion surrounding the rise of black characters in movies is accompanied by a discussion over the necessity of more black screenwriters who will be able to provide a more genuine portrayal of said characters in that they indubitably possess a better understanding over what it means and what it entails to be a black person.

Following the discussion presented in the previous chapter, what I am

interested in focusing on here is, on one side, art that confirms or challenges our worldview in terms of representation of marginalized and oppressed social identities and, on the other side, how artists from said social identities are often negated the access - or accepted with restrictions - to the places of production of art. For these reasons, I find it fruitful to understand art in connection with epistemology - more specifically, in connection with the hermeneutic resources that are at our disposal. Previously, we introduced Alcoff's concept of "hermeneutic horizon", understood, relatively, as the differences in epistemic resources that come with being in different social locations. Art can be convenient in demonstrating the extension of the hermeneutic horizon of different social locations thanks to its ability to depict social realities in an accessible way. In our specific case, where we focus on artistic expressions in the so-called western world, art - its content and its producers - can be seen a mirror of social relationships and social realities. Oppressive systems use art's cognitive potential in order to create and reinforce images of marginalized categories that work to perpetuate their status of subaltern. This happens via the creation of highly stylized and stereotypical images that reproduce unjust value systems and a hierarchical division of society that depends on the exploitation of those it chooses to marginalize. These images get reproduced in media and art, feeding and reifying a narrative of domination that, following the discussion of the previous chapter, will eventually become invisible - natural. The connection of art with the access to hermeneutic resources lies in the idea that by depicting social identities and social relationships from mainly one perspective - usually the white, male one - said perspective will be taken as universal, becoming, then, the point of reference for understanding our experiences as well as the ones of other people. This happens because, through the representation of social identities, art can have a serious impact over our world view. Taking movies as an example, the continuous representation of black folks or women as a caricatures or, in general, as the embodiment of racist and sexist practices will inevitably reinforce the belief that these oppressive systems are the norm. By seeing themselves represented over and again as the ones on the margins, with no possibility to act or respond to the injustices, people will start believing that those are the real boundaries of their world, initiating the process of alienation that we have described in the previous chapter according to which individuals, lacking the resources to resist the imposed social image, feel compelled to fit in an identity that does not belong to them. The same process - although specularly - happens on the other

34

side, where the representation of privileged identities reinforces their ideal of their superiority. Mihaela Mihai uses the concept of *experiential epistemic friction*, which "emerges from our failures to register and form a concern for the epistemic, psychological, political, economic and cultural costs victims of epistemic injustice experience" [Miahi, 2018]. Through the mechanism of experiential epistemic friction situations of oppression and marginalisation are kept in place, because of the lack of hermeneutic resources, on the side of the privileged, to understand the situation of marginalization of many under-represented social identities. Through the naturalization process we saw in the first chapter, we can see how the production of images that reproduce the relations of power and domination tend to be very rarely contested. The deeper problem is that people tend to fail in perceiving the oppressive power of these images in that the relation of oppression is itself hidden, invisible - although right under our eyes.

In this chapter I am going to explore the ways in which art can be considered as a mirror of social realities, how the representation of said social realities is informed by the specific hermeneutic horizon of the artist and, accordingly, how this can provide limiting and insufficient hermeneutic resources for marginalized social locations. Next to the discussion on how the content of representation can influence our world view, I will also introduce the discussion, further developed in chapter 3, on the relevance of who is producing the artwork as well as why and how artists from different - especially marginalized - social locations have a privileged standpoint when it comes to improving and extending our understanding of reality.

## 2.1 Art As A Form of Reality

Many often claim that not all art is - nor should be - politicized. I argue that this very claim is in itself a political stand - one that reproduces that process of invisibilization and naturalization of the relationship of oppression. The "art for art's sake" movement is perhaps the best example of an indirect representation of a political, socio-economic reality. Making its appearance and finding fertile grounds in the artistic circles of France and England of mid-nineteenth century, the movement of art for art's sake referred to the idea that art does not need justification nor purpose - but that the beauty of art should be a condition sufficient enough for its pursue and appreciation. In simple words, art has no moral, political nor utilitarian value -

art is just beautiful. Now, as much as I enjoy the idea of artistic production being completely devoided of any purpose other than the elevation of the soul and absolute aesthetic satisfaction, I cannot help but hear Herbert Marcuse's words who, paraphrasing Walter Benjamin, asserts that there is a "unique historical situation in which the work of art is created, into which it speaks, and which defines its function and meaning" [Marcuse, 1970]. In other words, art cannot be considered in a void and that is because of the fact that it is a product of the historical and socio-economic relations which constitute the framework that enables its appearance in the first place. Of course, this relationship is not always consciously represented by the artist in the work of art - more often it is an unconscious and indirect representation of the social structure one lives in. In some way or another, art is always conveying a sense of the place - be it ideological or socio-economical - where it comes from. The very idea of art for art's sake, in its apparent neutrality, carries the weight of its socio-economic origin. In fact, when we look at the movement through the lenses of representation, we can see how the idea that art has only intrinsic value is a cleverly disguised illusion. Remember the discussion on the naturalization of the relationship of oppression when it comes to marginalized social identities. The same discourse can be applied now. If the relationship of oppression is rendered invisible in our everyday life and practices, why would that be different when it comes to artistic production? As a matter of fact, through representation art is bound to reproduce hierarchies and injustices - mimicking the social background from which it blooms. Affirming that art has no moral nor political value is a privilege given only to those who are favoured by the hierarchical division of society and who share the perspective of the dominating epistemic framework. Above all, by stating art's neutrality, the invisibilization of an unequal social structure justified by "natural" traits is reinforced, while its shortcomings continue to be concealed. In some way or another, all art comes from a socio-economic, political background, hence art need not have a clearly stated social purpose to be political - nor to reproduce unequal and unjust social realities. Claiming that art has only intrinsic value is a privilege of those who need not worry about representation and encourages a conception of art that is detached from social reality, which can be detrimental to those who are represented in a stereotyped manner. To use some terminology that should be familiar by now, art reproduces the hermeneutic horizon of the artist who creates it. Works of art produced by white, male artists are informed by their own epistemic resources, hence they will be relatable by those who fit the

description, while being alienating to those who do not. Thus, people from marginalized social location will find themselves lacking relatable representation in art and feel compelled to accept a framework that does not make sense of their own experiences - or, when it tries to fit marginalized social identities, it does so in a stereotyped and restrictive fashion. By claiming their own neutrality and universality, these artworks tend to hide the partiality of the epistemic resources, ignoring their specificity in that they are dependent on determined social locations and, thus, hindering attempts at improving the representation of marginalized social locations as well as their self-understanding.

Now that we have determined that art has a place in reality, that it is influenced by the socio-economic background whence it came and, consequently, shapes our understanding of social locations in that it is informed by specific hermeneutic horizons, we should also consider the individual, psychological level of the artist. What this means is that, even though art comes from a specific background and replicates social realities within the perspective of the artist's hermeneutic horizon, at the individual level the artist can be producing art with the sole aim of pursuing beauty in and for itself. There is definitely a contrast here, but I do not find it detrimental to our purposes. Taking the case of art for art's sake in consideration, it is easy to understand that its proponents perhaps did truly believe in the neutrality of art - that is not what I am arguing against. What I think it is of great importance, however, is to acknowledge the existence and influence of a socio-economic background that justifies the claim of art as neutral and of the hermeneutic horizon that informs it - namely the one that, while taken as the objective, universal perspective, is, in truth, extremely partial and subjective.

That art is able to reproduce and maintain oppressive social structures comes from the idea of art as a form of life. As a matter of fact, art reproduces an idea of the world we live in - it represents particular point of views tied together with the social frameworks that enabled their appearance. If the movement of art for art's sake caught on is because its proponent truly believed in the fact that art could be considered only in itself. That was possible because the proponents of the movement were the ones whose perspective over the world was already represented (and covered behind an idea of objectivity) and, hence, could not perceive how this would have been detrimental to others. If art and theories about art are created mainly by white, European males, namely the same ones that are mainly represented in institutions and places of power, then the art they fabricate will inevitably

reproduce this state of affair. This system is perpetuated through time because of the hold that white, male-centered world views have on our everyday life. Nowadays, there are forces at play when it comes to determining what kind of art has the right to be produced and re-produced, namely capitalism and the market. These forces, in turn, are deeply rooted in the same values that organize and uphold our everyday social practices. Under capitalism, large part of art became a commodity. This process makes matter harder when it comes to the improvement of representation of marginalized social categories in that, should a higher number of artists from marginalized communities become part of popular culture, said artists will often need to pass the test of an audience (a gaze) that is considered to be mainly white and male [1].

Art, however, can also produce an idea of the world as we want it to be. Art can be use to solicit the imagination and create new possibilities - not only imagining a different world, but developing the concepts and idea to create a new reality. Herbert Marcuse writes:

> ... "living art", the "realization" of Art, can only be the event of a qualitatively different society in which a new type of men and women, no longer the subject or object of exploitation, can develop in their life and work [...] forms and modes of existence corresponding to the reason and sensibility of free individuals, what Marx called "the sensuous appropriation of the world". [Marcuse, 1970]

In this sense, art can become the instrument to fight against the established world view in order for marginalized communities to regain possession of the creation of meaning of their world and create a new, more just and equal reality. We can, in fact, see art as possessing a certain epistemic power in that art is one of the means to support and perpetuate a perspective over the world - for instance one that privileges upper class, white males - but it can also provide the interpretive tools to question this given order of things and encourage different perspectives.

---

[1] I will expand the discussion on mainstream art and its danger in section 2.4.

## 2.2 Cognitive Power Of Art

In order for it to have such a grip over our world view, art cannot be considered only from the point of view of the ones who create the work of art, but also from the perspective of those who perceives the artwork. As a matter of fact, viewers do not approach a work of art from a moral, political, socio-economic void, but they posses specific frameworks of intelligibility made up from values, beliefs and pre-conceived notions that are used to make sense of the work of art by appealing to the surrounding world.

In a society based on structures of oppression and domination, the representation through art of the mechanisms that we usually take for granted can be a positive and powerful source for questioning functioning itself of our everyday practices. Many philosophers of art argue for art's ability to stimulate us cognitively and prompt the formulation of new ideas - for art as a source of knowledge. This last claim can prove to be quite controversial, especially if we take in consideration the individualistic and abstract definition of knowledge as justified, true belief. However, the focus of this paper is on experiences that are heavily determined by the social context and location in which individuals find themselves [2]. The knowledge that we can gain from art is a knowledge of different perspectives and situations, of different interpretations of reality that can challenge the currently dominating state of affairs. Rather than talking about knowledge *per se*, perhaps it would be more correct to talk about, once again, hermeneutic horizons - and what we can do to expand them.

With all the more traditional tools we have at our disposal, art seems to be a quite unconventional way to expand one's horizon. Although I do not consider art as a superior way of learning, I believe that its peculiar characteristics render it more suitable to our specific aims. Similarly to many other knowledge mediums, art is stimulating and it prompts "conscious activity which is interesting, new, provocative, intense, suggestive" [John, 2013]. However, the ways in which we engage with art are quite different than the ways in which we approach to, say, a philosophy or a science manual. A relevant feature of art - *qua* art - is the pleasure-seeking attitude with which we approach it - where pleasure is understood in a complex

---

[2]Not so surprisingly, we could argue that the very concept of knowledge as justified, true belief came to be thanks to the mental efforts of white, upper-class men, namely the ones who generally do not experience institutional and societal injustices and abuse - and, therefore, feel entitled to claim the objectivity and universality of their judgement.

way, also "incorporat[ing] discomfort and pain", meaning that "individuals purposefully seek and enjoy painful art" [Miahi, 2018] in order to have rich experiences. What is peculiar of the engagement with art is that "it integrates pleasure-seeking into cognitive activity. With art, it is appropriate to make associations which are interesting or funny or somehow satisfying" [John, 2013]. The reason why I am focusing on art as a means to expand one's framework is that not only art is extremely pervasive in our everyday life, but also because we do not need to engage with it actively every time we face it - unlike reading a philosophy or science manual, which requires an active and focused approach in order to be correctly understood. Rather, the peculiar way in which it represents reality through images makes art a much more simple tool to interact with - a tool that, through the means of representation, acts in a subtle way over our imaginations.

But how can art influence or change our hermeneutic horizon? First of all, we should make clear that not all works of art have cognitive power - at least, not in the sense that concerns us here. The cognitive power of art that interests us is the ability that artworks have in providing interpretations and perspectives on reality in terms of those "natural" social roles, relationships and behaviours that we examined in chapter 1. The works of art that interest us, then, will be the ones who either reproduce or challenge the institutional and societal injustice and oppression believed to be natural - doing so through representation as defined above. In this sense, when we turn to the matter at hand - namely race and gender as socially constructed identities - the kind of knowledge we get from art is, on one side, a reproduction and corroboration of the predominant worldview that encages people within stylized and limiting social roles or, on the other side, an attempt at subverting these boundaries by showing different and more inclusive perspectives. Recall the statues tore down by protesters introduced at the beginning of this paper. The reason that motivated these actions lies in the idea of the world that these statues supported. Placing sculptures that commemorate slave traders and colonialists spreads the notion of the superiority of western white people, in an age in which slavery and segregation do not exist anymore (at least on paper) but in which race-based injustices and exploitation are common practice. The same happens with, for instance, the case of movies. When black folks or women are portrayed almost exclusively as caricatures or they are confined in restrictive roles, persistently ridiculed or belittled, then the already existing hierarchical division of society will further be justified and supported. The process of alienation is portrayed on the screen

and transposed over reality, where people from marginalized social identities experience the loss of agency even over their imaginations. In this sense bell hooks declares, in the introduction of her *Outlaw Culture*, the need to "decolonize minds and imaginations" and how the "focus on popular culture can be and is a powerful site for intervention, challenge, and change" [hooks, 1994].

Now, I am not saying that one single work of art can completely change our worldview. As for the case of social roles together with their load of beliefs and expected behaviours, it is demanding to recognize the shortcomings of the predominant worldview when we have been shown and taught throughout all our life that that is how things naturally are supposed to be. What I believe is that through the exposure to artworks that challenge the dominating state of things - both regarding the subjects they represent and the artists who produce them - our ingrained beliefs can be slowly influenced towards a plurivocal perspective of the world in which different world views can co-exist, support and even contradict each other in a productive way that stimulates our thoughts and imagination and that pushes us to always question the fairness of our reality.

Ultimately, the solution I will propose is one that builds from and thrives on the necessity of differences and the multiplicity of perspectives. In this sense, a polyvocal view of art not only would help going towards the elimination of distorted perspectives that we hold over marginalized and oppressed social identities and categories, but it will also make our world richer and more interesting both from a cognitive and an aesthetic point of view. But before we throw ourselves in how we can positively rebuild our imaginations and realities, we should first examine how art supports an oppressive world view and how it limits the expansion of our hermeneutic horizon by depriving people from exploited social locations of the tools necessary to fully understand their experience as marginalized and to actively develop and broaden their own representation.

## 2.3   Epistemic Injustice

Everyone perceives and acts positionally: through a framework of meanings, concepts and experiences an individual can successfully grasp the surrounding world and act upon it. Embedded within this framework are the relationships of domination and oppression - they are constitutive of the framework of intelligibility of the individual. In other words, in a society that has sys-

temic and institutional oppression built within itself, individuals who are are the bottom of this hierarchy will oftentimes find themselves lacking a framework of meanings that reflects their own experience and, consequently, they will have to make do with someone else's epistemic framework. These relationships of domination and oppression are not eternal, but the pervasiveness of one epistemic framework over the other(s) stresses the difficulty in trying to get rid of them - especially when the dominating framework is taken as being universal and, as such, it is often left unquestioned. As a matter of fact, the way in which a framework of intelligibility is established and perpetuated through time is "through collective ways of imagining that demean some social groups while dignifying others" where these "collective ways of imagining social groups are deeply entrenched in our cognitive apparatus and frame our interactions with others" [Dalaqua, 2020]. As we have seen with Butler's performativity, collective ways of imagining social groups are what inform and limit our gendered and racialized behaviours and beliefs. What happens to individuals from marginalized social locations is that not only they are damaged by the dominating epistemic framework and its collective ways of imagining social groups, but also, due to the pervasiveness of said framework and thus lacking a more appropriate representation, they will have to resort to the only available resources to make sense of their own experiences, even when these are perpetuating their subjugation.

What I want to focus here is Miranda Fricker's *hermeneutic* epistemic injustice, according to which there are gaps in collective epistemic resources due to erasing some groups' experiences. Fricker argues that

> relations of unequal power can skew shared hermeneutical resources so that the powerful tend to have appropriate understanding of their experiences ready to draw on as they make sense of their social experiences, whereas the powerless are more likely to find themselves having some social experiences through a glass darkly, with at best ill-fitting meanings to draw on in the effort to render them intelligible. [Fricker, 2007]

In different words, we already encountered these concepts throughout the previous chapter. The different social roles we are presented with and which are somewhat imposed upon us reproduce this division of power and access to hermeneutical resources. If the prevailing point of view is the white male one, then the resources available to understand the experiences

of those who do not fit within this identity - those who Fricker denominates *hermeneutically marginalized* - will inevitably be relegated in the margins and not considered worthy to be pursued. This means that not only a sizeable part of the population will be unable to fully understand their experiences, but that to compensate for the lack of resources they will turn towards the only available perspective, feeding the insatiable beast of internalized racism and sexism. This is when alienation comes into play. Art becomes, then, one of the many ways in which different perspectives are silenced in the name of one, main narrative, namely the white, patriarchal one. When lacking alternatives, people will then naturally tend to identify with the available perspective, even though this would be to their detriment. Not only women and black folks are under-represented when it comes to the production of art, but the artworks themselves reproduce ideals of gender and race-based marginalization. Though demeaning, people will forcefully try to fit within this perspective simply because it is the only one available - or, if not the only one, the most widespread and accepted. It is in this sense that bell hooks, for instance, calls for the necessity for black kids and black folks in general to return to the slogan "black is beautiful" and to reject the color-caste hierarchies within black communities. When the primary point of view, what Frantz Fanon calls "the only valid [gaze]" [Fanon, 1952], is the white, male one, it is of paramount significance to decolonize the minds of marginalized communities from the white, patriarchal and racist stereotypes of beauty, femininity and masculinity and to positively rebuild minds and imagination.

If we look closely at the biggest and best known art museums of the world, we can see a pattern repeating itself in all of them: the exposed artists tend to be, generally, western, white men. Other social categories often are the objects represented in the museums' artworks, although this representation is time and again filtered through the lenses of sexism, primitivism and orientalism. This pattern could easily be extended to movies, books and music. Although the number of female and black artists is indubitably on the rise, the situation is still far from being ideal. Artworks created and produced by white men still tend to be placed on a higher pedestal and canonized, all the while the way in which marginalized categories are represented in these artworks is stereotypical at best - when it is present at all. Moreover, even when artists from marginalized social locations manage to get to the public attention, this often happens by accepting and reproducing the values held by the class that determines what art is worth to be consumed: western

white males. A good example of this process is hip hop and rap music. Born in the Bronx in the mid-seventies, hip hop was - and still largely is - the voice of poor, black people from marginalized communities in the US. However, as M. K. Asante Jr. points out, "although hip hop is the cultural expression of young Black America, we do not control how the cultural expression is disseminated" [Asante, 2008]. What Asante refers to is exactly the appropriation, by white, capitalist multinational corporations of hip hop and rap culture and its reproduction in stylized, stereotypical images that confine hip hop to the idea of the machist, misogynist, violent black man, selling drugs and shooting guns. Through this movement, what was a mean for black people to express and represent themselves and their struggles, to recognize each other as part of a community, tragicomically turned into the anthem of mainly young white upper middle class boys who, in turn, created a stereotypical and racist image of black people and black culture. Walter Benjamin - although without the implications of race-based struggle - professed this same dynamic almost a century ago, talking about the film actor:

> the film responds to the shriveling of the aura with an artificial build-up of the "personality" outside the studio. The cult of the movie star, fostered by money of the film industry, preserves not the unique aura of the person but the "spell of personality", the phony spell of a commodity. [Benjamin, 1935]

Substitute "film" with "music" and "movie star" with "rapper" and you will get the same process of appropriation and reproduction that encapsulates black struggle in a stylized idea of black identity devoided of any connection to the historical and socio-economical framework that enabled its manifestation in the first place and which gave meaning to its expression. Many black rappers, then, feel compelled to turn towards this imaginary of the "gangsta black man" in order to succeed, becoming part of the process of reproduction of stereotyped caricatures of oppressed communities.

Asante defines this process the "reel becoming the real", showing how the appropriation of hip hop and the creation of a limiting image of black people is reflected back on black communities and artist themselves, who internalize the images continuously projected by television, radio, news and advertising, accepting the oppressive narrative provided by the dominating system: "although they may not reflect our reality, their sustained and continuous presence can determine it - determine the real" [Asante, 2008]. This is, in

a practical sense, what it means to perpetuate hermeneutical marginalization through art. In a world that relies deeply on the images portrayed by art - be that movies, music or books, next to more traditional forms of art -, representing a certain idea of reality over and over again will, inevitably, turn it into truth or, at least, deeply influence it. "Collective harms and atrocities [...] are typically preceded by symbolic stigmatizations of the targeted population and by particular expressive harms that become socially accepted and even habitual" [Medina, 2011], explains José Medina. A symbolic stigmatization that even the ones affected by it will, eventually, assume as true. This is the process of alienation that we have first introduced in the previous chapter. Subjects from marginalized social locations are, then, presented with an idea of the social role they are supposed to act out that is reinforced by the imaginary surrounding them. And, by being deprived of possibilities of identification that go outside the view determined by western, white, male values, individuals will find themselves forced into an identity that does not fit them - with little possibility to escape it.

We can recognize a similar pattern when we examine the representation of women in popular culture. In her essay *Genre and Gender: The Case of Soap Opera*, Christine Gledhill describes how, in the first place, the idea of "women's culture" reflects determined social values. She writes:

> If the "masculine" functions as a cultural norm, mainstream media will privilege a masculinist perspective which must impact on those forms developed for the female market: the woman's page, the woman's film, soap opera. The notion of "women's culture", then, is not intended to suggest some pure feminine space where women speak freely to each other outside of social constraint [...]. "Women's culture", then, refers to those spaces on the margins of the dominant culture where women's different positioning in society is acknowledged and allowed a degree of expression. [Gledhill, 1997]

In other words, what is created in order to appeal specifically to a female audience, is created by maintaining the masculine ideals of how women should be and how they are allowed to express themselves - the "degree of expression" being determined by the limits imposed by the masculine control over the female hermeneutic horizon. Indubitably, soap opera has some positive effects, above all the improvement in the number of female protagonists

on TV "providing many and diverse entry point for identification and recognition" [Gledhill, 1997], as Gledhill argues. However, this identification can only take place within the predetermined place and behaviours recognized to women by the male perspective - thus repeating the same constricting roles that women are allowed to fill in a socially acceptable way. This kind of representation reinforces the idea of the places that women are allowed to fill and - by failing to provide any other interpretation of the female condition that lies outside of the male perspective - does not offer the hermeneutic resources needed to have an appropriate understanding of their experiences, thus hindering any attempt at improving the limits of the female hermeneutic horizon. Moreover, stereotyped art provides marginalized social locations with inaccurate and oppressive representations that, nonetheless, are taken as reliable or correct simply due to the lack of better or more challenging representations.

It is not a case that art produced by black or female artists - or aimed at specific marginalized social groups like with the case of soap opera - is generally not considered as having great aesthetic value. Even if not declared directly, there exists a clear hierarchy within the art world that has little to do with aesthetics or beauty criteria. It is a very simple experiment that everyone can do: take a look at your library and count how many books are written by authors that are not white nor men - or think about your favourite movies: how many of them are directed by a woman or have as a main character a black person? More or less unknowingly, we partake in maintaining the hierarchization of art - because we are subtly pushed to believe that art made by white males is better, more aesthetically worthy. Not because this is actually true, but because most of the art we use as example of great artistic expression or to settle the criterion against which we determine valuable artistic production comes from white males. The prevalence of one point of view helps altering history and gives back a distorted image of power balances that supports the hegemony of the western, white and male point of view. It does not matter that Berthe Morisot had a crucial if not determining role in the development of Impressionism or that it is thanks to Mary Cassatt that the movement started to be known outside of France, because in museums and art books we only see and read about Monét, Manet and Cézanne. The rewrite of history through the willful elimination of female and black artists from the artistic canon has a deep influence on the way we see and accept art - thus feeding a narrative that sees black art or art made by women as not good enough to be exposed in museums, as not aesthetically worthy to be

pursued. Hence, the reason why white male filmmakers rule what cinemas are showing or why our libraries lack female or black authors.

The reason why we do not have much representation of artists coming from marginalized social identities is not to be found in the lack of such artists. As a matter of fact, there are thousands of great black and female authors, filmmakers, painters and so on. The reason why it is so hard to find them is to be found in the hierarchy that underlies the art world. So far we have focused on how most of the art we are presented to reproduces the hermeneutic horizon of the white, male class, coupled with the stereotyped and stylized images of other social locations. We should now inquire into *why* we are mostly presented with this kind of art. In this next section, we are going to take a glance into the world of popular art - who defines it and who, either as artist or viewer, has access to it.

## 2.4    Entering the Mainstream

One potential way to face the problem of representation and the hermeneutic injustice that comes with it would be to bring art and artists from marginalized communities to the attention of the world - namely, making them part of popular culture. Although ideally this would be the way to go, in reality we need to deal with the logic of appropriation and exploitation in the name of profit that is capitalism.

In its essence, graffiti is the radical opposite of mainstream art. Outside of galleries and museum, outside of the élite circles that retain their right to decree what counts as good or bad art - or what counts as art altogether -, graffiti opens up its doors to the world. Anyone with a spray can or a marker can be a graffiti artist and expose their works to the eyes of everyone - on the subways, on building walls or on advertising billboards. Exposed to the risk of being labeled as acts of vandalism and covered or simply to the meteorological agents that will sooner or later cancel them, graffiti are part of a project of re-appropriation of the spaces of the city by a class that has been systematically marginalized and whose attempts at leaving this marginalization have been continuously repressed [3], in radical contrast with the polished and clean bourgeois mentality responsible of this oppression and marginalization in the first place. However, this rebellious and vandalistic form of art started

---

[3]Here I am talking specifically about black communities and neighbourhoods in the US in the '70s, the years and places in which graffiti started to make their appearance.

to be appropriated by mainstream culture. What happened is that a form of art developed by and representational of black communities got seized by a mainly white public and predominantly white artists that depleted it from its subversive, representational content and gave back an empty shell of what it used to mean. We have seen the same happening in the previous section with hip hop music. The form of art is detached from its original background, what initially infused it of meaning, and it is turned into an empty, stereotyped version that can appeal to the white audience. One other example of this kind of commodification of art, is the widespread existence of European museums filled with works of art from Africa and Asia, heritage of Europe's colonialist past (and neo-colonialist present). The damage, here, is twofold. On one side, it claims to celebrate diverse art while, in truth, it eradicates the works of art from the culture and history that gives them birth just to fetishize them under the labels of "primitivism" and "orientalism" and then simplifying them as "exotic" artifacts. On the other side, it ignores Europe's colonialist past and present, all while commodifying works of art that do not belong to its culture or history.

What happens at this point, when art is commodified, is that even when the artists come from marginalized social locations, in order to get popular recognition they often feel the need to obey the rules of an evaluation system that is dictated by a white bourgeoisie. Inevitably, this corrupts the original aim of the work of art by translating its value only in terms of profit, leaving only its superficial, stereotyped form, devoided of any meaning it had in the first place. Always critical of the subjection of black art and culture to the appeal of a white audience, bell hooks writes:

> opportunistic longings for fame, wealth, and power now lead many black critical thinkers, writers, academics and intellectuals[4] to participate in the production and marketing of black culture in ways that are complicit with the existing oppressive structure. That complicity begins with the equation of black capitalism with black self-determination. [hooks, 1994]

This does not intend to be a critique of those artists that, in order to try and make a name for themselves, decide to comply with the whims and desires of a predominantly white audience. "Black capitalism is not self-determination", writes bell hooks, "that doesn't mean we don't need black

---

[4]And artists.

capitalism, but we can't confuse the two" [hooks, 1994]. The problem with the pursue of the approval of a white public digs its roots deep in a culture that systematically marginalizes artistic expressions outside of the white, male canon. In turn, this is connected with who possesses the means of production of value. When art galleries, record companies and publishing houses are mainly owned by rich, white males, the potential of representation of individuals who do not share one or possibly more of these characteristics is minimal. These *value houses* determine what is good enough to be produced and distributed, solidifying an idea of what is good and soliciting artists to create works fitting that idea, under penalty of not being published. By controlling the means of *re*-production, the value houses maintain the control over the marginalization of individuals that do not fit into their narrative - hindering at the same time, the possibilities of improvement of hermeneutic horizon by actively interdicting the access in popular culture of perspectives that elude the white, male one and its stereotyped and limiting representation of different social identities. Hence, the marginalization of some social locations is sustained through art by, on one side, the lack of access - for artists from marginalized communities - to the places of production of art and, on the other side, by the difficulty - for the viewer - to get in touch with the works of art of these same artists.

Indubitably, there can be some positive effects to art from marginalized communities entering the mainstream. Given that only so many individuals from marginalized social locations make it to the peak of mainstream art, they can use their position as the loudspeaker from which oppressed voices can be heard. The fact that people from marginalized communities, despite the difficulties, are able to obtain successful positions in the art world can be a sign of hope. As we have seen with the case of soap opera, the idea of a show clearly addressed to women meant the increase of female protagonists in television and, accordingly, more possibilities for identification for women. Ultimately, though, this is just a temporary solution. Even with an improvement in representation, not much would change if art was to be determined by the same evaluation system - namely if art was still used to repeat the same oppressive hierarchies and stereotyped social identities that marginalize people from certain social locations in the first place. What we need to look at is the potential of art to change our perspective over the world, to improve our understanding by providing us with new hermeneutic resources that will expand our horizons and, eventually, bring to a more just and equal society. Art, therefore, needs to be seen as a mean to social transformation.

49

# Chapter 3

# Artistic Revolutions

So far we have mainly discussed the ways through which art supports and perpetuates systems of oppression and marginalization. Considering art as a mirror of social realities, we can see how artists can - more or less voluntarily - reproduce values and beliefs that support the existing oppressive system. Moreover, we analyzed how art can influence people's hermeneutic horizon by depriving individuals from marginalized social locations of the access to the places of production of art on one side, and of truthful representation on the other. However, this does not mean that artists from marginalized social locations or alternative portrayals of social realities and identities do not exist - even with the restricted access to the places of popularization of art and the appropriation and commodification of some forms of art. Indeed, it is beyond doubt that instances of art as conscious depiction of social struggles do exist and, arguably, are on the rise. Through the last century, tied with the explosion of movements for equality, justice and freedom, countless activists artists put their art to the service of the liberation cause. A whole current of explicitly political art boomed and intertwined with popular culture: far from the lines of conventional western tradition and values, graffiti and poster art, music and performance art became some of the means to which artists resorted to denounce the oppressive conditions in which black people, women, LGBTQ+ communities and, in general, all of those who are marginalized and exploited by an essentially white-dominated and patriarchal society, live.

In this chapter, I am going to analyze how art can be used as a form of rebellion towards the dominating epistemic framework and how it can revolutionize the existing, oppressive social realities. In fact, art can use its imaginative power, on one side, to create more truthful representation of

marginalized social identities and, on the other, it can challenge the gender and race-based imposed behaviours and social division by providing people the hermeneutic instrument necessary to be able to understand, outside of the given hermeneutic horizon, the injustices present in our society and to challenge the restrictive identity-based roles that we are expected to fill in our everyday social life. Thanks to its great imaginative strength and its distinct accessibility of meaning, art is able to positively depict new ways to rebuild our social environment. The poet of Négritude Aimé Césaire notoriously believed in the revolutionary power of poetry, in that poetry "is the world turned upside down, ploughed up, transmuted" [Césaire, 2008]. In this chapter, I will further demonstrate the significance of representation, both when it comes to be the subject of the work of art and to be its producer. The solution I propose to combat the perpetuation of oppressive imaginary and social division is the creation of epistemic friction through art. This means using art as popularization of different perspectives that will, inevitably, challenge each other and, eventually, expand their limits. In fact, art not only can improve the hermeneutic horizons of those who are represented by it - by providing the tools to have a better understanding of their own experience that is not hindered by the values of the oppressive (white, patriarchal) system - but it can also influence the horizon of those on the other side, the ones who perpetuate the subjugation because not aware of the ways in which this works due to never being exposed before to diverse perspectives and types of representations.

## 3.1 Resisting Reality

Philosopher Herbert Marcuse states that art can either be an affirmative or a negating force. In the former case, art as an affirmative force can be translated as art that sustains the dominating epistemic and hermeneutic framework - or claims its own neutrality - thus perpetuating the existing hierarchy and social division, while in the latter, art as a negating force can be seen as the "*alienation* from the established reality" [Marcuse, 1970]. According to this latter meaning, art becomes the force that creates an irresistible distance between the dominating state of things and the silenced conditions of the marginalized people. By imposing this separation, art finds the interstices through which the silenced can finally speak out loud. The intrinsic purpose and reason of art becomes, then, the necessity to represent

all of those manifold realities that, otherwise, would find no representation - a movement that will ignite a reflection on the validity of perspectives that differ from the main white, patriarchal one and that, ultimately, will bring to the recognition and liberation of all people. "Art can indeed become a weapon in the class[1] struggle by promoting changes in the prevailing consciousness" [Marcuse, 1972], writes Marcuse.

Earlier I briefly talked about how all art can be considered political. What needs to be stressed, however, is that not all artists produce works of art with a clearly stated political objective. As we have seen, artists can, on the individual level, be pursuing art simply for the sake of beauty - even when, on the social level, the same work of art is supporting a clear type of social reality and division. When talking about art with a specific, clearly stated political intent, I am talking about all those artists that make themselves spokespeople of injustices and discriminations around the world and that portray them in a direct and easily understandable fashion. They aim to appeal to the great public and they have the upfront intent of shaking people and showing them the brutality of the world we live in. Although this kind of political art can be useful in conveying positive messages I believe that, due to the fact that its main purpose is to appeal to the masses, it often sacrifices its attempts at social justice for approval and recognition, falling into a stale reproduction of pre-packaged, good-for-everyone, social and political messages - especially when the message comes from someone who does not have a first hand experience of discrimination. This is the danger of art turning to the mainstream all over again - the commodification of the values of equality and freedom that does no real good to the ones affected by discriminations. The kind of political art that I am truly interested in, however, is the one that deals with the representation of people from marginalized social locations - both as subjects and producers of the work of art. The reason why I think this kind of art is more effective for our purposes is because, on one side, it challenges the standards of art by bringing something new, unusual to the public by coming from a different background and holding different values than most of the art that we perceive and consume and, on the other side, it provides diverse perspectives, diverse depictions of social identities that challenge the shared social imaginary, invite to actively rethink how we perceive different social identities, how we are confined by them and that make visible injustices and discriminations. This kind of art can have as part of its

---

[1]Or gender and race.

content a straightforward political intent as well. However, when it comes to improve the hermeneutic horizon of determined social locations, I believe that the art that focus more on improving and providing a more reliable and successful representation of marginalized social identities that challenges the social hierarchy has better chance of success.

In 2020, the activist and artistic collective Guerrilla Girls launched a project called *The Male Graze*, denouncing the over-representation of male artists in British museums at the expense of female artists. In their unmistakable provocative style, they covered several cities in the UK with billboards asking to the passerby: "Are there more naked women than women artists in UK museums?". More than food for thought, the question is to be taken as an actual practice: what they ask, in fact, is to people to go to their local museum and provide the count by adding it to their website. This is only one example, but the instances of art that deals with the representation of marginalized categories are countless. What they all have in common, however, is the belief, deeply rooted in ideals of equality and acceptance, that people need to speak out and let their voice be heard in order to challenge the oppressive state of things. The common thread connecting all of these disparate artistic expressions is the need to represent those realities that have been silenced and hidden in the name of a white, capitalistic and male-centered dominating narrative in a different, more truthful way.

Sometimes art can also be used as a therapeutic tool: not only to understand and heal trauma caused by alienating, dehumanizing and repressive social relationships, but also to learn how to deal with the same occasion, should that happen again, and fight back. In his *Using Art to Resist Epistemic Injustice*, Gustavo H. Dalaqua uses Augusto Boal's theory and practice of the Theatre of the Oppressed to show how art can be used as a way to widen people's perspective about social issues as well as provide and promote positive actions to deal with these situations. Since often, due to the process of naturalization that renders oppressive structures invisible, people are unaware of the arbitrariness of their struggles and often take an unconscious part in perpetuating them, art - in this specific case theatre, but we can consider art in general - can be a powerful tool to represent these struggles in such a way that "allows the oppressed to realize that a significant part of the oppression they suffer is due not to their personal faults, but rather to collective problems that cry for structural transformation" [Dalaqua, 2020]. Relevant to this is also the creative and imaginative power that art employs, which can, in turn, be used for actual transformative action.

Most of my discussion in the first chapter revolved, more or less explicitly, around the idea that in our white and patriarchal society people are defined, if not doomed, by their bodies. The fastest and easiest way to assess someone's place and expected role in society is through simply looking at them. "Our gender roles, the work we perform, the type of transportation we use, the cities where we live - all of these in one way or another can be conduits for oppression and constrain our corporal movements" [Dalaqua, 2020] says Dalaqua, paraphrasing Boal. That is why we need to deconstruct our bodies, in order to see the mechanisms of oppression that are operating our actions and behaviours - and that is what theatre and art can help us do. Once acknowledged the structures that govern our bodies and lives and, most importantly, we acknowledge their *constructed* character - once the necessity of nature falls to the arbitrariness of human behaviour, then we can resist the structures of power and start to create new possibilities. As Boal describes his Theatre of The Oppressed, "the deconstructive stage ought to be followed by a constructive one in which citizens are encouraged to use their bodies in novel ways" [Dalaqua, 2020]. Boal takes also in consideration the psychological aspect of oppression by developing the aesthetic technique of the *Rainbow of Desire*, that enables "the oppressed to diagnose epistemic injustice by showing them that the epistemic framework that they use to structure their desires is, to a significant extent, a source of domination" [Dalaqua, 2020]. Boal's techniques use art to shake the dominant epistemic framework and to enable people who are part of oppressed categories to find or create the tools they need to understand their experiences and to re-appropriate themselves of their desires and bodies. Quite vividly, Boal describes the strength of the dominant epistemic framework as the "cop in the head", meaning the authoritative voice that impoverishes and oppresses the variety of human experience. Boal's theatrical techniques are used with the intent to provide the actors with the hermeneutic tools necessary for them to have a better grasp and understanding of their experiences in real life as gay people.

While Boal's techniques could be considered as actively therapeutic - meaning that they have been developed with the clear purpose of helping people from marginalized communities to become aware of the abuses and oppression they are victim of and support them into forging new ways of re-appropriating of their experiences - I want to concentrate also on the ways in which art in general, hence not specifically created with a therapeutic aim in mind, can thwart the dominant epistemic framework and offer new tools

to resist hermeneutical epistemic injustice through giving space to speak to oppressed folks - namely, once again, through representation. Nevertheless, Boal provides us with a useful apparatus to understand how art can challenge the ruling epistemic framework and how it can help in imagining new ways to understand the world. As a matter of fact, in order to rebel effectively against the ruling collective ways of imagining social groups, simple representation is not sufficient. Rather, representation needs to be tied together with challenging images. As bell hooks reminds us, "the function of art is to do more than tell it like it is - it's to imagine what is *possible*" [hooks, 1994]. That is why bell hooks, who makes it a point to always tie her theoretical discussions with cultural references, so often criticizes black Hollywood filmmaker Spike Lee. According to hooks, Lee often falls into the trap of representing black people as they are represented within the white imaginary. Lee's mistake is to reproduce the ruling framework rather than promoting new images of black folks that challenge the stylized representation offered by the white imaginary. The sole fact that Lee, a black filmmaker, made it all the way to the top of Hollywood is absolutely relevant for the increase in number of people from marginalized social locations in places of artistic production. However, if this representation in number is not coupled with a representation in content, but keeps repeating the same tropes and clichés of marginalized communities characteristic of the white, patriarchal social imaginary, then the chances to challenge and improve our hermeneutic horizons drastically decrease.

## 3.2 Polyvocality and Epistemic Friction

When the social imaginary is divided between privileged and oppressed and it systematically marginalizes and misrepresents the latter, the only way to effectively counteract this is through the recognition of and dialogue with those excluded voices. I chose art as the centre of my discussion not only because of its pervasiveness in our lives, but primarily because of the accessibility of its great imaginative strength as well as the profound transformative power it can have. Art can be a powerful instrument to institute a dialogue that crosses boundaries and to contaminate the dominant worldview simply by making other perspectives visible. As bell hooks puts it, "art is necessarily a terrain of defamiliarization: it may take what we see/know and make us look at it in a new way" [hooks, 1995] - or it should be, at the very least.

Art's potential to critically look at our surroundings is something that needs to be cultivated if we want to change the world for the better.

In his *The Epistemology of Resistance*, Medina writes that "in order to develop a *resistant imagination*, our imagination has to become pluralized, polyphonic, and experimentalist" [Medina, 2011]. In other words, in order to live in a more just society, we need to be able, first of all, to imagine said society and the most effective way to do that is by letting people speak their minds - especially those who are most negatively affected by injustices and exploitation. This may sound like a circular argument: in order to improve people's life conditions, people affected by exploitative systems should be able to speak out and be heard, although, if that was the case, then there probably would be no substantial injustices to fight back in the first place. However, we need to acknowledge that oppression and injustices are not going to disappear overnight - the path to equality and freedom for all is long and tortuous. Granted this, we need to take small steps every day if we want any chance to get there. As I mentioned previously, artists coming from marginalized social locations exist and are numerous - and some of them are even able to access those places where popular art is produced and where they can reach to a bigger audience. Not only having more different voices will bring us on a path towards more equality but it will also enrich our aesthetic experiences and our awareness of the world. During an interview for the *UNESCO Courier*, Aimé Césaire said:

> I think it would greatly impoverish human civilization if the voices of African, Indian and other Asian cultures were to fall silent. If the globalization we are now being offered were to reduce the dialogue of cultures to a monologue, it would create a civilization doomed to languish and decline. I believe in the importance of exchange, and exchange can only take place on the basis of mutual respect. [Césaire, 2008]

Here lies the importance of representation in art. The problem is not that artists from different social locations that are not the white, patriarchal one do not exist but that, on one side, their access to the places of production of art at a widely recognised level is often restricted and, on the other side, the art produced by artists representing marginalized social identities is often placed on the bottom of the art hierarchy. By slowly providing spaces for expression, we will inevitably start to affect representation in the collective

imaginary - more artists from oppressed social identities will bring to better representation of those collectivities which, in turn, will bring to more artists and so on so forth. It is important to have voices that come from outside the main collective imaginary. What these voices create, by resisting and responding to the dominating epistemic framework, is what Medina calls *epistemic friction*. This friction is at the core of democratic interactions which, to be effective, needs to "avoid idealizations and go back to the rough ground of our actual practices where we find differently situated knowledges and perspectives - where there is friction" [Medina, 2011].

Art can help us in creating this friction. Through better representation, works of art can be important alternative sources of meaning while disputing the values at the foundation of the dominating epistemic framework. Causing what Mihai defines *moral epistemic friction*, works of art can prompt questions regarding the justice of our world and "problematize injustices citizens rarely perceive and often unreflectively inflict on others - epistemic injustice being one such example" [Miahi, 2018]. During a talk given in 2009 and entitled *The Danger of A Single Story*, writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie recalls how, as a kid growing up in Nigeria, she would read only American or British children books, whose protagonists were pale-skinned and blue-eyed kids. "Now, I loved those American and British books. They stirred my imagination", Adichie says, "But the unintended consequence was that *I did not know that people like me could exist in literature*. So what the discovery of African writers did for me was this: it saved me from having a single story" [Adichie, 2009]. Encountering African writers enabled Adichie to experience that necessary epistemic friction that would make her question the representational content of the books she was reading. Reading authors coming from a different social locations - her own - gave her the instruments to widen her hermeneutic horizon and recognize the damage that missing or stereotyped representation can do. Later on, she broadens the discussion and explains how what she calls the "single story of Africa" comes, ultimately, from literature - from the images that, since the very first Europeans travelling outside of the continent, populated the social imaginary of the global west. The same images that are still widely employed in today's literature, art and cinema. As for her experience throughout her childhood, the lack of different and more truthful portrayals hinders the possibility to challenge the "single story" we are provided with and helps supporting a system of inequalities through images that embed oppressive values. Hence the need for different voices to be able to take part, truthfully, in the popularization

of art.

In order to create fruitful epistemic friction, we need a solid foundation over which colliding epistemic systems and practices can live and thrive thanks to each other - we need what Medina calls relationalism, or *social relationality*. Primarily, we need to remember that "to understand the identity of something is to understand how that thing is related to many other things, but also how it can become entangled in many other *potential* relations" [Medina, 2011]. Hierarchies and marginalizations are possible only insofar different social locations are related to each other. However, we have seen how these relations are not eternal, but they possess a distinct socially constructed character, hence, they can be altered, they can be thought differently. In order to change these relations - to create the epistemic friction -, we need a resistant imagination, namely "an imagination that is ready to confront relational possibilities that have been lost, ignored, or that remain to be discovered or invented" [Medina, 2011]. In other words, we need to produce and disseminate new hermeneutic tools that will enable audiences, both from marginalized and non-marginalized social identities, to question the dominating order and to re-invent the oppressive relationships that rule over our everyday social life and interactions. What we aim at, through epistemic friction and social relationality, is not a consensus or unification of perspectives, but rather coordination and cooperation - a continuous state of openness to interaction between points of view from diverse social locations that result in the improvement of objectivity and justice [Medina, 2011].

## 3.3   Hip-Hop and Post-Hip-Hop Generation

> With its sands scattered to the winds of the world, hip hop joins scores of other vibrations that are born in the Black community, but that live, thrive, and reproduce all over the world. More than just an integral part of pop culture, *hip hop has shaped the perceptions of people* [2], especially young ones, wherever they are. [Asante, 2008]

These are the words that M. K. Asante Jr. uses in the first page of his *It's Bigger Than Hip Hop* to describe the phenomenon emerged in the Bronx in the seventies and now universally appreciated - and criticized - that is *hip*

---

[2]Emphasis added.

*hop*. Hip hop, as Asante defines it, is "a form of aesthetic and sociopolitical rebellion against the flames of systemic oppression" [Asante, 2008]. Born in the mid-seventies, a decade after the *de jure* segregation was outlawed in the United States, hip hop emerged as the voice denouncing the *de facto* perpetuation of racial segregation through the systemic abolition of black people from access to decent housing, education, jobs, healthcare and welfare plans. Hip hop became, then, the voice of a whole generation that felt systematically oppressed by and left out of society, reflecting the everyday struggle lived by black people in the United States. Hip hop, in its essence, was "designed for reproducibility" [Benjamin, 1935], meaning that it had a fundamental social relevance as it was was born out of the necessity of black people to find a voice in which they could recognize themselves and each other and that could be heard from the outside. However, that did not last for long.

As many other art forms, hip hop was no stranger to commodification. Because of that, the last few decades saw an increase in the appropriation of hip hop by a mainly white audience - and, as a consequence, white artists and producers. This, in turn, helped in forming and solidifying an inferiorizing and oppressive image of black folks - an image that not only influences how white audiences perceive black communities, but especially "how we think about ourselves", says Asante [Asante, 2008]. For this many reasons Asante voices out how him - as many other young black people from his generation - do not feel represented by hip hop culture anymore:

> Many young people - myself, age twenty-five, included - who were born into the hip-hop generation feel misrepresented by it and have begun to see the dangers and limitations of being collectively identified by a genre of music that we don't even own. And it is our lack of ownership that has allowed corporate forces to overrun hip hop with a level of misogyny and Black-on-Black violence that spurs some young folks to disown the label "hip-hop generation". [Asante, 2008]

These are the people who, as Asante defines it, are part of the *post-hip-hop generation*, the generation that does not feel represented by the hip hop culture that has been seized by big, multinational music companies - companies that re-sold to them, the hip hop community, their own music and their own identity inside a stereotyped and racist frame. When fed daily with a

narrative of oneself - of who one is supposed to be - through television, music and news, it becomes almost mechanical to fit oneself into this prepackaged identity - even when it does not correspond to reality. By disowning black people of their ownership of hip hop culture, not only corporations silence black people's voices and struggles but, at the same time, they nurture an ideal of black identity that, because of its pervasiveness, ends up being internalized by the same victims of this oppressive system.

Nevertheless, in the beginning - and still nowadays mainly outside the environments of big record companies - hip hop and rap music where the tool of black communities to express their dissent with a system that systematically marginalized and oppressed them, as well as a way to make these truths public, out in the open. By talking about the history of black folks as well as the present condition of black communities, hip hop can reach a lot of people that do not have the means - or, perhaps, would not have the interest - in knowing more about why and how black people are pushed at the margins of society. In his song *Changes*, Tupac Shakur, widely regarded as one of the most influential rappers of all time, raps about the war on drugs, poverty and police brutality in black communities. In the song, Tupac denounces how institutions prefer to turn their face away from the poverty - and, consequently, criminality - in black neighbourhoods caused, in the first place, by decades of segregation and repression, while they focus on the easier - although superficial - solution, namely mass incarceration. The first verse of the song goes:

> I'm tired of bein' poor and, even worse, I'm black
> My stomach hurts so I'm lookin' for a purse to snatch [...]
> Give the crack to the kids, who the hell cares?
> One less hungry mouth on the welfare

And a few lines later:

> And although it seems heaven-sent
> We ain't ready to see a black president
> It ain't a secret, don't conceal the fact
> The penitentiary's packed and it's filled with blacks

Tupac grew up in an activist family, with both parents being part of the Black Panther Party, and inherited the impulse towards addressing social

issues and inequalities in his songs. Thus, although the dark tone of the lyrics seem to leave little space for positive action, he still urges to the necessity "to start makin' some changes" and, even though he does not offer many tools on how, practically, this should be done, he appeals to the sense of community and solidarity that needs to be cultivated in order to fight back against the systematic oppression.

Through the apparent simplicity of the medium, hip hop music can offer hermeneutic tools that can help not only black folks to have a better grasp over the ways in which white culture systematically oppresses them, but that can be useful for white audiences - especially young - which might not be aware of how racist systems perpetuate themselves through time. Interviewed by bell hooks, rapper Ice Cube expresses the same thought: "I do records for black kids", says Ice Cube, "and white kids are basically eavesdropping on my records. But I don't change what I'm sayin' [...]. White kids need to hear what we got to say about them and their forefathers and uncles and everybody that's done us wrong" [hooks, 1994]. While raising awareness within black people regarding their history and the ways in which white supremacy perpetuates itself, criticizing profiling and the prison system, denouncing police brutality and institutional oppression, hip hop, as unintended outcome, can also offer hermeneutic tools to a white audience that, because of carelessness or systemic silencing, does not know about issues that affect the black side of the population. Using a medium far away from the often cumbersome language of politics and academic environments, hip hop is able to present its themes in a straightforward, unfiltered fashion, that can be easily grasped by anyone. Thanks to this, hip hop music and culture can solicit people's imaginations by offering hermeneutic tools that question the supposed naturality of the social hierarchy and the beliefs and expectations that come with conferring to individuals and communities a determined social identity, creating that epistemic friction necessary to question the fairness and justice of our world and institutions.

## 3.4   A Different Gaze on The Screen

Previously, we discussed how the soap opera genre supports the search for more fairness for women in the television industry by creating more female lead roles and characters in general. However, we have also witnessed how it fails in providing a new, challenging image of woman, in that it falls into

the repetition of the tropes and stereotypes of the patriarchal society. As a matter of fact, the women of the soap opera, even though created with the aim to appeal to a female audience, internalize the male gaze and propose an idea of womanhood and femininity that assumes the dictates and rules of patriarchal society. Hence the women of the soap opera are "stay-at-home" women, relegated to the private dimension of life, volatile and superficial, seemingly caring only about wealth, social status and relationships.

Since its very beginning, cinema and television have been influenced by the male gaze. Not only cinema replicates the values and hermeneutic horizon of the patriarchal society, primarily representing males on screen and, when present, stereotyping female characters, but, in addition, the access to the places of production of this kind of art - be that film-making, screen-writing, etc. - is on average more difficult for women - namely, the ones who would have a better chance to portray characters in more unconventional and truthful ways, detached from and critical of patriarchal values. In her *Content Analysis of Gender Roles in Media*, Rebecca L. Collins examines eighteen empirical articles analyzing the representation of women in medias and confirms that, even though in the meantime "the roles of women in society have broadly expanded", it is undeniable that "the disparity in portrayals of males and females has persisted over decades" [Collins, 2011]. Moreover, women are generally portrayed in circumscribed roles such that, when they "do appear in media, they appear in sexualized or subordinated roles" [Collins, 2011] or supporting broader gender stereotypes, with females more likely to play as housewives, housekeepers or, more generally, depicted in relationship roles. Collins goes on arguing that, based on the research she is working with, it is tricky to see what are the consequences of under-representation. In light of what said so far about hermeneutic horizon, social identities and injustice, we should be better equipped to see what these consequences are. While the effects on the individual's psychology can be harder to determine, we can definitely say something about the broader field of social experience. Stereotyped portrayals and under-representation of female characters are a clear reflection of the gender-based hierarchy present in our society. Not only, they reinforce the patriarchal and sexist values that already make up our perception of the world by limiting the female experience of the world to what are believed to be gender-appropriate roles and behaviours. The lived subjectivity of women has to continuously confront itself with the externally imposed social behaviours that not only restrict women's field of agency but that, in extreme cases, make them passive promoter of their own

marginalization by internalizing those values that are responsible for female oppression. Stereotyped representation also works on the perception of those who are not affected by it, namely men. This happens because, by replicating the male hermeneutic horizon, these stereotyped portrayals seem to justify and corroborate the correctness of the patriarchal society, thus reinforcing the general belief of male supremacy.

Once again, in order to contrast the predominance of the male gaze, it is absolutely necessary to create friction in the images that we are presented with. This means that we need more female characters portrayed in movies and TV-shows as well as more female screenwriters and filmmakers in order to convey a more complex, challenging and, overall, successful representation of women outside of the patriarchal system of values and its aesthetics.

*Fleabag* (2016-2019) is a British comedy drama - or dramedy - written by Phoebe Waller-Bridge, who also acts as the unnamed protagonist of the show. The plot follows an unnamed protagonist - only referred to as Fleabag -, a woman in her 30s living her life in London, trying to cope with the recent loss of her best friend, keeping her café up and running and trying to reconnect with her estranged sister. The show became widely appreciated thanks to its socially and politically engaged discourse around identity - especially around female representation. In their article *Through The Gaps of My Fingers: Genre, Femininity, and Cringe Aesthetics in Dramedy Television*, Julia Havas and Maria Sulimma describe how *Fleabag* "centraliz[es] the individual's relationship with social-political events and struggles currently dominating public discourses around identity [...] in the global West" [Havas and Sulimma, 2020]. What made audiences fall in love with the show and feel represented by it is the character of Fleabag: she is witty, cynical and, above all, imperfect and aware of it. Fleabag is a complex character that plays on the border between patriarchal values and rejection thereof - trying her best to not be influenced by the male standards of how a women should be, she not-so-jokingly calls herself a "bad feminist" because she is aware that she cares about having a "perfect" body image and that she changes her behaviour as a "less intimidating woman" when she is in presence of a potential - male - love interest. *Fleabag* creates that epistemic friction necessary to improve our hermeneutic horizon because it proposes a view of women that strikes with the one generally present in the social imaginary and supported by most of the films and shows we see. The character of Fleabag herself is home to this friction in that it continuously shifts between the ideal feminist woman she wants to be and the values of patriarchal

society that influence her nevertheless. The friction is productive in that it always prompts a questioning over oneself, one's beliefs and where these beliefs come from. Following Havas and Sulimma's discussion, the friction is obtained through the use of *cringe*, which "expos[es] central characters' personal faults or their social environments' shortcomings *as political issues*" [Havas and Sulimma, 2020]. What *Fleabag* does, as an example of cringe dramedy, is to

> Depict millennial female protagonists who frequently violate so-
> cial and physical taboos in embarrassing narrative situations,
> while failing at communication, exhibiting unawareness of ex-
> pected social behaviours, and having their self-image diverge from
> the ways others perceive them. In addition, these characters'
> visual portrayals often break with cinema's and television's aes-
> thetic conventions around the female body.
> [Havas and Sulimma, 2020]

The cringeworthy dramedy is able to create the sense of discomfort that is so common when someone does not respect the socially imposed behaviours that come with the conferral of a social identity unto them. Remember the concept of excorporation from the first chapter. The dramedy makes the viewer reflectively aware of the oppressive social roles and norms that come with a given social identity. Moreover, it actively rebels to this oppression by proposing behaviours that diverge from what is generally expected from a woman. Especially, the dramedy reflects on the ideals of beauty and femininity that a woman should embody and proposes a different representations that not only is aware of these expectations but also rejects them. A new set of values and representations, then, emerges. The woman on screen is not anymore confined in the stylized role imposed by the patriarchy - she is reflectively aware of the stereotyped role she is supposed to play in society but she continuously walks on the edge between subjugation to the patriarchal ideals and liberation from them. In Havas and Sulimma's words:

> the female-centered cringe dramedies frequently explore their char-
> acters' violations of social and cultural taboos, many of which are
> particularly constituted as gendered expectations about appropri-
> ate enactments of femininity. [Havas and Sulimma, 2020]

*Fleabag*, between the others, actively questions the viewers' values embedded in their social imaginary and, through the imaginative potential of the medium, is able to present a possible response to the collapse of widely held gendered beliefs. What Fleabag, above all, tells us, is the importance of genuine and imperfect representation. Avoiding an idealization of the female character as strong, independent and self-made, *Fleabag* provides a more relatable character struggling in her interactions with the surrounding reality and trying to expand her self-understanding.

## 3.5 Art and Collective Experiences

By making manifest situations of oppression as collective, art can help people in acknowledging the pervasive nature of oppression and, as a consequence, bring about social change. In chapter 1 I introduced the concept of strategic essentialism as necessary for individuals to recognize themselves as part of a community that shares the same socio-historical background and how this is essential to develop forms of resistance and rebellion to the dominating epistemic framework. In art, this translates in a practice that not only recognizes marginalized groups, but that also puts into words - or images - perspectives usually neglected and often lacking the means to express themselves. Described by Jane Nardal, one of its first theorists, as "the birth among Negroes of a race spirit" [Nardal, 2002], one of such practices can be found in the artistic movement of Négritude.

Sinking its roots in the brutality of French colonialism, the term Négritude made its first appearance in the late 1920s as the result of the meeting between Aimé Césaire, Léon Damas and Léopold Senghor, respectively from Martinique, Guiana and Senegal. The idea behind Négritude was to find an answer to who the black person was within the alienating and dehumanizing context of colonialism where "white" and "non-white" seemed to be the only meaningful types of identification available. Reiland Rabaka states that Négritude is "a theory that promote[s] *praxis* toward the end of transforming" the alienating identity imposed upon black folk into self-determination [Rabaka, 2009]. Thus, first and foremost, art - Négritude - is an instrument that reflects directly on everyday practice in order to provide the instruments to challenge the existing conditions of oppression and exploitation. In Négritude we find that call to a strategic essentialism that is necessary to understand and fight back the injustices - the search for a commonality

that can be a positive source of belonging and questioning. Here, the intention of strategic essentialism is, for the marginalized social group, to "move to an increasing more complex view of its identity as a social construct" [Nielsen, 2011]. This means recognizing that the social division based on race differences and, consequently, the connected socially accepted behaviours are not pre-determined, natural and irrevocable. Art can provide new interpretations of reality that render visible the constructed characters of identities and social hierarchies and it can show that "even though our own subjectivities are constituted in part [...] by others, the present social order is not a necessary order; rather, it is historical and contingent, open to alteration and even transformation" [Nielsen, 2011]. Even though in the first chapter I often stressed how gender and race-based identity are constructed, I also mentioned that they can be a positive source of belonging and of creation of meaning. That is because, even if we consider them as made up, this does not mean they do not have practical consequences over our lives and relationships. What black folks found in Négritude was a movement that recognized their perspectives as valid to be pursued, an instrument to revolt against the values of the white world and to positively re-build their role and place within society.

Another side of art as a form of collective experience is, as the name might suggest, art collectives. Earlier we talked about the *Guerrilla Girls*, which is only one examples of the hundreds of collectives existing today. Although it can be challenging to provide an all-encompassing definition of art collectives, given the variety of their expressions, we can still perceive some shared characteristics. Following the definition provided by Maria-Alina Asavei,

> collectivism signifies the production, reception, and dissemination of politically engaged art which does not stand for a single artist's voice. It may also refer to those art subjects that emphasize the "united voice" or "collective identity" of disregarded and disadvantaged groups. In contrast to individualist art production, collectivism connotes a sense of togetherness, multitude, solidarity, and political-critical engagement which challenges or changes certain ideas of authorship, ownership, economy of pleasure, aesthetic object and aesthetic experience. [Asavei, 2014]

Art collectives, even in their disparate manifestations, are united by the intent to give voice to the voiceless, to those individuals coming from

marginalized social locations who would generally be left out of the places of popularization of art. By their own nature, collectives are practices of togetherness. This unity is rooted not in the individuals' marginalization, but rather in the need to challenge the dominating epistemic framework and to introduce new ideas and rules to art. Therefore, often, "art collectives develop their own mechanisms of art production and distribution as a measure of their critical autonomy[...]. Collective art is usually not appropriated by the mainstream art world and institutions" [Asavei, 2014]. Art collectives generally tend to step away from consolidated art forms. On the contrary, they are critical of mainstream forms of art and, especially, they are aware of the potential of popular forms of art to support and legitimize a system of inequality and oppression. In an interview with magazine *Dazed*, artist Petra Collins declares the intent of her art collective *The Ardorous*:

> Growing up in a society where images for and of women are actually created by and for men leaves little room for a healthy, unbiased view of the female gender. This destructive culture of a one-sided representation needs to change. I want to offer an alternative to this landscape that we live on, one that celebrates women and the power that we hold. My goal is to question the current ideology of femininity and recast women in positive/dominant roles. [Collins, 2014].

As Collins clearly states, the aim of The Ardorous is, on one side, to provide the space for women to be the producer of their own images, their own idea of womanhood that is not defined by the standards of patriarchy, and, on the other side, to challenge and critique these standards and create a positive image of womanhood and femininity that breaks free of the oppressive roles in which they have been caged by the male gaze.

Through the mediation of the collective, individuals from marginalized social locations can find a source of belonging as well as become part of the creation of positive meaning that challenges the white, patriarchal dominion over the social imaginary. Moreover, these new images can offer original hermeneutic instruments necessary to criticize the oppressive social roles and to re-invent and open up the possibilities of expression of marginalized social identities.

# Conclusion

Throughout this work, I tried to show how art, specifically representation through art, can become a powerful instrument to combat injustices, both epistemic and non. By using art as a reflection of the social realities that make up our world, I described the ways in which oppressive systems such as patriarchy and white supremacy can be supported and perpetuated through time. Through the definition of social identities as constructed through performative acts, I provided a basis for the critique of said identities and the whole of imposed behaviours and beliefs tied a determined social role. Most importantly, recognizing the socially constructed character of gender and race identities is what I used to justify new expressions and portrayals of said identities outside of the white, patriarchal system of values. Art, thanks to its imaginative potential, became then the instrument to re-think these social identities and to re-build them in a new, more truthful and more just manner, providing the hermeneutic tools to critique the dominating social hierarchy and to positively re-construct social relations and identities.

My last hope is that I offered some new instruments than can help in reading the reality that surrounds us in a different way while making us aware of the naturalized and often invisible oppression sewn into the fabric of our social lives - and that, thanks to this, we have a starting point to challenge and improve our hermeneutic horizons.

# Bibliography

[Adichie, 2009] Adichie, C. N. (2009). The Danger of a Single Story. Ted Talks.

[Ahmed, 2015] Ahmed, S. (2015). Culture as "Ways of Life" or a Mask of Racism? Culturalisation and The Decline of Universalist Views. *Critical Race and Whiteness Studies*, 11(1).

[Alcoff, 2006] Alcoff, L. M. (2006). *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, And The Self*. Oxford University Press, New York.

[Appiah, 1994] Appiah, K. A. (1994). Race, Culture, Identity: Misunderstood Connections. *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*.

[Asante, 2008] Asante, Jr., M. K. (2008). *It's Bigger Than Hip Hop: The Rise of The Post-Hip-Hop Generation*. St. Martin's Griffin, New York.

[Asavei, 2014] Asavei, M.-A. (2014). Collectivism. In Kelly, M., editor, *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, pages 89–95. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

[Ásta, 2018] Ásta (2018). *Categories We Live By: The Construction of Sex, Gender, Race, and Other Social Categories*. New York, USA: Oxford University Press.

[Bach, 2012] Bach, T. (2012). Gender is a Natural Kind With a Historical Essence. *Ethics*, 122(January):231–272.

[Benjamin, 1935] Benjamin, W. (1935). *The Work of Art in The Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Penguin Books, Harlow: England.

[Blum, 2020] Blum, L. (Spring 2020). Cultural Racism: Biology and Culture in Racist Thought. *Journal of Social Philosophy*, pages 1–20.

[Butler, 1988] Butler, J. (1988). Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory. *Theatre Journal*, 40(4):519–531.

[Butler, 1990] Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble*. Routledge, New York.

[Collins, 2014] Collins, P. (2014). The Ardorous Manifesto. Dazed.

[Collins, 2011] Collins, R. L. (2011). Content Analysis of Gender Roles in Media: Where Are We Now and Where Should We Go? *Sex Roles*, 64:290–298.

[Criado-Perez, 2019] Criado-Perez, C. (2019). *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men*. Vintage, London.

[Césaire, 2008] Césaire, A. (June 2008). The Liberating Power of Words: An Interview With Poet Aimé Césaire. *The Journal Of Pan African Studies*, 2(4).

[Dalaqua, 2020] Dalaqua, G. H. (2020). Using Art To Resist Epistemic Injustice. *Contention*, 8(1):93–114.

[Fanon, 1952] Fanon, F. (1952). *Black Skin, White Masks*. Penguin Random House, UK.

[Fanon, 1967] Fanon, F. (1967). Racism And Culture. *Towards The African Revolution*, June-November.

[Fredrickson, 2002] Fredrickson, G. M. (2002). *Racism: A Short History*. Princeton University Press, Princeton.

[Fricker, 2007] Fricker, M. (2007). *Epistemic Injustice: Power and The Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

[Gledhill, 1997] Gledhill, C. (1997). Genre and Gender: The Case of Soap Opera. In Hall, S., editor, *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*, pages 337–386. Sage Publications, London.

[Guillaumin, 1977] Guillaumin, C. (1977). Race and Nature: The System of Marks. In Miles, R., editor, *Racism, Sexism, Power and Ideology: Colette Guillaumin*, pages 133–152. Routledge, London.

70

[Hall, 1997] Hall, S. (1997). The Work Of Representation. In Hall, S., editor, *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*, pages 13–74. Sage Publications, London.

[Haslanger, 2012] Haslanger, S. (2012). *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique*. Oxford University Press, New York.

[Havas and Sulimma, 2020] Havas, J. and Sulimma, M. (2020). Through The Gaps of My Fingers: Genre, Femininity, and Cringe Aesthetics in Dramedy Television. *Television and New Media*, 21(1):75–94.

[hooks, 1994] hooks, b. (1994). *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations*. Routledge, New York.

[hooks, 1995] hooks, b. (1995). *Art on My Mind; Visual Politics*. The New Press, New York.

[John, 2013] John, E. (2013). Art and Knowledge. In Berys Gaut, D. L., editor, *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, pages 329–340. Routledge, London.

[Juteau-Lee, 1995] Juteau-Lee, D. (1995). (Re)Constructing the Categories of "Race" and "Sex": the Work of a Precursor. In Miles, R., editor, *Racism, Sexism, Power and Ideology: Colette Guillaumin*, pages 1–26. Routledge, London.

[Keller, 1987] Keller, E. F. (1987). The Gender/Science System: Or, Is Sex to Gender as Nature Is to Science? *Hypatia*, 2(3):37–49.

[Mallon, 2015] Mallon, R. (2015). Performance, Self-Explanation, And Agency. *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, 172(10):2777–2798.

[Mallon, 2016] Mallon, R. (2016). *The Construction of Human Kinds*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

[Marcuse, 1970] Marcuse, H. (1970). Art as Form of Reality. In Kellner, D., editor, *Herbert Marcuse: Art and Liberation*, pages 140–148. Routledge, Oxon, London.

[Marcuse, 1972] Marcuse, H. (1972). Art and Revolution. In Kellner, D., editor, *Herbert Marcuse: Art and Liberation*, pages 166–177. Routledge, Oxon, London.

[Medina, 2011] Medina, J. (2011). Toward a Foucaltian Epistemology of Resistance: Counter-Memory, Epistemic Friction, and Guerrilla Pluralism. *Foucault Studies*, 12:9–35.

[Miahi, 2018] Miahi, M. (2018). Epistemic Marginalisation and The Seductive Power of Art. *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, 17(4).

[Nardal, 2002] Nardal, J. (2002). Black Internationalism. In Sharpley-Whiting, T. D., editor, *Negritude Women*, pages 105–107. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

[Nielsen, 2011] Nielsen, C. R. (2011). Resistance Through Re-Narration: Fanon on Deconstructing Racialized Subjectivities. *African Identities*, 9(4):363–385.

[Nietzsche, 1974] Nietzsche, F. (1974). *The Gay Science; With A Prelude in Rhymes and An Appendix of Songs*. Vintage Books, New York.

[Rabaka, 2009] Rabaka, R. (2009). Frantz Fanon: Revolutionizing the Wretched of The Earth, Radicalizing the Discourse on Decolonization. *Africana Critical Theory*, pages 165–227.

[The Biology and Gender Study Group, 1988] The Biology and Gender Study Group (1988). The Importance of Feminist Critique for Contemporary Cell Biology. *Hypatia*, 3(1):61–76.

[Stoljar, 1995] Stoljar, N. (1995). Essence, Identity, and The Concept of a Woman. *Philosophical Topics*, 23:261–292.

[Taylor, 1994] Taylor, C. (1994). The Politics of Recognition. In Gutmann, A., editor, *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition*, pages 25–74. Princeton University Press, Princeton.

[Zeiler, 2013] Zeiler, K. (2013). A Phenomenology Of Excorporation, Bodily Alienation and Resistance: Rethinking Sexed and Racialized Embodiment. *Hypatia. A Journal for Feminist Philosophy*, 28(1).