Bamboozled (Spike Lee, USA 2000)

Spike Lee's filmmaking has been the source of much controversy since his international breakthrough. Although celebrated and admired by many scholars, Lee has also been confronted with political accusations of having a socially segregationist position due to his concentration on black themes and characters. For example, the black essayist Stanley Crouch caused a great stir when he once characterized Spike Lee's film style as "Afro-Fascist Chic" in a *Village Voice* article and compared the aesthetics of his films to that of Leni Riefenstahl's oeuvre.[1] Debates such as this are typically ignited by Lee's cinematic oeuvre as well as by his own self-presentation. One of Lee's trademarks is the way he connects his films with images, terminology, and slogans from the tradition of the black liberation struggle.[2] This approach reached its zenith in the

1 See Stanley Crouch, "Do the Race Thing: Spike Lee's Afro-Fascist Chic." *The Village Voice* (June 20, 1989): 73-76. Although less polemical, similar critiques are offered by, for example, bell hooks and Ed Guerrero, who primarily take exception to Lee's hostile depiction of interracial romantic relationships. See bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1989) and Ed Guerrero, "Spike Lee and the Fever in the Racial Jungle," in *Film Theory Goes To The Movies*, eds. Jim Collins, Hilary Radner, and Ava Preacher Collins (New York: Routledge, 1992): 170-181.

2 Similar references can be found in almost every Spike Lee film, such as, for instance, the quote from *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, by the black novelist Zora Neale Hurston, that opens Lee's She's Gotta Have It (USA 1986), quotes from Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X at the end of Do the Right Thing (USA 1989), or statements of James Baldwin, who is quoted by the dying Pierre Delacroix at the end of Bamboozled (USA 2000). Moreover, Spike Lee often includes references to black victims of violence, such as in the form of dedications, like in Do the Right Thing (USA 1989) or Jungle Fever (USA 1991). Perhaps the most obvious position can be found in Spike Lee's own production company: the name "Forty Acres and a Mule" refers to the United States government's broken promise to provide an economic foundation for freed slaves, namely by providing each 40 acres of land and a mule.

advertising campaign for his film Malcolm X (USA 1992), when Lee repeatedly used Malcolm X's early militant and radical rhetoric, called for a day off from school for all black children in the country in order to see the film, and sometimes completely rejected questions from white interviewers.[3] The film's opening sequence alone, a montage of documentary footage of Rodney King's mistreatment, as well as images of a burning US flag whose tatters ultimately form a giant X, caused an uproar. The political ambition of such depictions has solidified Spike Lee's presence in the public consciousness. Thus, as director Saul Landau states: "Lee, more than a talented filmmaker, has become an unapologetic troublemaker."[4]

With his film Bamboozled (USA 2000), Spike Lee had already caused some irritations in the run-up to its premiere. When it became known that Lee planned a film that would resurrect the tradition of minstrel shows, indeed even show actors in blackface, many were greatly outraged. Because none of the major studios wanted to finance the project, Lee completed the film as a low-budget production costing only $8 million. Researching for the film also proved difficult because not every film excerpt that Lee wanted to use as references for the Hollywood tradition of blackface was granted by rights holders.[5] When Lee's production company provided the *New York Times* with photos for

3 In fact, Lee's engagement with the controversial black leading figure of Malcolm X can be seen as one of the points of crystallization that still sparks criticisms of Lee's films. While he has been accused of having his own shallow commercial interests in mind in reference to his film project Malcolm X (Lee's company, Forty Acres and a Mule, made millions with the sales of merchandise such as baseball caps, T-shirts, posters, and other memorabilia emblazoned with an "X"), Lee was able to secure the support of the most important black media giants. After publicly condemning the planned edits and changes called for by Warner Brothers studios, which was financing his project, celebrities such as Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson, Janet Jackson, Bill Cosby, Tracy Chapman, and Prince offered financial support so that Lee could finish his project the way that he envisioned it. The title of the film Bamboozled is also a Malcolm X reference, stemming from a speech wherein Malcolm X address how America's black population had been cheated out of their freedom: "You've been hoodwinked. You've been took. You've been led astray, led amok. You've been bamboozled." This speech also appears in Spike Lee's film Malcolm X.

4 Saul Landau, "Spike Lee's Revolutionary Broadside," *Cineaste* 26, no. 2 (2001), 11.

5 For example, Time Warner refused to provide clips that show Bugs Bunny in blackface, obviously so as not to damage their own product. Additionally, in one interview, Lee hinted that Disney withholding cartoons that feature blackface to this day. See Gary Crowdus and Dan Georgakas, "Thinking about the Power of Images: An Interview with Spike Lee," *Cineaste* 26, no. 2 (2001): 4-9.

the advertising campaign right before the film premiered, it refused to print images that showed actors with blackened faces, arguing that the images were too racist and insulting to appear under the banner of the *New York Times*. Although the film was floated as a satire, several critics vehemently opposed the minstrel depictions and, therefore, a repetition and revival of racist traditions of entertainment.

BAMBOOZLED tells the story of a painful form of crossing racial boundaries. The protagonist, Pierre Delacroix, a black screenwriter, is presented from the very start as a deeply divided figure. Although he is successful in his career, his ambitions to write sophisticated television series about and for the upper black middle class cannot be enforced against his superior, the TV producer Dunwitty. Under pressure from Dunwitty to churn out a TV show that conforms to the commercial interests of the TV broadcasters, Delacroix presents his concept of "The New Millennium Minstrel Show", which processes the most successful form of entertainment at the turn of the century, blackface.

Figure 21: "The New Millennium Minstrel Show"

However, Delacroix's calculated plan of making the TV channel's executives think with the use of openly defamatory depictions of black stereotypes does not work. The show is produced and becomes a surprise success and one of the most popular shows in the country. Torn between the promises of the white establishment – prosperity, notoriety, recognition – and the demands of the black community – responsibility, loyalty, integrity – Delacroix ultimately breaks down in his inner struggle between two positions, which

the film characterizes as irreconcilable. Thus, the film follows the pattern of the *tragic mulatto* tradition, which focuses on a character's feelings of being divided, one whose agonizing slippage between two racial poles ultimately requires a choice of one or the other.

The protagonist's name already points to his inner conflict: he changes his birth name, Peerless Dothan, to "Pierre Delacroix" – a name that represents a calamitous type of "crossing" (*la croix*). At the same time, the shortened form of this name, "Dela," which Pierre is called by most of the other characters, refers to the delocalization of its bearer, as Michael Rogin argues: "Called Dela, his moniker invokes a French title of nobility without his family seat; de la is the lord from nowhere."[6] Already the name change is presented as a failed attempt of a freely chosen self-positioning: Dela's self-designation leads astray, for the name indicates all the more clearly that which the torn subject is trying to hide: the nothingness and nowhere of its own identity. Dela's name change is paralleled by a similar act from Sloan's brother Julius: he insists on only being called "Big Blak Afrika", since, as a "slave name," the name Julius has been forced upon him.[7] Also, the characters try to cement their self-chosen identity on the level of idiom, which confronts the businessman Delacroix's affected, smug accent with the broad ghetto slang of the Mau Maus. A statement from Dela's father Junebug, to which Dela objects, shows the fact that Dela's effort to speak with a pronounced, albeit over-stylized diction is seen by the members of the black community as a betrayal of his own heritage: "Nigger, where the fuck did you get that accent?" When Dela answers that he does not particularly appreciate the word "nigger," his father responds with the joke: "I say 'nigger' a hundred times every morning – it keeps my teeth white."[8]

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6 Michael Rogin, "Nowhere Left to Stand: The Burnt Cork Roots of Popular Culture," *Cineaste* 26, no. 2 (2001), 15.

7 The other members of the militant black music gang "The Mau Maus," of whom Julius is the leader, follow suit. Their names are "Hard Blak," "Smooth Blak," "Jo Blak," "Mo Blak," "Double Blak," and "One-Sixteenth Blak."

8 Spike Lee cites his own position on the use of the racist "N-word" at one point in the film. After Delacroix has asked his boss Dunwitty, who justifies his usage of the term "nigger" with a reference to his high esteem of the black race, to not use that term in his presence because of its racist implications, Dunwitty explains: "I don't give a goddamn what that prick Spike Lee says, Tarantino was right: nigger is just a word." Lee's position is argued again in the soundtrack to BAMBOOZLED, when Stevie Wonder's song "Some Years Ago" complains about a social climate "where it's ok to play with the word 'nigger.'"

While Junebug leaves no doubt about his view of the incompatibility of races, Dela feels nothing but contempt for his father, as he clarifies in a voice-over: "Did I want to end up where he was? Hell, emphatically, no!". Here, too, a classic motif of the *tragic mulatto* tradition can be found: the denial of one's family, which is also evident in Dela's hostile attitude towards his mother, whose criticism of his TV show Dela interprets as contempt for his professional success. Furthermore, the film accentuates the identity problem with visual references, such as when the very beginning shows how Dela covers himself with a thick layer of white shaving cream during his morning routine. Here, "white" metaphorically represents the ambition of a model of white identity, perhaps even more so because Dela uses the shaving cream to shave not only his beard but his whole head and thus remove his curly hair. At the same time, this shot announces the main theme of Bamboozled: the question of how to go about the entertainment tradition of blackface, in which all the characters must position themselves throughout the film. For the defamatory blackening of the face is inextricably connected to a less ostentatious, but because of this, no less effective, form of brightening the face – both mechanisms seem to be constitutive of a type of racist entertainment that has been alive for centuries in the United States.

Lee's engagement with racist-tinged terms and images is staged as a multilayer nexus of references, in which a narrative that initially seems conventional becomes a complex discursive network with documentary subcomponents,[9] self-reflective cinematic quotations,[10] and extradiegetic commentary.[11] They all meet in the main axis of the film: the problematization of the

9 This includes, for example, a clip from TV coverage of the O.J. Simpson trial integrated in the film, which Lee includes as an example of a racial spectacle conveyed by a medium.

10 There are two noticeable quotations that address the medium of television as a machine of corruption. First, Spike Lee dedicates Bamboozled to the author Budd Schulberg, who wrote the script to A Face in the Crowd (Elia Kazan, 1956). In addition, Lee includes several references to Network (Sidney Lumet, USA 1976), among them the exclamation taken from Lumet's TV character Howard Beale: "I'm sick and tired and I am not going to take it anymore!".

11 This primarily concerns Lee's casting strategy, which included casting the TV screenwriter, actor, and producer Damon Wayans in the role of Pierre Delacroix. Wayans is one of the founding figures of the 1990s Fox sketch comedy show *In Living Color*, which was one of the most successful and simultaneously controversial American TV series of the 1990s. While both the writers and the producers described the comedic intention of the show as "parody" and "satire," many critics took issue with the over-the-top char-

practice of blackface in minstrel shows as well as its legacy in both Hollywood cinema and contemporary mass entertainment. It is precisely this element that interests Spike Lee: the staging of ostentatiously displayed black bodies as a specific characteristic of the practice of representation that is inextricably bound to American popular culture. In BAMBOOZLED, the engagement with the complex system of a structure marked by racism, whose determining factor consists in its visual accessibility, is a significant principle; indeed, it is elevated to a decisive media operation that aligns the production of American entertainment to this day.

With such an open display of a blackness made mask-like and graphic, Lee refers to a form of representation that draws on a long tradition of theater and cinema. The performative moment that comes into play here is interpreted by many scholars as a transcultural hybrid phenomenon, whose subversive potential is capable of transcending racially defined binary positions. For example, in his study of the phenomenon of the minstrel show, Eric Lott states: "It should hardly seem strange that miscegenation is suggested (if in oblique and displaced form) in accounts of white men's fascination with and attraction to black men and their culture, for these are accounts in which the cultures merge."[12] Susan Gubar offers another perspective, arguing that the practice of the blackface is not so much intended to blur boundaries, but rather to draw them rigidly. Racial confusions and diffusions, that is, those mixing ratios Lott speaks of, could be robbed of their disruptive effect by the ostentatious display of blackened skin as a visual marker:

> "Indeed, blackface itself might be considered as a symbolic defense against such (inevitable) complications. Since it may be impossible to 'tell' if a person is actually of black decent – especially in the context of the 'one drop rule' (defining a person with just one 'drop' of 'black' blood as racially Other) – complexion is neither an infallible nor a stable index of race, while blackface

acters who were reminiscent of the typified characters from the minstrel tradition. The basic thematic constant of the film BAMBOOZLED is, in a sense, authenticated by the reference to the production history of the TV show *In Living Color* and thus integrated into a larger debate on media mechanisms of racial representation politics.

12 Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 57.

assures audiences that difference is visible, always encoded in the same way, skin-deep."[13]

Hence, the practice of blackface can be interpreted as a type of attempted defense against anxiety, during which the feared mixing of blood is substituted by racial masquerade. As a "symbolic defense," it proves to be a strategy that seeks to ward off the danger of contaminating the white race in the process of visual separation. In this sense, one may argue that blackface, in its emphasis on visuality, forces a certain direction within racial identification: what is not expressly recognizable is hyper-visualized. In fact, a type of multiplication takes place the moment a surface (the skin) is superimposed and enriched by another surface (the mask). Blackface then turns into a congealed blackness: a racist form of knowledge with the guarantee of visibility. Gubar interprets this type of representative violence as a mechanism of racist disciplining, which implies a significant similarity to another brutal ritual of subjugation: lynching. The association of both forms of punishment, the "connection between the physical violence of lynching and the mimetic violence of blackface",[14] is explained by the analogy to a similarly structured visual spectacle. This connection becomes apparent in the extremes of the arsenal of images that the minstrel tradition has constructed. Gubar explains: "Blackface performances can be considered as a symbolic rite of scapegoating, the flip side of lynching: burnt cork instead of charred flesh, the grin and the grimace of pain, bulging eye balls, and twitching limbs or stiffness of body parts."[15]

Gubar's observation, which recognizes the convulsive agony of the lynched person in the twitching body of the minstrel performer, which sees the distorted facial features of the strangled person reflected in the comic's bulging eyes, and which discerns the burned flesh of the fire victim replicated in the soot, is captivating – especially because, in both cases, it is dealing with an essentially American form of racially structured mass entertainment. Here it is not only the thrust of the intended message nor the blatant display of white superiority that is comparable but also the type of performance, in the form of a public spectacle. Dora Apel highlights the fact that several cases of lynching were announced and staged as major community events:

13 Susan Gubar, *Race Changes: White Skin, Black Face in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 65.

14 Ibid., 78-79.

15 Ibid., 78.

> "From 1882 until at least 1981, almost 4,800 African Americans were killed by extralegal means – tortured, shot, hanged, or burned to death. […] At times, newspapers ran headlines announcing lynchings in advance, railroads ran special excursion trains to the sites or added extra railroad cars, and schools were let out for the day. These were community events like carnivals and street fairs."[16]

Furthermore, one should note that the newly developed methods of communication and broadcast of the twentieth century played an important role for the entrenchment of the semantics of lynching in the public consciousness. The effect consisted in a type of reanimation of racist disciplining, which launched a specific ritualization driven by the media, as Jonathan Markovitz argues:

> "Twentieth century lynchings by mass mobs, or 'spectacle lynchings' […] should be understood not as barbaric relics of a bygone age but as a 'peculiarly modern ritual' that relied upon virtually every form of communication and transportation technology. […] Even more important than the thousands of people who attended and participated in mass lynchings, though, were the much larger regional and national audiences who learned about these lynchings from newspapers, postcards, books, pamphlets, and even […] radio announcements."[17]

Dora Apel also emphasizes this relationship and describes the discourse of lynching practices funneled through the media as an effective amplifier of racist oppression in the United States:

> "Lynching became the most glaring, inescapable, and enduring symbol of racist oppression in the United States and was purveyed by increasingly sophisticated media technology to ever more blood-chilling effect. While evolving into more legally sanctioned forms of persecution by the late 1930s, the widely disseminated visual discourse of lynching became nearly as potent as lynching itself because of its ineluctable reinforcement of white supremacist tyranny."[18]

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16 Dora Apel, *Imagery of Lynching: Black Men, White Women, and the Mob* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 23.

17 Jonathan Markovitz, *Legacies of Lynching: Racial Violence and Memory* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), xxvi.

18 Apel, *Imagery of Lynching*, 221.

Additionally, Markovitz points to the fact that the dissemination of lynching images increased at precisely the same point when the number of actual cases of lynching decreased, which significantly reinforced the mechanisms of racist oppression and surveillance:

> "In important ways, the power of spectacle lynchings actually increased as their frequency declined, since modern communication technologies made it possible for images and narratives of lynchings to be disseminated to ever-larger audiences. Because representations of lynching worked to extend and magnify the surveillant functions and the terror of the mob, they should be understood not as entirely separate entities from lynchings themselves but as key components of the power of the practice."[19]

A similar structural dynamic can be observed in the practice of minstrel shows. At the point when stage performances from minstrel troupes began to dwindle, the depiction of blackface characters was updated by the developing medium of film. Susan Gubar states: "Despite the common assumption that minstrelsy declined at the turn of the century, it profoundly influenced America's first movies and musicals, raising questions about the degree to which these apparently new and innovative genres contained and sustained conventional structures of oppression."[20] The answer could be as follows: the scope of a racist disciplinary mechanism is not repressed or weakened by the transfer from one form of mediation to another; rather, a shift takes place that leads to a specific media charging of representation.

The brutality of racist mass spectacles finds a violent outlet in the images of Bamboozled. At the end of the film, violence erupts in a horrifying catastrophe: the radical group of the Mau Maus kidnaps the actor Manray because of his participation in the offensive "New Millennium Minstrel Show" and, as punishment, carries out a cruel execution that is livestreamed on the Internet. Shortly thereafter, the police raid the Mau Maus' quarters and kill all but one member of the militant group. At the same time, Delacroix also must die: in the final confrontation with his assistant Sloan, he succumbs to a fatal shot from her gun. Several critics have seen this orgy of violence as the film's greatest weakness. For example, Armond White interprets the film's final act

19 Markovitz, *Legacies of Lynching*, xxviii.
20 Gubar, *Race Changes*, 55.

as an exuberant spectacle without a genuine message and an example of the "sensationalism that is Lee's specialty."[21]

Indeed, Lee's excessive portrayal of violence, the obsession with the motif of dying that permeates the film, is striking. However, rather than having to do with a general sensationalism, it has much more to do with the staging of blackface as a racist form of entertainment and oppression that Lee ties to the aesthetics of death. In the process, different components and sources of association are linked to a dense network of references that reflect the motif's complexity within a specific media formation. Therefore, it has not so much to do with dying per se but with the relationship between death and racial representation in the cinematographic image. Lee confronts this cinematically mediated type of racial representation with its own origins: with the spread of blackface masquerade as a structural element of American film history. Bamboozled is permeated with cinematic quotations that recall the continuation of the minstrel tradition in the medium of film, among them, for example, clips from The Birth of a Nation (D.W. Griffith, USA 1915), The Jazz Singer (Alan Crosland, USA 1927), Babes in Arms (Richard Rodgers, USA 1937), Jezebel (William Wyler, USA 1938), The Great Lie (Edmund Goulding, USA 1941), Holiday Inn (Mark Sandrich, USA 1942), Duel in the Sun (King Vidor, USA 1946), Show Boat (George Sidney, USA 1951) – films that, on the one hand, feature white movie stars who perform in blackface (for example, Judy Garland, Bing Crosby, and Al Jolson) and, on the other hand, black actors whose repertoire of gestures is clearly oriented toward figures well-known in minstrel shows (for example, Mantan Moreland as Coon or Hattie McDaniel as Mammy). This type of citation reaches its climax in the film's final montage. Here, Lee bundles and condenses a universe of caricatures that visualizes the recurring patterns of the minstrel tradition: a grinning mouth, bulging eyes, twitching dance moves, subservient bows. These are film images that, rather than being "leading" motifs [*Leit*motive], end up as motifs of suffering [*Leid*motive] similar to images of lynching victims.[22]

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21 Armond White, "Post-Art Minstrelsy," *Cineaste* 26, no. 2 (2001), 13.

22 When Spike Lee conjures up memories of the victims of lynching in his staging of minstrel characters in Bamboozled, he is building on his previous look into the pathology of race relationships and the violence that results from them – since an engagement with racist scenarios of oppression is one of the central focuses in his earlier films as well. It suffices to mention two examples which clearly tie the theme of lynching to a critique of modern racism. Lee's 1989 film Do the Right Thing shows the violent death of a black resident of the ghetto, Radio Raheem, in a way that establishes a clear

Michael Rogin describes this kind of representation as an uncanny funeral ceremony: "We viewers of the film are buried alongside him [Delacroix] under the return of the racial repressed."[23] Lesley Stern similarly argues: "The repetition of roles and performative tropes is overwhelming. The ghosts of Hollywood return to haunt us. […] These gestures, like wandering homeless ghosts, take up residence in alien bodies, there to play out the repetition that is their destiny."[24] Stern's interpretation explains the re-staging of film images as a dynamic of transmission. He understands the visually mediated

similarity to images of lynching. While a police officer abuses Radio Raheem with his baton, the camera focuses on his feet, which suddenly lift off the ground. His legs, helplessly struggling in the air, illustrate a victim's last twitching movements – until they ultimately go limp and signal the death of the lynching victim. The black community's commentary which is articulated thereafter, "It's murder; They did it again; Just like they did Michael Stewart," ultimately refers to a real victim of police brutality, namely the black graffiti artist Michael Stewart who died from strangulation while in custody of the New York City Police Department. Furthermore, the setting of the film, namely the area around "Sal's Pizzeria," establishes an intended similarity to the Howard Beach case, i.e. the Queens neighborhood where the black Michael Griffith was attacked and brutally beaten by a group of white teenagers after visiting a pizzeria in 1986. (Cf. Spike Lee and Lisa Jones, *Do the Right Thing*, New York: Fireside, 1989, 24.) The group subsequently chased Griffith onto the highway, where he was struck by a vehicle and killed. The case received national attention, which led New York mayor Ed Koch to publicly denounce the crime as a form of "modern lynching." (Cf. Markovitz, *Legacies of Lynching*, 46.) Lee's 1991 film JUNGLE FEVER also features a recontextualization of lynching. The black architect Flipper Purify's father, drawing on the practice of lynching enforced during slavery, comments on the interracial relationship between Flipper and the white secretary Angie Tucci as follows: "White man say to his woman, baby, you are the flower of white southern womanhood, too holy and too pure to be touched by any man […]. And if any nigger so much as look at you, I'll lynch his ass." Lee connects the same film with another real victim of racist violence; namely the black teenager Yusef K. Hawkins, to whom the film is dedicated and whose photo can be seen during the opening of JUNGLE FEVER. Hawkins was murdered by an armed group of white teenagers in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Bensonhurst in 1989 after they had found out that a white girl had invited black guests to her birthday party. In fact, there was no such invitation – Hawkins had not been on the way to the party but was going to view a car that was for sale. (See Douglas Martin, "About New York: Racial Hatred through Fresh Eyes," *New York Times*, February 15, 1992.) A collection of Lee's interview comments on the currency of racist violence can be found in Spike Lee and Cynthia Fuchs, *Spike Lee: Interviews* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2002).

23 Rogin, "Nowhere Left to Stand", 15.

24 Lesley Stern, "Putting on a Show, or the Ghostliness of Gesture," *Lola* 5 (2002), http://www.lolajournal.com/5/putting_show.html.

arsenal of stereotypical movements as a return of sign complexes that are, as it were, relocated through the transfer to "alien bodies": the corporeality of the characters in BAMBOOZLED is superimposed by the performance of their predecessors from the history of Hollywood. Building on Susan Gubar's argument, who sees the practice of blackface as a reflection of lynching, this process can be understood as a structure doubled within itself: as an actualization of an actualization. The repetition of gestures so clearly emphasized in the final montage – the physical rhythm, the vocal intensity, the distorted facial features that appear in black stereotypes – is staged as the presence of an uncanny revenant, as a return of the dead in the form of the undead.

Visually mediated disciplinary measures, such as the spectacle of lynching or blackface, can be understood as attempts to repeat the violence perpetrated on the enslaved through symbolic re-stagings in order to solidify its own claim to oppression. Such attempts fail, however, at the very moment when the repetition becomes visible as overcompensation. Susan Gubar stresses: "The phrase 'repetitive lynchings' sounds like a case of overkill and is meant to be-cause, as Virginia Woolf once put it in a different context, 'it is far harder to kill a phantom than a reality' and the fictitious nature of this celluloid specter kept it alive, creeping back to haunt the white imagination."[25] This context of consolidation seems to play a notable role in the filmic signification of blackness. Thus, Tania Modleski asks:

> "Is it not the case that the threat of monstrosity – that is of black monstrosity – has been present [...] as a consequence of the decision to make it an allegory rather than to treat the situation of blacks directly? And has not the tendency of films from the early days of cinema to cast white people in black face served a similar function – i.e., to suggest that blackness may be so monstrous it can only be signified but not directly represented?"[26]

Modleski's argumentative starting point is the practice of the blackface frequently demonstrated in the early stage of Hollywood cinema: it is precisely this form of racist performance that Modleski wants to see understood as allegory, not as representation. But does the circumstance of a performative displacement of significant blackness provide a sufficient explanation for the functional mechanism of blackface, and is this type of portrayal of blackness

25 Gubar, *Race Changes*, 57.

26 Tania Modleski, *Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a "Postfeminist" Age* (New York, London: Routledge, 1991), 118.

on top of whiteness the main element of the racist scenario acted out in blackface?

Already in 1958, Ralph Ellison had pointed to the fact that the racist caricature of blackface constructs a kind of type whose most important characteristic consisted in the unique way of stylizing what is depicted: "This mask, this willful stylization and modification of the natural face and hands, was imperative for the evocation of that atmosphere in which the fascination of blackness could be enjoyed, the comic catharsis achieved. The racial identity of the performer was unimportant, the mask was the thing."[27] In fact, many black artists had continued the repertoire of staging established by minstrel shows – and, as Ellison stresses, with the same effects that were set in motion by their white colleagues.[28] According to Ellison, the decisive factor was not the application of a black layer onto a white undercoat but the mask itself, or more precisely, its specific form and peculiarity: "The mask, stylized and iconic, was once required of anyone who would act the role – even those Negroes whose natural coloration should, for any less ritualistic purposes at least, have made it unnecessary."[29] With this, Ellison is addressing the type of staging that is also at the core of Spike Lee's BAMBOOZLED: the hyperbolization of blackness, whose expressiveness does not primarily refer to a black/white stratification but which achieves its effect in the stylization of the mask itself.

27 Ralph Ellison, "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke," in *Shadow and Act*, ed. Ralph Ellison (New York: Vintage, 1995 [1958]), 49.

28 Along with the popular white minstrel ensembles, there have always been successful black troupes. The most famous African American blackface performers included Ernest Hogan, who became known under the stage name "The Unbleached American," as well as Bert Williams and George Walker, who announced themselves in their programs as "Two Real Coons". Spike Lee's BAMBOOZLED directly cites this practice, as Manray and Womack also appear under the label "Two Real Coons." Another quotation shows that Lee leaves no doubt as to how this type of minstrel performance should be understood, namely not as a subversive testing of the limits of color but as a forced relapse into a highly degrading practice of a racist culture industry. In a conversation between Sloan and Manray, the latter explicitly points out the fact that black performers at the beginning of the twentieth century were forced to appear in blackface because this type of performance was the only way to gain entry into the white-dominated entertainment industry. In this context, Bert Williams is mentioned as a prominent example.

29 Ellison, "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke," 47.

In Bamboozled, Lee repeatedly visualizes the putting on of the blackface mask as an extensive make-up ritual. This process is expressed particularly clearly in a sequence that is presented exactly in the middle of the film.

Figure 22: Putting on the Blackface Mask

The sequence begins with a top shot of a make-up pot, in which, keeping with Sloan's instructions "to keep the ritual the same," the soot from the burnt cork is mixed with water into a viscous paste. The following shot shows Womack's face in a close-up: it is only half lit, so that the depiction is reminiscent of a silhouette rather than of the image of an entire face. The next shot depicts Womack's colleague, Manray, whose mirror shows his double-reflected face. Following this, Womack is seen again as a divided shape, because the chosen framing makes only one half of the figure visible. This shot and the subsequent shot, a high angle shot of Womack's face in the dark, show the careful application of the layer of soot. After a shot of Manray, who is also presented while applying make-up from a low-angle shot, the camera follows forward to focus on Womack's double-reflected, half made up face. This is followed, as a structural repetition, by another top shot of the make-up pot. The next shot shows a face in profile, of which only the nose and one eye are clearly visible: because both the image's foreground and background are extremely dark, the area of the face seems to disappear almost completely into darkness. Two shots then follow that show Manray and Womack as two images facing one another: while Manray, on the right side of the frame, looks to the left, Womack, whose profile is shown in a close-up, looks to the right. Then, there are two more shots that first show Manray and then Womack; both are close-

ups in a half-profile, and both faces are now almost completely covered by the black makeup. The following shots depict the gradual completion of the masquerade: this includes putting on pieces of costumes, such as white gloves and a black top hat, as well as applying brashly red lipstick. The last shots of the sequence show the completed transformation of Manray and Womack into the characters Mantan and Sleep 'n Eat: not only the makeup, but also their gestures and facial expressions, as well as their gloved hands up in the air, their widely opened eyes and, ultimately, the programmatic exclamation, "Showtime!", illustrate their conversion.

Spike Lee's film-aesthetic staging visualizes a process of transformation that turns the multidimensional characters Manray and Womack into the flat minstrel characters Mantan[30] and Sleep 'n Eat.[31] The effect of such a ritual metamorphosis is expressed particularly clearly in the framing and editing. Lee often shows the faces in profile shots, as silhouettes, as incomplete sections. All of these shots reveal and cloak things at the same time. They form an image and simultaneously leave the viewer in the dark over the back of the image – in short: they evoke the functional mechanism of the mask. During the broadcast of the "New Millennium Minstrel Show", its author, the veritable make-up artist Pierre Delacroix, describes his feelings in a voice-over: "I was feeling a little like Dr. Frankenstein." As a filmic foreshadowing, this quote points to a creature who begins to gain independence and is in danger of slipping from his creator's grasp. The success of the "New Millennium Minstrel Show" escalates into an enthusiastically celebrated form of retro-racism, which ultimately claims numerous victims. Just like the monster created by Frankenstein, Delacroix's uncanny masked creation is connected to a paradox: it is static and moving at the same time. This becomes clear, for example, in a shot in which the rear view of the three-dimensional figure Manray can be seen in the foreground, while the two-dimensional mirror image of the stage mask Mantan is presented in the background. Even though Lee's editing seems to emphasize the increasing dominance of the mask – for example, through the increasing number of shots that show only the reflection of the

30 The name is supposed to be reminiscent of the actor Mantan Moreland (1902-1973), who had numerous roles as an eye-rolling "coon" and comical servant in the 1930s-40s. See Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks*, 72-75.

31 The actor Willie Best became famous under the name "Sleep 'n' Eat" in the 1930s. Bogle describes the racist caricature with which Best became associated as a classic "darky image: the coon is content as long as he has enough to eat and a place to sleep." Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks*, 71.

mask, but not the person wearing it placed in front of the mirror – the mask cannot be regarded as an independent being: it remains bound to its wearer, whose movement is what sets the unmoved in motion.

This connection represents a fundamental ambivalence whose scope Reinhard Olschanski describes as follows: "The mask does not only refer to the disguise and representation of the face as a special zone of the body but to an entire body construct, the wearer of the mask. And this results in a multilayer interplay: man and mask refer to one another."[32] In this context, the rigidity of the mask can be associated with a state of immobility with a state of immobility, which is in opposition to the wearer's vitality, but which is nonetheless closely related to it. As a phenomenon of vacillation, the mask stands for the transitional terrain between life and death, a reference that becomes all the more apparent when considered in the context of the death mask. Reinhard Olschanski states:

> "Death is one of the conditions that co-determines the perception of masks by giving the face mask-like, stiff characteristics. The inertia of a dead face reoccurs in the stiffness of the mask and pushes the masked being into a field of tension between life and death. Conversely, seeing the dead contains something of the urgency that is characteristics for the appearance of the person wearing a mask."[33]

The death mask stands for a significant immobilization: the dead's facial expressions are exhibited in their mask-like character and, at the same time, as a mask, removed. The exposure of the dead body reveals the ambivalence of absence (of life) and presence (of death), which the mask affirmatively repeats in its fundamental simultaneity of presence (a face) and absence (no face). But it is not only the oscillation between stasis and movement that is crucial for the particular effect that unfolds in this context. The reference to death is additionally emphasized by the specific materiality that comes into play in the death mask:

> "In its very materiality, the mask represents the unsettling change of the animated human body into inanimate matter. While the effect of other masks, isolated from use, sometimes adapts itself to the effect of mere things, the death mask has a unique characteristic due to its very thingness. It adheres

32 Reinhard Olschanski, *Maske und Person: Zur Wirklichkeit des Darstellens und Verhüllens* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001), 47.

33 Ibid., 80.

> to the reversal that has occurred and repeatedly occurs in perception: the reduction of the human body to a 'thing,' to dead matter."[34]

The shift described by Olschanski articulates itself particularly clearly in the blackface mask because the soot visually exemplifies its relation to death both in the form of its material and in its color. Spike Lee reflects on this relationship by not solely presenting the ritual of an actor blacking his face but, rather, prefacing it with the production of the materials used, that is, the burning of the cork to achieve the blackness. The reversal in the field of tension between life and death is thus shown not as a distinctly localizable or temporalizable act but, far more, as a context of movement understood as a processual succession of repetitions. There is no definitive conclusion evoked here but a structure in which effacing simultaneously represents resurrecting in an altered form.

Contrary to the cultural tradition of the aestheticized death mask, which does not cruelly distort the face of the dead but rather makes it appear dignified, Lee's presentation of the blackface mask is not concerned with the image of the peacefully departed. Beyond an ennoblement, which would include the beauty of the moment of rest in the depiction of the dead, Lee focuses more on the image of a mask meant to frighten, in which violence and terror prevail. It therefore seems appropriate to add a further component to the complex associations that resonate in the depiction of a blackface mask: namely, the repulsive effect of an image that is well-known from the practice of torture. Because here, too, the mechanism of the mask has a functional use that is transferred onto both the disciplinarian (the masked torturer) and to the disciplined (the masked victim). Reinhard Olschanski explains:

> "The anonymization that the perpetrator takes on by masking himself, like the deindividualization that he forces on his victim, contributes to the transgressing of moral boundaries: to not perceive the subjected party as a person and to not be seen himself as a morally accountable person – the mask's function of transcendence is, in both cases, that of a crossover into terror."[35]

Here, it must be emphasized that the masking of the perpetrator can take on additional functions in the context of racist disciplinary measures: one would have to mention the masks of the Ku Klux Klan, which, along with

34 Ibid., 82.
35 Ibid., 80.

the anonymization of the perpetrator, are also conducive to the fear-inducing exposition of an executive branch that projects the appearance of being lawful. In this type of mask, the concealment of the individual and the display of the instance of revenge have an equal coexistence. In Spike Lee's BAMBOOZLED, however, more important than the thematization of the perpetrator is the figurative form of the victim as well as the specific form of the mask with which it is performed for the disciplinary gaze of the audience. According to Olschanski, the effect is the following:

> "The mask-like deindividualization also has an external and exclusionary function. It designates the victims, aiming not least at the fact that they are turning this process of designation against themselves in a self-destructive way. The deindividualization also aims to destroy a self-image that enables the individual to articulate his or her claims to respect and recognition."[36]

The masking of the victim implies a unique form of degradation in the concealment of the individual. It evokes a transgression of established schemata of identification and, in doing so, negates the uniqueness of the subject. Even more: not only the claim to respect but also the entitlement to human dignity is undermined in such a configuration – a mechanism that comes to light in the minstrel mask's gesture of subjugation, as Ralph Ellison notes: "Its [the mask's] function was to veil the humanity of Negroes thus reduced to a sign, and to repress the white audience's awareness of its moral identification with its own acts and with the human ambiguities pushed behind the mask."[37]

Spike Lee reflects on this connection by combining – indeed, visually analogizing – the virtual violence that the degrading image of a minstrel mask bears with a very concrete form of violence culminating in the death of those involved in the process of image degradation. This can be seen, for example, in the execution sequence, which creates a visual linkage in the parallel editing of excerpts from the "New Millennium Minstrel Show" and shots of the brutally tortured Manray, in which one form of violence seems to react upon the other. Therefore, physical injury is to be understood as the effect of a profound violation by the image, as a mechanism that exposes the fundamental effect of a structure in which the destruction of one's self-image catalyzed by the mask reaches its climax in the definitive annihilation of the individual.

36 Ibid., 78.

37 Ellison, "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke," 49.

This connection is again taken up in the film's final image. The last shot shows the distorted face of the stage character Mantan, whose clenched grin the soundtrack comments on with a quote from Dela's father, Junebug: "Always keep 'em laughing!"

Figure 23: "Always keep 'em laughing!"

During the conflict-laden confrontation between father and son that takes place in the middle of the film, Junebug had already declared: "You know what I always told you: Every nigger is an entertainer." A shocking statement: the raison d'être of African-Americans, Junebug implies, consists in the satisfying of a sadistic need for entertainment, in the affirmation of a feeling of superiority that is ultimately confirmed in the reduction of the living individual to a ridiculous stock character.

In the film's final image, every trace of carelessness and harmlessness gives way to a cruel basic message. At this point, the clown's face freezes into an ugly grimace, into a fright mask, whose effect the viewer cannot escape. Reinhard Olschanski explains: "In a unique way, fright masks are designed for the moment of their appearance. […] Before we know who or what it is, the threatening aspect of the appearance is revealed. Distorted facial features, a torn mouth or protruding eyes inevitably leave their mark."[38] It is precisely the elements listed by Olschanski that Spike Lee emphasizes most clearly in his montage of Hollywood film excerpts that precedes the final picture, and which he highlights in a condensed form in the final shot of Mantan's face:

38 Olschanski, *Maske und Person*, 48.

images of horror that look back on their own history in "Hollywood's Hall of Shame" and are brought back into the viewer's consciousness in an unsettling way.

These images unfold their threatening atmosphere not least with a suction effect, which is accentuated by the torn open mouth as an uncanny gorge.

Figure 24: Open Mouth

This abyss is reflected as a recurring moment in almost every image in the film: whether as an oversized mouth in the stage decorations of the "New Millennium Minstrel Show", as the coin slot on a blackface piggy bank figurine, or in the form of the torn open mouths of the slaves onstage and onscreen into which chicken legs and pieces of watermelon disappear. As eerie openings that follow each smirk, their gullets threaten to devour the audience itself. In this context, there is also a significant connection to death, which refers back to the motif tradition of the wide-open mouth in folk culture. Mikhail Bakhtin explains: "[T]he gaping mouth […] is, of course, related to the lower stratum; it is the opening gate leading downward into the bodily underworld. The gaping mouth is related to the image of swallowing, this most ancient symbol of death and destruction."[39] The open throat can fundamentally be understood as a threatening abyss, as an opening that leads into a dark depth, from which there is no escape.

The reversal expressed by the mask bounces the film back onto itself. It presents it as an image machine whose production is structured by absorption, but whose devouring also always simultaneously initiates a spitting out. Two elements are crucial here, and both can be considered in close relation to the motif of death: the moment of immobilization and the moment of movement. The paradoxical simultaneity of stasis and movement is already epitomized in the motif of the death mask – and, in a further step, it is applied to the technique of cinematography. Because the death mask's ambivalence

39 Mikhail Bakhtin,*Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helen Iswolsky (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1984), 325.

is not solely constituted by the previously mentioned identification of presence and absence, it is further manifested as an image of stiffness from the perspective of a revitalization. The mask provides a form in which the depiction does not appear as a fixed thing but which itself has found access and duration; it presents itself as an image that keeps death in the world of the living.

In media theory, this connection was applied to the effects of the technical image early on. André Bazin begins his 1945 essay "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" with the following basic premise: "If the plastic arts were put under psychoanalysis, the practice of embalming the dead might turn out to be a fundamental factor in their creation."[40] Bazin's formulation hints at a type of conservation that he finds realized in the art of photography. The peculiar immobilization of a context of movement that the photographic image undertakes at first is thereby transferred into a new context of life: the photograph drains the life from its object and, at the same time, grants eternal life to this moment through a conservation. Roland Barthes also comments on the connection between life and death in the process of medialization in his *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*; he sees "an interior future of which death is the stake"[41] in photography. Bazin finds another link ultimately in the crossover of photography to film, and here, too, he uses a metaphor that evokes the image of an embalmed dead person; nonetheless, here it is that of a dead person who, through the movement of the image, himself starts moving: "Now, for the first time, the image of things is likewise the image of their duration, change mummified as it were."[42]

It is this very movement of the dead that Spike Lee imagines – and from a perspective that reveals a link to racist formations in the rhythm of the cinematography. Already in the film's second sequence, the relationship between race and media structures, or more precisely, between color and time, is addressed. After a conference, the TV producer Dunwitty asks his writer, Pierre Delacroix, if he knows the meaning of so-called "C.P. Time." Delacroix responds with a definition of the abbreviation and explains: "C.P. Time is colored people's time: the stereotypical belief that Negroes are always late,

40 André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," in *What Is Cinema?: Volume I*, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 9.

41 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010), 96.

42 Ibid., 15.

that Negroes have no sense of time – time: except when it comes to music and dance, then you can set your watch to them." With this explanation, the film points to a context that far exceeds Dunwitty's concept of a broadcasting schedule being a categorization of racially different consumer needs. Rather, at the heart of Delacroix's statement is a dynamic described as specifically racist, which not only influences the dramaturgy of Delacroix's "New Millennium Minstrel Show", but which can also be applied to the film Bamboozled as a rhythmized structure.

The main attraction in Delacroix's show consists of carefully choreographed dance numbers from the "New Millennium Minstrel" Ensemble, led by Mantan, who acts as an "uneducated Negro with educated feet" (as Delacroix's advertisement states). But dance does not just play an important part within the onstage terrain of the "New Millennium Minstrel Show". Even in the offstage reality of Bamboozled, tap dancing is staged as the main element – such as in the portrayal of the "Street Stepshow," with which the street performers Manray and Womack earn money before their TV careers, in the casting scene in Dunwitty's office, in which the conference table turns into a stage, in the sequences in the dance studio where Manray leads the rehearsals for the show, and finally in the execution sequence, in which the Mau Maus stage Manray's death as a "Dance of Death" and announce it on the Internet with the banner "FEETS DO YOUR STUFF."[43]

Figure 25: Tap Dancing

43 The African-American actor Mantan Moreland became famous with the exclamation "Feets! Do your stuff!" – exclaimed every time he exited a scene. One sequence presents tap dancing as a type of harbinger of death before the execution, in which Dela, in recognition of Manray's credits in the "New Millennium Minstrel Show", gives him the last tap shoes that belonged to the great African-American film actor Bill "Bojangles" as a gift and gives them to him with the following words: "In fact, he died with those on his feet."

Tap dancing does not only come up as a recurring motif that helps to characterize a specific character in the film, it additionally seems to lie above the diegesis as a structural element, as a dynamizing form that is closely tied to the film's mechanics itself. Jodi Brooks describes the relation between tap dancing and cinema as follows:

> "Tap and cinema [...] have had an odd and sometimes brutal kinship, which is not simply a result of the place of tap in film. It also arises from the place of film in tap, or more specifically the ways that ideas of the camera-projector apparatus and the moving image in general seem to underlie and infuse some forms of tap-dancing."[44]

Brooks' observation establishes a basic analogy between the dancer's physical movement and the cinematographic apparatus's mechanical movement – an observation that is all the more visible when one applies it to the movement of the dance steps in the movement of the film image:

> "In tap, the click of the taps can appear to animate the body's movements, recalling and playing with ideas of the machinic. This effect can be even more pronounced in screen tap, where the sound of the taps can serve to suggest or mimic the suppressed sounds of the camera-projector apparatus. Screen tap, in short, would appear to be a privileged site for playing with the temporality of the filmic image and its 'compulsory' movement."[45]

The link between sound and movement described by Brooks, which she sees in the coinciding of audible dance steps and inaudible film mechanics, takes on another dimension in Bamboozled through the thematization of race. It is not solely the reflection of a genuinely filmic dynamic that is crucial here but its specific linkage to forms of racial performance. In no small way, this is made apparent by an extradiegetic reference that comments on and enriches the events in the film, so to speak, from outside, that is, the casting of the actor Savion Glover as the character Manray. Glover is not only a famous dancer, who achieved great success with his own Broadway show, "Bring in da Noise, Bring in da Funk," he is moreover one of the founders of a movement in New York that for years has worked to free tap dancing from the white image of Hollywood musicals and again establish it as a black dance form. The agenda

44 Jodi Brooks, "Ghosting the Machine: The Sounds of Tap and the Sounds of Film«," *Screen* 44, no. 4 (2003), 358.

45 Ibid., 358.

behind the movement is to expose the African-American roots of American popular culture and thereby to save what has been repressed. In BAMBOOZLED, Spike Lee's overall theme, the black struggle for freedom, is connected to a cultural reflection that visualizes the confrontation of two racial poles, white versus black, as a media-coded structure. Lee extends the mediation of this reflection to both the visual and the acoustic level of the film, which he correlates with one another in a unique form of rhythm. In the process, it is not the general technical history of rhythmic movement that is in the foreground but its racial dimension: the color of sound in the rhythm of images.

Jodi Brooks addresses this structure by ascribing a heightened form of audibility to the performances of black dancers in classical Hollywood musicals: "One of the peculiar side-effects of the placement, function and audibility of these dance numbers is that African-American tap dancers, while generally sidelined in a film's storyline, often seem to be the most audible dancers in the films in which they appeared."[46] Brooks justifies this heightened audibility, on the one hand, with the basic scarcity value of black characters in classical Hollywood cinema and, in addition, with a special form of physical performance that is achieved by staging black dance as a physical spectacle. In fact, Spike Lee accentuates the dance numbers throughout BAMBOOZLED with a specific type of staging. All of the minstrel show interludes were filmed on 16mm, whereas the rest of the film was shot on digital MiniDV camcorders. Unmistakable in sight and sound, the minstrel performances stick out from the narration surrounding them: not only the colors of the stage costumes and decorations seem brighter, more unreal, more penetrating, the film's soundtrack also brings the dance numbers to the fore. All of the background noises are cut out when the dancers take the stage; no unwanted movement seems to exist beyond dance steps: as soon as the dance begins, everything else in the picture becomes silent and immobile. While the film's frame narrative implies realistic mobility in the shots from the mobile hand camera, the "New Millennium Minstrel Show"'s static shots seem to resemble a strictly choreographed, indeed almost compulsory movement. In this context, minstrel show reveals itself as a continuum whose inalterable structure dictates the immobility of the movement. The tapping generates beats that the film seems to organize itself around; the traditional movement of minstrel shows produces the film's movement, which appropriates and continues the prescribed pattern. The powerful effect of the model on the image seems unbroken – until

46 Ibid., 367.

one moment, when Lee again showcases the medium of the rhythm, the possibility of a rupture. It is the sequence that shows Manray's last appearance on the TV show; this time, however, not in the familiar habitus of "Mantan" but as the uncostumed Manray, who shouts out his protest against the corrupt television regime and dances in front of the cameras.

Of particular importance in this context is the fact that the critique is articulated in the form of a rhythmic dance. This dance acts not only as a marker of the crisis situation in the narrative; it also comments on the rhythmic structure that simulates the minstrel tradition and the practice of blackface in classical Hollywood cinema – a structure that Manray seems to subdue in its own exaggeration. This is made by apparent by an ecstatic tap dance whose escalating dynamics is in danger of shaking up the image itself. Jodi Brooks analyzes this moment as follows:

> "This dance sequence is both precise and frenzied, with Manray's/Glover's body moving at such a pace that his movements appear as a series of brush strokes: the image, it seems, cannot keep up with the speed of this body and his moves seem to scar the image with gashes of colour. Performed in what seems to be (at least) quadruple time, this dance not only attempts to outstep the minstrel show's cooning beat but also to blast it asunder."[47]

The sequence described by Brooks is introduced by a mock breakdown that the film replicates in three short shots of the same content: Manray's body is show falling to the ground, first in a yellow, then in a blue, and lastly in a red tint. If the movement of the clicking tap steps can be understood as mimicking the movement of frames through a projector, as Brooks suggests, then Manray's last jerking dance points to a flicker effect that causes the projected image to tremble and shake. In the collapse of the body, the image, and the image body, then, lies simultaneously the collapse of the system – an attempt that must fail because the system, as the film shows us, cannot be knocked off balance by such a brief irritation. It is able to recover and regenerate in order to then come out of the moment of rupture all the more strongly.

This is evinced by a further movement that is superimposed onto the film's images as a structuring element: it is the movement that closes the film and does not allow itself to be suppressed in the closing credits. Through an uncanny animation of toy figures, their mechanical movement strikingly visualizes the unquenchable driving force of racist image production. Spike Lee

47 Ibid., 372.

highlights this connection when he breathes new life into the inanimate material of the tin and porcelain toys – and he does this not only by incorporating the static figures into moving film images, but he does this also with a ghost-like process of its own, which again saliently stages the motif of the revenant as the living dead. After Manray's execution, a sequence is included in which the puppets are freed from their rigidity and move toward Delacroix. Delacroix's trepidation about Manray's murder, which has just been shown on TV, is commented on with a close-up on one of the toys, whose unmoving face suddenly takes on a malicious grin. It is the so-called "Jolly Nigger Bank," a piggy bank in the form of a black figure, who, with a lever, transfers coins from its outstretched hand into the grotesquely wide-open mouth. Smirking and rattling, the figure moves closer to Delacroix, who, in a frantic outburst of helplessness, attempts to knock down all the figures off the shelves and destroy them.[48] But his desperate outcries of "Stop it! Leave me alone!" are not able to counter the power of the collection of images that he himself has assembled – once begun, the movements continue unabated all the way to the end credits, where the rolling eyes and twitching arms and legs of the toy dolls are perpetuated as an endless form of automatism.

The mediation of an automated sequence of motion through the medium of cinematography represents a marked moment of reflection. Spike Lee's

48 This sequence is noticeably similar to a scene from Ralph Ellison's novel *The Invisible Man* (1947). There, it is the nameless narrator who destroys a grotesque blackface piggy bank, a "cast-iron figure of a very black, red-lipped and widemouthed Negro" (Ralph Ellison, *The Invisible Man*, (New York: Vintage 1952 [1947]), 320). Since it is not his property, the next day he tries to inconspicuously throw the pieces away – but he fails every time he tries to. First, a woman forbids him to throw away his garbage in her garbage cans, then he is followed two blocks by a man who thinks that he lost the bundle of shards that he left behind and is trying to return it to him. Every attempt to destroy the odious image, and rid himself of it, must fail because the tradition of blackface is a stubborn companion that is not easily repressed. This is further shown in other parts of the novel, such as when the "invisible man" observes how his black colleague, Tod Clifton, is selling dancing sambo dolls on the street – every one of them an uncanny figure, "which some mysterious mechanism was causing to move up and down in a loose-jointed, shoulder-shaking, infuriating sensuous motion" (Ibid., 432). As the "invisible man" finds out, even the most repulsive symbol of degradation cannot be repressed; it even shows up where it would have to be decisively rejected – within the black community. Both motifs are presented as alienating quotations in Spike Lee's BAMBOOZLED, where the reference to the dangerous effects of images that keep racism alive is, so to speak, transported along with it.

racially contoured images of automata associate the mechanical movement of the blackface tradition with a rhythm that turns out to be a deadly form of animation. For, on the one hand, the minstrel show means the death of the individual, and, on the other hand, it means a type of eternity that is achieved by constant repetition. It is therefore only consequential that the last images in the film are populated by mechanical figures – for they represent a sequence of movements that does not tolerate any interruption, a sequence of movements, which, once set in motion, expands as an inalterable functional mechanism.

The dynamics of this automatism in the course of American film history is shown directly before the end credits – in the aforementioned montage of film and cartoon excerpts that present the loaded image values as an inextinguishable eternity. What is remarkable here is that the clips are not sorted chronologically or according to genre but that they are arranged by movement: in this way, the sequence of subcomponents from sound and silent films, television shows, and cartoon series show a structure that have a stable rhythm. Furthermore, the images are held together by a similar motif: twitching dance movements are followed by devouring mouths, followed by wide-open eyes, then a broad grin, and finally a gesture of subjugation that is repeated several times, which is articulated as an incessantly servile "Yes, sir" and "Yes, ma'am." The rhythmized violence that closes out the film is thus to be understood as a gesture that reanimates and therefore updates the racism inherent in the image.

For Spike Lee, the question of racial identity is linked to the question of how to go about contouring and calibrating the racial image. In the process, he refers to the dangers and to the costs that are connected to the flow of racist images. The central focus is Lee's attitude toward degrading and defamatory modes of presentation, which finds an important point of reference in the formation of the minstrel show. The hegemony of the white entertainment industry – Lee clearly shows this – is based on the production of antagonistic images that act out the heritage of minstrel show in the form of a disciplinary mechanism. Pierre Delacroix's complicity within this exercise of power is not presented as a liberating moment of transgression but as a repeated confirmation of racial difference, which solidifies and corroborates existing boundaries. The marking of such a boundary with methods of visual discipline is a type of appropriation of power that is only achieved by violence and terror and that entails the agonizing death of the individual. For the reanimation of defamatory gestures and movements proves to be parasitic to the degree that

it is able to take possession of foreign bodies and update traditional forms of humiliation with media mechanisms of transmission. Spike Lee's BAMBOOZLED shows how the process of producing racist images continues in a reflection on relations of movement. In doing so, the evocative power of the images sheds light on its own figurations and rhythmizations – and it is presented thereby as a dynamic whose impact in reference to the formation of racial identity has a lingering resonance.