



Until You See the Whites of Their Eyes

Brett Bailey's *Exhibit B* and the Consequences
of Staging the Colonial Gaze

—MEGAN LEWIS

In this world of unequal power, in which various hegemonic orders try to convince us that one nation, one race, one gender, one sexual preference, one religion, one ideology, one cultural framework is superior to all others, is it really defensible to insist that the arts should be unshackled from social agendas?

BRETT BAILEY, 2014 WORLD THEATRE DAY MESSAGE

The title of this chapter draws upon a common military command used during the eighteenth century and made popular at the Battle of Bunker Hill during the American Revolution. Embedded in this adage are the dual notions of combat and proximity, of being close enough in war to know who one is shooting, as well as the suggestion of whiteness and sight, or white-sightedness. We are at a moment in history that demands that whiteness pay for its past and present sins. As a system of privilege based on fictional difference that often refuses to acknowledge its own construction, whiteness functions predominantly as an invisible, unmarked norm that has been naturalized as the default category of existence. This is particularly true in the global north, where to maintain its power, whiteness requires forgetting. Whiteness is a machine, what Melissa Steyn calls an “assemblage of practices and affective formations,” and the machine is lubricated with “epistemologies of ignorance.”¹ In other words, for whiteness to remain in power, we must forget that it is there, we must train

ourselves not to see it, or to only see the world *whitely*. Theater—as a space and a practice—can be one way of engaging and examining whiteness critically and working through “how we look at art artifacts” as Mike Sell suggests.² But what happens when a white artist—and a white South African man at that—attempts to address the sins of the past in contemporary Europe? South African theatre-maker Brett Bailey did exactly that with his performance installation *Exhibit B*, which is aimed at interrogating empire and addressing the European legacy of whiteness and its relationship with Africa.³ *Exhibit B* is Bailey’s multiyear performance installation,⁴ framed as an ethnographic exhibition, that explores the racist (il)logic and violence of the colonial era and particularly the European framing of the Other. What did Bailey ask us to see in *Exhibit B*, when he invited us to “have a good look at difference?” Who were included in that assumed “us”? And what were the protesters who shut down his show in Fall 2014 at the Barbican in London seeing differently, not seeing, or only willing to see?

The story of how this work of art—aimed at exposing racism in the European past and present—ended up being censored raises several important questions and provocations within our post- and neocolonial condition about agency, definitions of activism, and racially charged performance. And it registers the potentials and pitfalls of representation, questions of freedom of expression and censorship, and the stakes and politics of social media and journalism in the 24-hour news machine. The dueling claims over this controversial work register the racialized tensions that continue to haunt Europe and Africa, particularly, and our larger world in general.

So much attention has been paid to the protests of *Exhibit B* that the performances themselves have been lost in the fray. A quick internet search of Bailey’s name brings up the *Exhibit B* controversy immediately, and this digital record has become the central story and assumed final truth about the piece.⁵ This provocative piece of work demands deeper analysis, and thus, in the first half of this essay, I position *Exhibit B* within the trajectory of Bailey’s twenty-year body of work and map the installation in some detail to explore what Bailey means by “having a good look at difference.” In my analysis, I suggest that *Exhibit B* is an artistic intervention that dredges up painful scenarios of the colonial past to shed light on contemporary racism and xenophobia and to underscore the difficulty and necessity of the act of witnessing another person’s humanity in a world divided by racial fictions. In the second half, I investigate the ways *Exhibit B* tested the limits of racially charged artistic expression in contemporary Europe through the protests waged against it by Sara Myers and other activists and its ultimate censorship at the Barbican in the fall of 2014. I explore what this performance offers to conversations around the stakes of representation: who has the right, and the responsibility, to represent? on behalf of whom? and

who is addressed, or omitted, in such representations? And I map how whiteness haunts *Exhibit B* and its creator and question if, and how, white artists—and whiteness itself—can ever defy their own hegemony.

“Having a Good Look at Difference”

Exhibit B is structured as an ethnological cabinet of curiosities, looking backward to the practice of human displays in the nineteenth century, when African bodies were framed by their European exhibitors as strange, unfamiliar, and exotic and were imagined as dehumanized objects to be gazed upon with wonder, disgust, lust, and scientific curiosity. These historic scenarios and practices, which Bernth Lindfors⁶ terms “ethnological show business,” included: the Khoisan woman Sara Baartman from South Africa, billed as the “Hottentot Venus,” who was paraded through salons and displayed as the “missing link” in the evolutionary chain between human beings and apes in London and Paris in the early nineteenth century. A *village nègre*, an African village of four hundred people, was installed at the 1889 Parisian World’s Fair for Europeans to gaze upon. In 1904, at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis, Missouri, a *kraal* composed of South Africans from varying ethnic affiliations, but blanketed with the title “Kaffirs,”⁷ was on display as Boer War generals reenacted battles on horseback and in ox wagons. And in 1906, Mbuti pygmy, Ota Benga, from the Kasai River, Congo Free State, was displayed at the Bronx Zoo in a cage in the Monkey House with Dohong the orangutan and an African grey parrot, a staging choice that positions him within social Darwinism and its associated discourses of racial difference.⁸ The practice of human zoos—and the systems of representation they engendered and leveraged—was imbricated in a larger colonial discourse that justified the subjugation of Africans, the plunder of the continent’s resources, and the superiority of European (white) privilege.

So what occurs when the relationship of spectator and spectacle is itself made strange in the twenty-first century, asking audience members to examine the white-sightedness of privilege and oppression and to “take a good look at difference,” as *Exhibit B* does? “The dim chambers of our collective imagination,” writes Bailey, “are haunted by twisted representations of racial Otherness: the violent, sexualized barbarian; the scientific curiosity; the submissive victim; the Master’s property. These silent stereotypes continue to energize degrading, dehumanizing systems such as Apartheid, the one that I grew up in.”⁹ *Exhibit B* is an exploration of the racist systems of representation that undergirded colonialism in Africa, but Bailey says its focus is on the increasingly xenophobic and

racist policies of the European Union toward African immigrants today. Such policies “evolved from the scientifically legitimized and state-sanctioned racism of the late 19th century,” Bailey says. “[They] do not exist in historical isolation.” Bailey describes *Exhibit B* as “a series of installations, featuring performers who identify themselves as black [who] present a catalogue of the atrocities that were committed—and concealed—by European powers in Africa in the name of ‘civilization.’ It commemorates the men and women whose dignity was stripped away in this process.”¹⁰

Brett Bailey has been making iconoclastic theatre in South Africa since 1996.¹¹ He is known for his large-scale Dionysian installations involving sensory immersion, spectacle, ritual, and trance that the late John Matshikiza described as a kind of “collective possession, dancing on the edge of a reckless madness, but finally opening a door to the possibility of a kind of collective catharsis.”¹² Daniel Larlham describes the conventions of these large-scale performances as “site-specific stagings using semicircular hay-bale seating; burning herbs and lighted torches that create an atmosphere of multisensory stimulation; song, dance, and percussion overlaying and driving the play’s action; actors whose faces and seminaked bodies are often smeared with gray-white pigment (sparkling associations with Xhosa initiates, European mimes, and the stone visages of Eastern statuary).”¹³ In his evolution as an artist, recently Bailey has tightened the scale of his work, creating more Apollonian performance installations that facilitate an encounter between a single audience member and the performance she or he experiences. Bailey’s earlier work emphasized theatre as a communal space in which he attempted to create crossings of the old borders of the apartheid era that still haunted the South African socialscape after the 1994 transition to democracy and to engage diverse audiences together in rituals of community that allowed them to see, hear, and relate to one another. But since then, Bailey has shifted away from collective Dionysian events to audiences of one. For Jacques Rancière, the collective power of theatre lies not in its collection of multiple bodies that become a unified whole but rather in the individualized responses, experiences, and translations that audience members discover in the work. He emphasizes the spectator’s agency in his or her “power to translate in their own way what they are looking at.”¹⁴

The shift in Bailey’s work from large communal ritual to intimate audiences of one happened in 2009 with *Terminal*. The performance, which I saw at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown that July, took place nightly in and around the abandoned train terminal and its tracks at the edge of the city of Grahamstown, the ruins of the desecrated 1820s settlers¹⁵ cemetery, and the township of Joza, where the majority of the town’s black and brown South Africans

reside. According to Bailey, "The Grahamstown Railway Terminal was built in 1878 on this boundary line between Us and Them. It sits directly below the Settler cemetery—an inter-zone between Here and There. The last train pulled out of the station in February 2009, and the empty platforms of this dead end, like the vandalized graves nearby, are haunted by memories trapped in airless limbo."¹⁶

Audiences of thirty-five people at a time were admitted to the waiting room of the old terminal building, where we waited to be randomly called, one by one, to begin our journeys. As we waited, we read the following admonishment, printed on a large placard in the waiting room: "Somehow, in the popular consciousness of white South Africa, the 1820 Settlers—imported from Britain to provide a colonizing buffer between the amaXhosa and the Cape Colony—have managed to retain a butter-wouldn't-melt-in-the-mouth innocence. As if they were any less rapacious, opportunistic, violent and bigoted than the other 'civilizers' that have used blades, bibles and brute arrogance to shatter the despised societies and cultures of indigenes, to annex their land, and to enrich themselves off the fragments. As if they had little to do with the history that has fouled up our country."¹⁷ My English surname suddenly felt like a burning brand on my identity. Upon being called up and entering the dark train platform, I felt disoriented as my eyes adjusted to the darkness; my vision was immediately engaged as part of the performance. I also felt somewhat uneasy, as I did not know what to expect and was left all alone to experience an event in the darkness of an abandoned part of town that as a (white) (South African-American) (woman) I would never visit alone, especially at night. Then, suddenly I felt a small, cold, rough hand sliding into mine, its little fingers gently grasping my much bigger hand and I turned to discover a small boy, dressed in tatty clothes and a sweater with holes in it, putting his finger to his lips to remind me to remain silent.

In the hands of this small guide, I journeyed "across the tracks," and out of my literal and figurative comfort zones, to parts of Grahamstown I had never before encountered. Along the journey, I witnessed a series of Bailey's signature tableaux: scenarios of complex and troubling racial and sexual dynamics and provocative visions of South African politics, often set into corners of the train station and on the tracks themselves, behind security gates, and beside grave-stones in the cemetery. In one scenario, a woman dressed in the standard maid's uniform so ubiquitous across South Africa, with pantyhose over her face that both blurred her identity and was suggestive of some type of criminality, stood at an ironing board deliberately burning a starched white shirt. In another, a pile of newspapers and other rubbish came to life as the little boy guided me across the train tracks, revealing the discarded human beings who occupy the outskirts

and fringes of this colonial city of white privilege. On a gravestone in the cemetery, I saw an old black man cradle an old white man, rocking him as if he were a baby. And in a gutted old building, a man dressed in British colonial military uniform sat gloating over the collapsed body of a black worker, electrical wires dangling from the wall above him.

My guide and I never exchanged a single word; our hands became our system of communication. He would squeeze or pull my hand, advertently, to show me the direction we should walk. When I was startled by an image, I squeezed his hand and we made eye contact. At the end of the event, my guide disappeared into the night as silently and suddenly as he had emerged on the train platform at the start of the performance. I was stunned and felt abandoned, and I sat on the front steps of the train terminal and wept. I wept for the loss of this little anonymous child's company, wanting—as a mother and as an audience participant—to thank him and acknowledge his individual humanity. I wept because the images I had seen brought up all manner of shame I carry as a white South African born under apartheid. I wept cathartically, releasing the tension in my body that came from being out in the cold and darkness on unsure footing in frightening places. And I wept in gratitude for having experienced this work, for being moved as a spectator—physically, emotionally, intellectually—to consider the history, dynamics, hierarchies, and inequities of the town of Grahamstown, a microcosm of the larger South African social field. I became, in Rancière's terms, an emancipated spectator, a spectator who “makes his poem with the poem that is performed in front of him. She participates in the performance if she is able to tell her own story about the story which is in front of her.”¹⁸

Bailey carefully selected the site for *Terminal*—the abandoned Grahamstown train station that marks the dividing line between the town's black and white residents—as he did for each new iteration of *Exhibit B*. Bailey's sites augment the meaning of the piece and simultaneously abolish the traditional relationship, or sight lines, between the space of the performers (stage) and the place of the audience (auditorium). Daniel Sack, in his *Howlround* review of *Exhibit B* at Avignon, describes how the space of the Église des Célestins, “a church without an altar, just the skeleton of faith,” added to his experience of the installation. *Exhibit B*, he writes, “forces us to come face to face with the history not only of specific events and genocides, but of spaces and institutions, traditions of representations. By presenting the piece in a church, Bailey prompts an elegiac response while at the same time requiring our recognition of the fact that the imposition of a Western system of belief is inevitably intertwined with the crimes committed against these people in that distant colony.”¹⁹ In addition to

the church Sack describes, the school in which I first saw *Exhibit A* in Grahamstown, the Playfair Library in Edinburgh, and the countless other spaces *Exhibit B* has performed in are all institutions of Western culture and hegemony that frame and speak to the performance. At the Playfair Library Hall in Edinburgh, for example, each scenario was framed within an alcove presided over by white marble busts of figures like Charles Darwin, David Hume, Alexander Graham Bell, Arthur Conan Doyle, and William Wordsworth. The busts cast their lifeless, marble gaze over the scene, and whiteness ghosted through the space. Their lifeless yet ubiquitous gaze spoke to the white-sightedness of many Europeans, whose culture and identity are built on colonialism and who are shielded by their privilege to not have to see racism in its current incarnations. Simultaneously, the whites of their marble eyes “busted through” consciousness, making Europe’s racialized history explicit for contemporary audiences and allowing the flawed representational practices of the past to shed light on continued racist practices in the present.

I first saw *Exhibit A* in Grahamstown in July 2012 and then *Exhibit B* in 2014 in the Playfair Library Hall at the University of Edinburgh with my students. The conceit of the piece is to “gaze into the hidden Curiosity Cabinets of European racism”²⁰ and to connect past practices of human displays with today’s increasingly xenophobic policies of the European Union toward African immigrants. Audience members are allowed into the space at staggered intervals, one at a time, and move from tableau to tableau at their own pace.²¹ At the end of the exhibition space, audience members have a chance to reflect on the performance.²² Several tableaux vivant depict and embody scenes that look backward in time to frame static ethnographic snapshots of the past, scenarios of colonial violence, genocide, and degradation. As the installation progresses, the scenarios become about contemporary segregation, deportations, and ongoing racism toward Africans in Europe. *Exhibit B* turns the tables on the historic power dynamics of (white) European spectators consuming (black and brown) African bodies as the live performers look back at the present audience (one person at a time) in a strategically unnerving gaze reversal.

Exploding the logic of the museum, audiences at *Exhibit B*, who are usually disciplined to visually consume inanimate objects and dioramas behind rope cordons or glass barriers are instead included as one of the media on the museum placard of each tableau. The fourth wall is eliminated and the diorama or curiosity cabinet comes to life, locking its gaze with you as its witness (figure 1). The power in this scenario is the live body, the living, breathing human being who makes constant eye contact with you. Bailey’s singular direction to the

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actors is to never let the audience member out of their sight. Audiences are asked to gaze into the whites of the performers' eyes, and they, in turn, look back at the spectators with a powerful, unrelenting gaze.

It is in this exchange—uncomfortable, awkward, intimate, sometimes shame-etched—that the performance really takes place. A relationship between object and subject, between the actor representing a past scenario and that actor's present presence, between spectator and performer, is open for negotiation. The live bodies in this scenario are powerful agents in their own right, looking upon us as spectators and wielding their formidable gazes over us as their objects of visual pleasure and scrutiny. *Exhibit B* underscores the necessity—and the difficulty—of the act of witnessing another person's humanity. If we can look



Figure 1. María Liliana Caicedo Valencia returns the gaze in *The Missing Link*. Photo credit: V. Zalaquett.



Figure 2. Danny Muboti in "Origin of the Species." Photo credit: Anke Schuettler.

at difference, really see one another, *Exhibit B* suggests, we can work toward dismantling systems of oppression and privilege.

The first thing I experienced as I entered the front door of the Gadra Matric School in Grahamstown was a hallway filled with taxidermied animals: rooibok and wildebeest heads mounted on the walls, a full-size warthog and a complete duiker on the floor level. Running the literal gauntlet of stuffed and displayed animal specimens, I turned to look through a doorway on my right and encountered a stunning tableau: a scene reminiscent of a colonial-era ethnographic postcard or cabinet of curiosities aptly titled "Origin of the Species" (figure 2). An African couple (Asanda Rilityana and Andrew Mugenyi) stood

nearly naked within a frame of colonial memorabilia, including a caricatured blackface doll, nineteenth-century maps and travelogues, a baboon's skull, and several stuffed antelope heads. A museum placard and velvet rope cordoned off the "exhibit" from me as a spectator. The placard read: "Origin of the Species. Trophies Brought to Europe from the Congo Free State. Mixed media: maps, various trophies (antelope heads, 2 Pygmies, cultural artefacts), vitrines [glass display cases], anthropological paraphernalia, observer/s."²³

Wearing headbands, wristbands, and anklets made of yellow measuring tape—and tagged, as objects in a museum might be, with specimen numbers—the living performers actively locked their gaze on each individual audience member who came into the room, watching us as much as they were being watched. In *looking backward* to frame familiar static snapshots of the past, *Exhibit A* (and later *Exhibit B*) turned the tables on the historic power dynamics of white European spectators consuming black African bodies by *looking back* at us as audience members. This reversal of the usual spectator-spectacle relationship was disarming. Brent Meersman, in his review of the Vienna performance, describes how "it detonates the status quo of passive African victim presented sympathetically to the liberal European patron of the arts."²⁴ Bailey's installation offered to potentially emancipated spectators what Rancière calls "the spectacle of something strange, unusual, which stands as an enigma and demands that [s/he] investigate the reason for that strangeness."²⁵

Bailey says that he designed *Exhibit B* for "European audiences, to confront them with a history that they have hidden and forgotten."²⁶ He charged his performers with a powerful action as they enact their individual tableau: to never let the person watching them out of their sight. Thus, the audience (the "observer/s" in the list of media on the museum placard of each tableau) becomes the object of study. Whereas the traditional, gendered relationship of the gaze places the power in the (usually male) observer over (she) who is looked at, the live bodies in this scenario are powerful agents in their own right, looking upon us as spectators and wielding their formidable gazes over us as their objects of visual pleasure and scrutiny. Sack describes this dynamic as "the brilliance and the vertiginous terror of Bailey's piece. I find it impossible to turn away," he writes, "and yet absolutely pressing that I do so."²⁷

I, too, found myself simultaneously unable to look, because the piece's dramaturgy required me (as a white South African) to gaze upon black bodies as a colonial consumer might. Simultaneously, I felt obligated to make eye contact with the actors before me, to acknowledge their humanity and presence in the space and perhaps also to absolve myself of the shame the piece triggered for me. As I gazed and looked, my (decidedly white) body registered a fraction of

the exposure, dehumanization, and scrutiny that Baartman, Benga, and others might have felt in the nineteenth century. I become acutely aware of my race, of the burden of European history, and my accountability—as a person of European descent—for the ignominy of the practice of human displays. And, as I processed these emotional and intellectual reactions within my own body, I became aware of how this performance also invited me not just to “look at difference” as Bailey suggests but also to “perform” a negotiation between myself and the performers in each scene.

In the second room on the upper level of the installation, I encountered a black woman (Portia Memani), naked from the waist up, sitting with her back facing me on a wrought-iron bed. In a scene based on a photograph from the estate of Hermann Schlüter held by the Braunschweigisches Landesmuseum, Memani sat tied to a bedpost, a large iron shackle around her neck. On the bedspread was a musket. On the wall of this bedroom were more taxidermied animal heads, a mirror, and framed images of colonial era scenes of rows of shackled Africans. The placard for this installation read “A Place in the Sun. Quarters of An Officer of the German Colonial Forces, Windhoek, 1906.”²⁸ A single chair was placed facing the installation for audience members to sit on and from which to gaze upon the scene.

Here, the negotiation between me as audience member and Memani as performer became more active. She refused her gaze to me as I watched her. She sat with her back turned to me; yet she could watch me in the mirror on the wall. When I shifted in my chair to seek out her image in the mirror, she retreated. Once I pulled back, she engaged me in the mirror once again. Playing a kind of provocative hide-and-seek, she seduced me with her eyes, inviting me to seek her out and follow her tantalizing game. Countering what film theorist Laura Mulvey reminds us is the gendered dynamic of the gaze, where women are positioned as the “bearer[s] of meaning, not [the] maker[s] of meaning,”²⁹ Memani held the power over this scene, she possessed agency, even if its content was about female exploitation.

Placed in the voyeur's seat, as if I were the German officer looking upon her naked flesh, I simultaneously attempted to apologize with my eyes for the horrors of the past and to communicate my empathy for her in this scene. The scene was clearly framed as one of sexual exploitation—marked by her nakedness, the bedroom setting, and the instruments of enslavement and violence that surround her. Bailey himself describes the opposing tensions inherent in the piece: “I wanted to create images where you are seduced by beauty—you want to look—but the content is so horrific you also don't want to look. You don't know where to look.”³⁰ In my engagement with Memani, she taught me where to look,

and I had to discover a way to look that moved us toward an unspoken understanding and helped us work through the deeply troubling power dynamics of this scenario. We negotiated the she-who-is-looked-at and I-the-one-looking gaze back and forth between us, in silence, with only our eyes. Rather than being a field in which a spectacle is on display for a viewer, the crux of the performance in *Exhibit B* was what occurred between us, in this negotiated dance we did with our eyes.

Thus, the dynamics of *Exhibit B* created a space of exchange, of dialogue (without words), of potential between spectator and performer. A mutually negotiated conversation about power, looking, racialized bodies, and spectatorship took place in silence. Sack describes the profound pull of the performance but also remarks on how its construction asked him to perform.³¹ Such a possibility exists, as spectators may feel obligated to perform their remorse, sorrow, or shame, especially in the extreme intimacy of the space between themselves and one other human body—or, to perform in the presence of other audience members who they pass or encounter as they journey through the installation. I, too, became acutely aware of my own performance in the space. I found myself caught between the privacy of my tears (brought about by emotions of shame, profound sadness for the human condition, anger at the past, disgust at the continual exploitation of Africans in the present, awe at the beauty of the artists and artistry before me) and the desire to demonstrate remorse, to connect with the live human performers in the intimacy of the room with me. Following Rancière, the poem I wove with the poem of *Exhibit B* was a deeply personal one, woven from my own history as a white South African, a performance scholar concerned with unpacking whiteness, a postcolonial historian, a mother. And I imagine that every individual who experiences the piece weaves his or her own stories from and with it as well. Contrary to Guy Debord's formulation of spectacle, in which spectacle alienates the self, this performance asked me to confront myself and my own position, beliefs, and discomforts. Rather than alienate me from myself through a seductive or soporific display that rendered me passive, *Exhibit B* activated my vision and consciousness, asking me to reflect deeply and inwardly.

Indeed, Bailey intended the piece to provoke and his highly controlled structuring of it is designed to create a confrontation between bodies in the present around shameful issues of the past. He manipulates the encounter, setting up a dialectic in which spectator and performer come face-to-face with each other to negotiate painful realities of the past and present and in which, as Sack points out, "feeling could not sufficiently encompass what should be felt."³² Bailey is also candid about his own sense of shame as a white South African,

descended from colonials who most likely were slave owners and raised under apartheid. "I can't ignore that that's part of my cultural DNA," he says. Bailey also is clear that he did not make the work to shame people. "No, not at all," he says, "I made this work to excavate....I wasn't out to deliberately create images of shame, except a lot of the stuff I came across shamed me and then I tried to find the images that articulated that."³³ His provocation—what he calls the theatrical "trick"—is the strategic reversal of the gaze, so that audiences see "reflected in the glasses of the display cases their own reality."³⁴

From a scene of sexual consumption of black African women, the dramaturgy of *Exhibit A* in Grahamstown next shifted to a scene of scientific consumption of black African bodies. In two rooms, the Herero and Nama genocides were the historical contexts for the performance. The program described the experiences of indigenous people during the early twentieth century: "In the forced-labour camps set up after the war, rape and beatings were routine, and thousands more Herero and Nama died of disease, exposure, starvation and exhaustion. The attempted annihilation of these people is acknowledged as the first genocide of the 20th Century."³⁵ The beautiful harmonies of a chorus of voices drew me into a room that contained four white plinths lined up before a bank of windows. In "Dr. Fischer's Wunderkammer (Cabinet of Curiosities)," four Namibian singers (Avril Nuuyoma, Chris Nekongo, Marcellinus Swartbooi, and Melvin Du Pont) whose bodies were entirely contained by each plinth, save their heads which were painted shiny black, formed a chorus of disembodied faces. As replicas of historic images of Nama decapitations hung above them over the windows, the Namibian choir (who were trained by Swartbooi, a Windhoek-based composer) sang traditional songs of lamentation in Nama, Otjiherero, Oshiwambo, Tswana, and isiXhosa. The placard for this scenario referred to Dr. Fischer's experiments and how his practice of the theories of racial hygiene in German South West Africa "laid the ideological foundations for the justification of the Holocaust."³⁶ Bailey also reminded his audiences of the long legacy of European exportation and exploitation of African resources—natural, mineral, and human—telling us that "tens of thousands of skulls of the ancestors of the people of the free world are still held in the underground vaults of the museums and universities of their former colonial masters."³⁷

Here, witnessing, and experiencing aurally, the four singing heads became an exercise in terrible beauty. The exquisite harmonies of the voices acted as a soothing balm, but one that never allowed for catharsis, for the ever-present archival photographs of decapitated Nama heads literally hung over the scene, their sunken, lifeless eyes a reminder of the human lives extinguished in the name of racist science. The strange enigma (Rancière) of this scenario lies in the

tension between beauty and horror, between the exquisite sound of the choir's voices and the subject matter of the scene, between the disembodied heads of the actors (that are intact live bodies) and the dismembered heads of real bodies, real Nama people killed during the extinctions. And even when the aural promised to soothe, the visual remained searing and disquieting, as the live voices of the singers conjured up those no longer living.

In a second room, a woman (Siphokazi Matinyane) wearing a brown sheepskin cloak *kaross* and an ochre-colored headdress sat within a small enclosure demarcated by barbed wire. In her right hand, she held a human skull, in her left, a shard of pottery. Across the wire hung a German sign reading "*Achtung!*" and at her feet was a large cast-iron cooking pot. The placard for this room, "Civilizing the Natives: Domestic Scene (1905–1908)," read: "Women in the concentration camps of German South West Africa had to boil the decapitated heads of fellow prisoners and scrape them clean with shards of glass. The camps were set up following the extermination of tens of thousands of Hereros and Namas by German colonial forces. The skulls were exported to European research institutes, where they were measured and analysed to 'prove' the theories of European racial supremacy that legitimised colonial policies."³⁸ The combination of this terrible information and Matinyane's fierce stare, never letting go of her onlooker's gaze, made us as audience members look the past directly in the eye. Through her resolute, accusatory stare, her scenario in the installation shifted the stakes for African bodies beyond the humiliation of being put on display to the brutal violation and humiliation of those bodies.

In these two scenarios, *Exhibit B* examined the history of racism and the European empires built on the backs, and at the expense, of Africans. A profoundly moving, ethically savvy critique that used the power of live bodies within static frames, Bailey's installation questioned the inherited narratives and cultural stories (myths) reinforced for centuries by colonialism, those "sly bullies" as Naomi Iizuka reminds us, "constructed to persuade, to seduce, to silence the competition in the moment of the telling."³⁹

Bailey's installation looks back to a time when "Europe's powers scrambled for African colonies, and her scientists formulated...pseudo-scientific racial theories"⁴⁰ to justify their exploits across the continent. And through the powerful presence of live performers, *Exhibit B* underscores how vital, yet difficult, it is to witness another person's humanity.

If, as Naomi Iizuka suggests, "making theatre is the act of remembering," then I argue that Bailey's intervention functions as an attempt at *righting* the wrongs of the past. His performance *rite*—a solemn communion between live performers and those who witness them—facilitates a remembering of the past

(and a re-membering of the mainly anonymous African bodies displayed across the nineteenth century). Starting in Europe in 2010 and then “returning” to South Africa in 2012, Bailey’s *Exhibit B* revisits the pathway of European conquest into Africa and then reverses the direction of power. Within post-1994, democratic South Africa, *Exhibit B* resonates as what Jason Kehe calls “a chilling, challenging exercise in seeing and being seen.”⁴¹ For Brent Meersman, it “subversively turns exotic spectacle on its head.”⁴² Kehe notes in his review that while the installation debuted in Europe (in Vienna’s Museum of Ethnology in 2010) for predominantly European audiences where “the point was clear: a searing indictment of colonial sins,” its transfer to South Africa “muddies that message. Now it’s Africa on Africa, implying—possibly—an even darker implication. Who’s the spectator, and what’s the spectacle?”⁴³ Bailey adjusted the performance for South Africa; in particular, he removed the installation about Baartman called “Sara.” He told me he did this out of respect for her and for the people of the Eastern Cape, not wanting to attempt to imitate or represent her in her motherland, after her remains had been repatriated and buried in Hankey, only 200 kilometers from Grahamstown. He reiterated that the piece was designed for European eyes, where the “Sara” scenario would mean differently in the site of her original display.

Meeting several of the actors after the show in Grahamstown, I listened as they talked candidly about how they draw motivation in their performance from their personal experiences of racism. Bailey has also explained how they developed backstories to each of the scenarios, which helped the actors (all of whom are locals where the installation occurs) focus their performances.⁴⁴ The performers in Grahamstown also discussed how different audience members reacted to them. “White people show they are sorry, you see their emotions,” company coordinator and performer Luvoyo Yanta told me. “That’s not so hard for me,” he said. “I can understand that my standing there makes them feel these things.” But for him, it was fellow black South Africans who unsettled him. Not carrying the weight of European civilization with them into the performance space, black audiences “judge and stare. And they don’t show any emotion,” Yanta said. These exchanges mark how the performance functions in two directions: the spectators’ experiences of the actors as well as the actors’ encounters with their spectators. It also marks the differences and complexities of audiences. We are not a monolith, a generic mass of passive bodies, but rather a collection or assemblage of atomized individual consciousnesses who bring to, and take from, the spectacle our own experiences. For instance, a friend who attended the show with me felt an urgent compulsion to intervene; he said he constantly wanted to unshackle Memani from the bedpost or cut the barbed

wire that enclosed Matinyane in her horrible skull-stripping scenario. Sack felt drawn in but also that it was “imperative” that he look away, perhaps to refuse to be complicit in such a gaze. Thus, each audience member experienced the installation autonomously and individualistically. Audience here is anything but passive and unilateral: rather, it is an active exchange, bidirectional, and even reciprocal.⁴⁵ In the second half of this essay, I return to audience responses in London and Paris in 2014.

Bailey’s call to “have a good look at difference” extends from the nineteenth-century displays and maltreatment of Africans into the present. “A century after the Imperial Age,” Bailey writes in the program, “we continue to live in a world fractured by notions of Racial Difference and Otherness.”⁴⁶ Thus, while the first floor of the Gadra Matric School was focused on nineteenth-century events and evocations, the lower floor brought the stakes of dehumanization of African bodies into much closer, contemporary focus.

As I made my way down the stairs of the Gadra Matric School, I encountered “Found Object #1” (Sbo Ntshebe), a man labeled as “Congolese Immigrant,” his vital statistics and refugee status listed on a board next to him. You cannot progress through the exhibit—or through history, Bailey seems to be suggesting—without coming face-to-face, eye-to-eye, with how African immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers are treated in our contemporary world.⁴⁷ Ntshebe and I locked our gazes for a long time; we stood witnessing each other, before I moved down the stairs.

The final tableau, pointedly titled “Survival of the Fittest,” consists of a row of airplane seats and a man (Siyabonga Yafele), labeled as Aamir Ageeb from Sudan, duct-taped to the seats, his head, nose, and mouth taped as well, leaving only his eyes staring out at you. This is a horrifying image; a smothered man reduced to nothing but his panicked eyes, pleading with you. The placard gives his birth date and death date and lists the cause of death as “suffocated while resisting deportation by Bundesgrenzschutz officers on Lufthansa Flight LH 588 from Frankfurt am Main to Khartoum. The officers got off with minor charges.”⁴⁸ Thus, *Exhibit B* connects the history of human zoos, theories of racial hygiene and difference, and gruesome practices against Africans in the past to contemporary European xenophobic practices and immigration anxieties, suggesting that while we might have put the inhumane ways in which Europeans treated and imagined Africans out of our collective minds, there are still lasting impacts—real, material impacts—of that forgotten history. As Sylvie Chalaye⁴⁹ suggests, not only is our collective imaginary still framed through phantasmagorical and subconscious colonial images, but such a way of imagining the

world has real-life consequences wrought out on the bodies of African refugees like Sudanese Amir Ageeb, Angolan Jimmy Mubenga, Nigerians Joseph Ndukadu Chiakwa and Osamuyi Aikpitanhi, and countless other Africans who have died (usually from asphyxia or cardiac arrest) during forced deportations since 1991.⁵⁰ Iizuka reminds us, "In theatre, the dead are always in the room. The dead have a lot to say."⁵¹ And, in the performance installation of *Exhibit B*, it is the live performers who stand in for the dead in Bailey's powerful installation and who speak most persuasively, with their eyes, locking their gaze upon us as their witnesses, without uttering a single word.

The Limits of Racially Charged Artistic Expression

In this second half of the essay, I trace the multiple answers to a question posed by Manick Govinda: "How could a performance *about* racism, performed by black British actors who have maintained a dignified defence of the artwork, be deemed *racist* by predominantly black protesters and anti-racist activists?"⁵² The limits of racially charged artistic expression made visible by *Exhibit B* are anchored by three fundamental questions that artistic director of Border Crossings Michael Walling succinctly posed as: Who represents? Who has the right to represent? And who is being addressed in that representation?⁵³

Exhibit B tested the stakes and limits of theatre in several ways, including how social media can ignite and proliferate decontextualized misinformation, especially about racially charged issues. In August 2014, Sara Myers, who describes herself as "a Black African mother from Birmingham," started a petition on change.org calling for the Barbican Theatre to stop the "racist Exhibition 'Exhibit B - The Human Zoo'" from performing at their theatre.⁵⁴ Calling out the Barbican for "an outrageous act of complicit institutional racism" and branding *Exhibit B* an act of "mental terrorism," Myers threatened to protest outside the theatre if its management allowed the piece to be performed there. In total, 22,973 supporters added their signatures to the petition. The run in London was canceled after Myers and about two hundred protesters got into a shoving match at the Barbican doors. Police in riot gear were called in and the theatre capitulated to the protesters' anger, citing concerns over the safety of both the audience and the actors. A few weeks later, in Paris, a similar protest attempted to shutter the show at the Théâtre Gérard Philipe in Saint-Denis. Despite a judge's ruling in their favor, the performers could complete only two of the eighteen scheduled performances, effectively putting the actors out of work. The protesters never came to see the show, despite Bailey's invitations to them to experience it.

Myers started the petition after reading a preview in the *Guardian* written by John O'Mahony⁵⁵ as the play was about to open its run at the Edinburgh Festival a month earlier (where I saw it for the second time). O'Mahony framed the piece as a racially charged power game: he insinuated that Bailey was a dictatorial white director, "spouting the n-word provocatively in his clipped South African intonation" and bullying his black performers—whom O'Mahony describes as "not getting it." He opens the preview with the line: "It's the first Edinburgh rehearsal of *Exhibit B* and there's mutiny in the air." Like a giant game of telephone gone wrong, Myers was (understandably) triggered by O'Mahony's misleading article—Who wouldn't hate this Brett Bailey?—and she and her followers did not see the work, nor did they feel it necessary to do so. Myers said, "You pretty much can go online and see what it looks like.... Basically it is black people standing in subservient positions in a subservient way with cages around them and chains around their legs and they're bound and they're gagged. I don't need to really see that."⁵⁶

Operating within this breakdown in communication and understanding and relying solely on images on the internet, the petitioners saw what activist Akala described as "inert black bodies" who were "pornographically disempowered."⁵⁷ They read static images as racist without the affective experience of the live tableaux. In *Exhibit A*, we see stylized, simulated degradations of African bodies—as Bailey clarifies a "staging [of] a human zoo...not a real human zoo"⁵⁸—that ask us to look into the collective colonial past and to see its terrible power and impact. The stylization provides, for some spectators, just enough distance to be able to take in the scene without recoiling in horror or rejecting the performance and leaving. As audience members, we are tasked with translating the silent scenarios of the performers into stories and to transmute what we see into what we think and believe, reflecting on the past and the continuation of mistreatment of Africans in our contemporary world. The experience of spectatorship in Bailey's work demands action on the part of the individual members of the audience. By placing the spectator at the nucleus of the performance, rather than as an inert bystander subordinate to the action of the play onstage, *Exhibit B* shifts the responsibility for the performance—and of the content of the scenarios it depicts—onto us, the audience. We have to find a way to act ethically, to consider carefully the stakes of our gazes, of whether we look and, if so, how we look. And through these acts of looking, we can experience insights about our positions within history and about the power dynamics of the past and the present.

Because the provocative internet images were taken out of context, the protesters read them literally rather than artistically, saw racist surfaces devoid of

context, and missed the gaze reversal, which is the central conceit of this work. Bailey said, in response: "I regret that EXHIBIT B[,] a multidimensional performance piece, which has meaning in the intimate dynamic interaction between performers and spectators, has been judged on the basis of 2-dimensional photographs."⁵⁹ The piece requires liveness, two live human beings negotiating a gaze; that is *where* the performance happens. Without the experience of that gaze, the still images—which we use as archives of performance or promotional provocations—became a trap. They fixed a scenario in a moment in time and exposed the limits of intelligibility.

"The mob hysteria"⁶⁰ that the petition caused is also an example of the limits of clicktivism. Of course, twenty-two thousand people signed a petition that told them a white South African racist was putting black people in cages. Blinkered by assumptions about his whiteness and racism, they judged him without knowing his work or hearing what he had to say. Then, the media frenzy that picked up on the story helped deepen the divide. Journalists, who need to feed the twenty-four-hour news machine, eagerly "cut and paste"⁶¹ this story of yet another act of deplorable white racism, thereby perpetuating the assumptions that O'Mahony started, that Myers was triggered by, and that then twenty-two thousand people were sold. Despite the nuanced and committed way in which Bailey has worked for more than two decades in South Africa to create provocative works of performance art, twenty-two thousand people latched onto familiar narratives of white masters and black slaves, a racist white South African overlord oppressing helpless Africans.

Bailey's forthrightness and willingness to name and discuss the racist legacies into which he was born, and against which he has spent his life fighting, mean that he is often misquoted or misread as being racist, because he talks openly about racism and its power dynamics. Also, his feisty "maverick" personality—part mischievous provocateur, part blunt frankness, and driven by a perfectionist's work ethic—can also feed into misperceptions of him as dictatorial, what Michael Walling calls "the problem of the white director."⁶² Walling's question—who has the right to represent?—concerns me here. How can we—can we?—in our contemporary world where whiteness is, justifiably, being called to answer for its sins, remain open to a white artist as he explores racially charged material? Can white artists attempt to interrogate or dismantle racism? Or do we become blinded by what is assumed about white people, especially white South African men?⁶³

Walling accepts "that the horrors of colonial history and the neo-colonial present will have a different emotional impact on those people whose ancestors were slaves from those whose ancestors were slave-owners. But that does

not mean that only black people can talk about this. Indeed, I would argue that it is essential that everybody talks about it.”⁶⁴ Ethiopian British poet Lemn Sissay, who supported *Exhibit B*, asks, “Is it really racist to show the shocking facts of the past via theatrical installation?” Citing depictions of the atrocities of the Holocaust as an analog, Sissay asserts, “I am not defined by my scars but by the incredible ability to heal. And part of this healing is to know the story of oppression. These stories must be told by all to all. Like the Jewish community we may not like what we see but we can understand that it must be seen.”⁶⁵ And Bailey defends his right as a white artist to address race in his work: “Because I am a white South African who spent my first 27 years living under a detestable regime of racism—albeit on the side of privilege—may I not reflect in my work on that system? Should I restrict myself to making anodyne works that don’t challenge status quos, that don’t confront people with realities that are all too easy to leave festering in the dark?”⁶⁶

Exhibit B also raised questions about definitions of activism. Bailey sees his work as an intervention aimed at dismantling oppressive power structures, a form of performance activism (though he does not use the word “activist” to describe himself; he is an artist). Myers and the other protesters consider themselves activists whose goal it is to call out injustice where they see and experience it. The problem in the racially charged dynamic of these black protesters versus this white artist is that both sides are committed to speaking out about racism, to raising awareness about structures of oppression, and to working toward a more just world. But in this moment in history, whiteness carries too heavy a stigma to be heard and black voices are outraged after centuries of mistreatment by European colonials. So rather than share in antiracist work, which Walling says is everyone’s responsibility, the two sides stand on either side of a chasm of mistrust and misunderstanding.

I believe it is incumbent upon white artists to join artists of color in creating work that exposes systems of power, privilege, and white supremacy; in fact, I would argue that it is an imperative that whites address whiteness. *Exhibit B* was aimed at exposing whiteness, but instead, its own whiteness got in the way. Or maybe Bailey’s whiteness got in the way? He was written off based on his country of origin: “The fact that he is a white South African seems to be sufficient proof that there is something wrong with the show.”⁶⁷ And the critique leveled at him was that he used black and brown bodies to teach white audiences about the ills of the racist past. Perhaps this is the tricky stickiness of whiteness in the postcolony: that it can never exist in historical isolation and is always haunted by its own historicity. Can white artists escape the hegemony of

whiteness? Or should we, as South African philosopher Samantha Vice⁶⁸ suggests, get out of the way?

I return now to the question of “who represents?” In focusing all their attention on Bailey and his whiteness, the petitioners patently ignored the *agency of the performers* involved in the project, all of whom are black and many of whom are African immigrants to Europe. People signed the petition because they assumed Bailey to be a white taskmaster who abused his black actors, playing into an easy and familiar master-slave dialectic that the contemporary public feels righteously indignant about. Petitioners (many people of color included) assumed that the actors were ignorant puppets with no interest in the subject matter and no agency in deciding what they will or will not be involved with. Such assumptions perpetuate the age-old stereotypes held by many Westerners (and propagated through film and other media about the continent) of Africans as ahistorical savages without intellect or agency.

In response to Myers and her followers’ claims to speak for them, the Edinburgh and London performers added their own voices to the debate. One of the actors, Avril Nuuyoma, said, “This petition assumes we can’t think for ourselves. None of us have been forced to do this, and all of us can leave at any time.” In their joint statement, the performers stated explicitly, “We are not objects during the exhibition.” They explained:

In that moment when our eyes meet, we cease to be objectified and become human.

As they move through the exhibit, we watch [people] and witness anger, grief, pity, sadness, compassion. Above all, we witness a dawning of awareness. This is why we keep doing this, and would keep on doing it, if we could.

[Audiences] cry because they didn’t know what was done. They cry because they realise how it is still being done. They cry because they realise that the past impacts the present. They cry because they experienced this personally. They cry because they didn’t. Reading the pages and pages of comments from the audience left at the end of the exhibit attests to this, but we don’t need to read that. We see it in their eyes.⁶⁹

Another performer, Priscilla Adade-Helledy, articulated the personal stakes involved for her as a young black female artist. She was deeply disappointed not to be allowed to work at the Barbican, in a role she “felt real investment in...and ownership over.” “In all my experiences of racism,” she writes, “I’ve never actually had someone say to me, ‘You can’t do your art.’ We were being totally unvoiced by the people who said they were anti-racists. It was really depressing.”⁷⁰

When asked what she thought about Priscilla's claim of being silenced by another, older black woman, Myers dismissed her: "Now she knows how our ancestors felt....I didn't deny anyone's voice. I didn't shut the show down. The Barbican did that—the Barbican silenced her, not Sara Myers. We just banged drums and protested."⁷¹

Myers's instinct to question and protest what she perceived as a restaging of a human zoo is based on her lived experience—and frustrations—as a black African in Europe. And the fatigue of forever seeing depictions of abject blackness (such as the framing of Ota Benga as victim, as I discussed in the first half of the essay) also fueled the protests. For T. O. Molefe, "the piece narrows the experience of being black by depicting blackness only as suffering. And it presents this caricature of blackness and the bodies of the performers to white audiences, who can then pick apart the guilt, shame, denial or dissociation they might personally feel from being beneficiaries of and perhaps co-conspirators in racism."⁷²

What the protests ask of this piece is: Who is the assumed or ideal spectator? And what happens when the piece triggers deeply felt and suppressed anger about ongoing racism in Europe? While perhaps he intended to activate a different energy around race and racism, Bailey understands *Exhibit B* to be a "lightning rod" that conducted the anger and frustration of Africans, black people, and immigrants in Europe: "This work is...a sharp needle that pricks a skin bloated with fury, frustration and pain. The 'multicultural utopia' of Europe is a myth."⁷³

The current refugee crisis in Europe is yet another example of how, when the citizens of empire look to the European metropole for a better life, economic possibility, or to escape troubles at home, they are summarily rejected at the gates. Facing what Ross Douthat calls the "African scramble for Europe," as evidenced in the recent migration influx to the EU from Africa, Europe seems in denial of its inevitable "Eurafrican future."⁷⁴ Right-wing parties are on the rise: the nationalist and anti-immigration National Front in France, Freedom Party in Austria, the Golden Dawn in Greece, and Trump's election in 2016 in the United States. Myers and countless other Africans in Europe no doubt face relentless racism on a daily basis. No wonder she defended her decision not to see the show, saying, "As a black woman growing up having experienced racism...there's no need for me to see it because I've *experienced* that"⁷⁵ (emphasis mine).

While his lived experience is clearly different, Bailey does understand such frustrations. In a Facebook post from Paris, he reflected on the protesters outside the theater: "[They] are protesting because they are fed up with being second class citizens...with institutionalized racism...with racial profiling

and humiliation in the streets and in the media, fed up with lack of access to opportunities...with not having platforms to express themselves...*with being represented as 'other.'*"⁷⁶ It is no wonder, then, that two-dimensional images of his show, fueled by the insinuations of O'Mahony's preview article, triggered such an outcry. It is lamentable that the protesters and Bailey's ensemble were not able to join forces in the fight against racism, as was the case in Amsterdam, where activists used *Exhibit B* in allyship with their fight to get rid of the racist black-face character Zwarte Piet.⁷⁷

Exhibit B also tested the limits of freedom of expression. When the Barbican decided to cancel the London run of the show in response to protests, *Exhibit B* became about censorship of artists making racially charged work. Bailey emphatically defends "the right of artists to speak uncomfortable truths, and to challenge status quos. And to disturb. And to offend. I don't want to live in a society in which we silence ourselves in response to every politically correct outcry; in which artists are struck dumb by self-righteous mobs."⁷⁸ J. S. Rafaeli, of vice.com, paraphrased Frederick Douglass in stating: "Denying freedom of expression is an act of double violence. You do violence to those who want to speak, but also to those who want to hear. You may have loved to see this piece and decided for yourself whether or not it was worthwhile. But now you can't because some people decided you weren't grown up enough to make up your own mind. And that sucks."⁷⁹ Peter Rorvik, of the creative organization Arterial Network, says, "Dissenting voices have a right not to see the work; they do not have the right to force a closure.... The role of artists as agents of change should be celebrated not prosecuted."⁸⁰ And for Manick Govinda, "the real problem here is that black people have been censored from the Barbican's decision-making processes in relation to programming and curating."⁸¹ The lightning that *Exhibit B* conducted is thus a more extensive, pervasive, and systemic racism that has saturated Europe to the breaking point; the protesters have had enough and *Exhibit B* became the scapegoat for their frustrations.

To return once again to the question of audience, just as the dynamics of the piece changed when *Exhibit A* transferred from Europe to play in South Africa in 2012, so too did the dynamics shift when people of color were the ones receiving the gaze reversal. *Exhibit B* worked very powerfully for me as a white audience member—a white South African at that—but it is clearly open to many other readings and interpretations. I saw the gaze reversal as a disarming, formidable act of reclamation by the performers to take back and reverse systems of representation; to me, it was all about their agency in the space. In the negotiated gaze space between performer and audience, *Exhibit B*—which is designed for white people, to activate their consciousness and shake Europeans, specifically,

out of their complacency and ignorance about the racist practices of the past—worked for me because I was its *ideal* spectator.

But asking people of color to confront the racist history of trauma in the colonial spectatorship relationship—especially as black Africans living in Europe—would reveal very different responses than mine. The scenarios of degradation could be too painful to countenance. And where would a person of color find herself in the work, which is explicitly addressing whiteness? Walling's question "who is being addressed in the representation?" is vital to consider here. A spectator of color might, as T. O. Molefe suggests, have seen "art that turns black bodies into therapeutic objects for white people."⁸² Or she may have experienced what Dione Joseph,⁸³ a woman of color in Edinburgh, did. Joseph was prepared "to witness something startling." But she was unprepared for the emotional collapse she felt upon gazing, in silence, at these scenarios. Her anger was because "it forbids us to speak, to engage, to debate, to have conversation; it is entirely one-dimensional!" Joseph felt trapped and traumatized within a performance that denied her a voice with which to process her experiences. Even though, at the end of each installation, there is a room in which audience members are invited to write their responses to the piece, clearly Joseph needed the communion of other voices, other human beings, with which to process this difficult work that the performance denied her. The Western, logocentric practice of written responses was insufficient for her; she sought out a more African, communal expression and processing and, I would agree, the performance could have benefited from such an audience response redesign. In fact, in the performance I saw in South Africa in 2012, audiences sat around a fire and processed with the performers after the show.

While audiences for *Exhibit B* tended to be populated with white spectators, there have been people of color at every performance of the piece across its five-year run. But in London, protesters made sure many other people never witnessed *Exhibit B*. "This isn't the politics of representation," suggests Rafaeli. "It's the politics of representation of representation."⁸⁴ In other words, it became not about who is seen, but who is even allowed to look. Whatever dialogue may have been possible, across the racially charged divide, was effectively silenced and the conversation that the piece was designed to engender never had a chance to occur. And that, to me, is a profound limit. But an even profounder loss is that the larger conversation about institutional racism in Europe seemed never to happen, even after the protests and the Barbican shutdown. As blogger Diasporic Redman from London Town put it, "The challenge has been to the institutional White privilege of the UK arts establishment," but "Bailey, the Barbican, and all the commenters are just further proving how arrogant and

out-of-touch they are in being unable to face an authentic discussion of White privilege.”⁸⁵ Two years after the fact, Barbican Centre director of arts, Louise Jeffreys, admitted that the venue had “failed audiences” by canceling the 2014 performance following protests.⁸⁶

So I return to the title of this essay—until you see the whites of their eyes—as an apt caveat, an expression of the (im)possibility of *Exhibit B* and its consequences. *Exhibit B* illustrates how whiteness haunts our contemporary world, institutions, and mindsets and how it can get caught in the structures of its own creation. The colonial power structures that *Exhibit B* critiques are systems that continue to justify white privilege. The white-sightedness of the Barbican, as stand-in for the larger UK arts establishment, became painfully evident when the institution was willing to censor Bailey’s work but not take a good look at its own systems of exclusion and privilege. *Exhibit B* in London attempted to break Steyn’s “epistemologies of ignorance” that keep whiteness invisible and unmarked but ended up getting caught in its own white trap. Bailey’s display of black and brown bodies was (mis)read as the very practice it aimed to critique, and, simultaneously, he was not prepared for what the fault lines revealed when the assumed ideal audience included Africans who were tired of the very depictions his piece aimed to expose. Bailey’s South African whiteness simultaneously positioned him in an impossible identity and, perhaps, taught him about the stakes of representation at the price of his international artistic reputation. There has not been adequate conversation across the divide between white artists (Bailey) and audiences of color (the protesters) about the larger questions and oppressive systems that this piece offers up for consideration. As an exemplar of our contemporary state of global race relations, the *Exhibit B* controversy shows how stalemated in racialized combat mode we still are. Sadly, no one has risked stepping close enough across the divide to see the whites of the other’s eyes.

Notes

Epigraph. Brett Bailey, World Theatre Day Message, International Theatre Institute ITI (2014), accessed February 20, 2017, https://www.world-theatre-day.org/brett_bailey.html.

1. Melissa Steyn, *Whiteness Just Isn't What It Used To Be: White Identity in a Changing South Africa* (New York: SUNY Press, 2001).
2. Mike Sell, “Activism and/or Ethics? Historicizing the Black Arts Movement,” unpublished plenary paper, American Society for Theatre Research annual conference, Portland, Oregon, November 5, 2015.

3. The piece was originally called *Exhibit A* (2010–13) and was focused on German and Belgian colonialism in Africa and later morphed into *Exhibit B* (2012–present) as Bailey added French, British, and other colonial elements to the work to speak to the specific colonial histories of the spaces in which the piece was performed.
4. *Exhibit A*, later *Exhibit B*, performed in 2010 in Vienna (Wiener Festwochen) and Braunschweig (Theaterformen Festival); in 2011 in Helsinki (Kiasma Centre); in 2012 in Brussels (Kunsten Festival des Arts / KVS), Grahamstown, South Africa (National Arts Festival), and Berlin (Berliner Festspiele); in 2013 in Amsterdam (Holland Festival), Ghent (Vooruit Centre), Avignon (Festival d'Avignon), Paris (Le 104), Strasbourg (Le Maillon), and Wrocław (Dialogue Festival); in 2014 in Edinburgh (International Festival), Moscow (Territoria Festival), Poitiers (TAP), Saint-Denis, Paris (Theatre Gerard Philippe), and Paris (Le 104); and in 2015 in Chile (Santiago a Mil), Galway (Galway International Arts Festival), and Gwangju (Opening Festival of the Asian Culture Complex Arts Theatre). I saw it in Grahamstown (2012) and Edinburgh (2014).
5. When Bailey toured his adaptation of Verdi's *Macbeth* to the Philadelphia Fringe in September 2016, the negative press around *Exhibit B* preceded his arrival. I sat on a panel, hosted by WURD radio host Stephanie Renée, called "Who Gets to Tell the Story?" with local Philly artists of color, all of whom were deeply concerned about Bailey's reputation and the Fringe's decision to bring his work to their city.
6. Bernth Lindfors, *Africans on Stage: Studies in Ethnological Show Business* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).
7. A sixteenth-century Arabic word for non-Muslim or infidel, this apartheid-era racial slur is akin to the N-word. Early European cartographers mapped the Southern African coast as the "land of Cafraria."
8. It also frames Benga as a victim, just as much of the discourse around Baartman does. In their 1992 study of Benga's life, for example, Phillips Verner Bradford and Harvey Blume outline "one man's degradation in turn-of-the-century America," chronicling Benga's capture by Verner Bradford's grandfather, his suffering in New York, and his ultimate suicide in 1916. In such narratives, Africans lack any agency and are framed only as helpless victims of colonialism. In her controversial 1996 play about Sara Baartman, *Venus*, Suzan-Lori Parks suggests that Baartman, while victimized, had agency and a modicum of control over her own display.
9. Brett Bailey, Web program, <http://thirdworldbunfight.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/EXHIBIT-B-PROGRAMME-TEXT-FOR-WEBSITE1.pdf>
10. Third World Bunfight website, <http://thirdworldbunfight.co.za/exhibit-b/>.
11. Bailey's oeuvre includes *iMumbo Jumbo* (1997), *Ipi Zombi?* (1998), *The Prophet* (1999), *Big Dada* (2001–2005), *macbEth* (2001), *Safari: C G Jung in Africa* (2003), *medEia* (2003), *Voodoo Nation* (2004), *House of the Holy Afro* (2004–2010), *Orfeus* (2007), *Terminal* (2009), *Exhibit A* (2010–2012), *Exhibit B* (2012–present), and *MACBETH* (2014–2016).
12. Brett Bailey, *The Plays of Miracle and Wonder* (Johannesburg and Cape Town: Juta Academic, 2003), 7.
13. Daniel Larlham, "Brett Bailey and Third World Bunfight: Journeys into the South African Psyche," *Theater* 39, no. 1 (2009): 8.
14. Jacques Rancière, "The Emancipated Spectator," *Artforum* (March 2007): 278.

BRETT BAILEY'S EXHIBIT B

15. The 1820 Settlers, to whom a monument is erected in Grahamstown, were white British colonists brought in to populate the Eastern Cape frontier and defend the Cape Colony from the neighboring Xhosa, whose land the settlers came to occupy. Many of the four thousand settlers were poor and were encouraged to settle in the Cape by the British Crown under a government-sponsored settlement scheme.
16. Brett Bailey, *Terminal* text, unpublished text for waiting room placard. National Arts Festival, Grahamstown, South Africa (2009).
17. Bailey, *Terminal* text (2009).
18. Rancière, "Emancipated Spectator," 277.
19. Daniel Sack, "Regarding the Pain of Others: Brett Bailey's Exhibit B," *Howlround* (October 1, 2013), accessed February 20, 2017, <http://www.howlround.com/regarding-the-pain-of-others-part-two-brett-baileys-exhibit-b>.
20. Brett Bailey, program for *Exhibit A*, unpublished text for program. National Arts Festival, Grahamstown, South Africa (2012).
21. Audiences were either alone in the room with performers or in contact with other audience members, depending on the nature of each venue site. In Grahamstown, for example, each installation was set up in a different classroom of the Gadra Matric School, which audience members experienced in solitude. In Edinburgh and Avignon, on the other hand, installations were set within the alcoves of the space and audience members encountered other spectators in the open areas of the church or library.
22. In Grahamstown, audiences exited the building to a circle of chairs around a fire, where Bailey (and, later, the actors) met up with us to process the work. (Bailey met audiences after *Terminal* in a similar way.) In Edinburgh, a more formal process was instituted: in a room before the building exit, we were invited to write responses on paper and read the actors' bios and statements under each of their headshots along the wall.
23. Brett Bailey, Berlin installation texts, unpublished text for *Exhibit B* museum placards (2012).
24. Brent Meersman, "Exhibit B: Look Black in Anger," *This Is Africa* (September 9, 2014), accessed February 20, 2017, <https://thisisafrika.me/brett-bailey-exhibit-b-look-black-anger/>.
25. Rancière, "Emancipated Spectator," 272.
26. Bailey, installation texts (2012).
27. Sack, *Howlround* (2013).
28. Bailey, installation texts (2012).
29. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 6–18.
30. Anton Krueger, "Gazing at *Exhibit A*: Interview with Brett Bailey," *Limnality: A Journal of Performance Studies* 9, no. 1 (February 2013): 3.
31. Sack, *Howlround*, 2013. In my experience of *Exhibit A* in Grahamstown, I rarely encountered other spectators, and, if so, it was a fleeting passing between the rooms. In my experience in Edinburgh, and during Sack's experience in Avignon, we were "always with a collective of other spectators."
32. Sack, *Howlround* (2013).
33. Krueger, "Gazing at *Exhibit A*" (2013): 3.

34. Krueger, "Gazing at *Exhibit A*" (2013): 7–8.
35. Bailey, program for *Exhibit A* (2012).
36. Bailey, installation texts (2012).
37. Bailey, installation texts (2012).
38. Bailey, installation texts (2012).
39. Naomi Iizuka, "What Myths May Come," *American Theatre* 16, no. 7 (1999): 18.
40. Bailey, program for *Exhibit A* (2012).
41. Jason Kehe, "Stare if You Dare," *Cue Online* (June 29, 2012), accessed February 20, 2017, <http://cue.ru.ac.za/?p=5983>.
42. Brent Meersman, "Resisting the Muse of Imperial 'Science,'" *Mail & Guardian* (June 7, 2010), accessed February 20, 2017, <http://mg.co.za/article/2010-06-07-resisting-the-muse-of-imperial-science>.
43. Kehe, "Stare if You Dare."
44. See Krueger, "Gazing at *Exhibit A*" (2013).
45. I think it is useful to note the distinction in activity between what Bailey (or Rancière) proposes and Augusto Boal's formulation of an active audience. Unlike Boal's spect-actors, who actively and physically intervene in performance, the locus of activity for Bailey's spectators resides internally, silently in our minds, hearts, and intellects.
46. Bailey, program for *Exhibit A* (2012).
47. In the Vienna performance in 2010, audiences were guided into the space by African refugee children from the city (as children were guides in *Terminal* in 2009). Meersman writes: "I saw how having to take the hand of a black asylum seeker's child had a significant impact on the Viennese patrons" (2014).
48. Bailey, installation texts (2012).
49. Sylvie Chalaye, "Colonial Imaginary: Fantasies and Nostalgia," *Le revue d'Africultures* 43 (2006), accessed February 20, 2017, <http://www.africultures.com>.
50. The placard by Siyabonga Yafele's tableau lists the names of fourteen people, including those I listed here.
51. Iizuka, "What Myths May Come" (1999): 18.
52. Manick Govinda, "Exhibit B: Artists must Have the Right to Shock," *Free Speech Now!* (September 25, 2014), accessed February 20, 2017, http://www.spiked-online.com/freespeechnow/fsn_article/exhibit-b-we-must-fight-for-the-right-to-be-offensive#.WKsKLRBOE4A.
53. Michael Walling, "Exhibit B: A Response to the Closure," *Border Crossings Blog* (September 25, 2014), accessed February 20, 2017, <http://bordercrossingsblog.blogspot.com/2014/09/exhibit-b-response-to-closure.html>.
54. Sara Myers, "Withdraw the Racist Exhibition 'Exhibit B - The Human Zoo' from showing at the Barbican from 23rd–27th September," *Change.org petition* (2014), accessed February 20, 2017, <http://www.change.org/p/withdraw-the-racist-exhibition-exhibition-b-the-human-zoo>.
55. John O'Mahony, "Edinburgh's most Controversial Show: Exhibit B, a Human Zoo," *Guardian* (August 11, 2014), accessed February 20, 2017, <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/aug/11/-sp-exhibit-b-human-zoo-edinburgh-festivals-most-controversial>.
56. Jack Malvern and Gaby Swerling, "Activists Celebrate after Closing Show They Hadn't Seen," *Times* (September 26, 2014), accessed February 20, 2017, <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/arts/stage/theatre/article4218426.ece>.

57. Akala, "The Human Zoo and the Masturbation of White Guilt," *Huffington Post* (September 15, 2014), accessed February 20, 2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/akala/barbican-centre_b_5809508.html.
58. Krueger, "Gazing at *Exhibit A*," 4.
59. Brett Bailey, Facebook (November 30, 2014), accessed February 20, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10205249573587873&set=a.1640238614827.2087905.1502648785&type=1>.
60. Bailey, Facebook (November 30, 2014).
61. Meersman, "Resisting" (2010).
62. Walling, "Exhibit B: A Response to the Closure" (2014).
63. Akala's suggestion that "Mr. Bailey take his foolishness back to where he came from" affirms the commonly assumed implication that South Africa is simply a racist space.
64. Walling, "Exhibit B: A Response to the Closure" (2014).
65. Lemn Sissay, "Brett Bailey's Exhibit B and the Real Human Zoo," *Lemnissay.com* (September 26, 2014), accessed May 23, 2017, <http://blog.lemnissay.com/2014/09/26/brett-baileys-exhibit-b-real-human-zoo/>.
66. Robyn Sassen, "Brett Bailey's Exhibit B Knots up London Knickers," *Mail & Guardian* (September 5, 2014), accessed February 20, 2017, <http://mg.co.za/article/2014-09-04-brett-baileys-exhibit-b-knots-up-london-knickers>.
67. Meersman, "Look Black in Anger," (2014).
68. Samantha Vice, "How Do I Live in This Strange Place?" *Journal of Social Philosophy* 41, no. 3 (Fall 2010).
69. "Exhibit B: Is the 'Human Zoo' Racist? The Performers Respond," *Guardian* (September 5, 2014), accessed February 20, 2017, <http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2014/sep/05/exhibit-b-is-the-human-zoo-racist-the-performers-respond>.
70. J. S. Rafaelli, "Performers in London's 'Racist' Human Zoo Exhibit Are Angry It's Been Shut Down," *Vice.com* (September 26, 2014), accessed February 20, 2017, http://www.vice.com/en_uk/read/exhibit-b-human-zoo-barbican-178.
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81. Govinda, "Exhibit B: Artists must Have the Right to Shock."

82. Molefe, "Racism and the Barbican's 'Exhibit B,'" (2014).
83. Diane Joseph, "Exhibit B: A Personal Response," *The Big Idea* (October 11, 2014), accessed February 20, 2017, <http://www.thebigidea.co.nz/news/whats-on-show-reviews/2014/oct/148888-exhibit-b-a-personal-response>.
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