



Xavier Ina's article *Race as a Kind of Speech Act* (2000), the repetition of these particular utterances works to further entrench and define the social construct of race and then, blackness.

—DEANNA BOWEN

Greg—You must have been very young at the time, but I'm curious to know if you remember anything of the racial tension or Klan activity from your childhood in Philadelphia in the 1960s?

—LIZ PARK

Dear Liz,

Endearing, beloved, treasured: these are not the words that come to mind when visiting my hometown outside Philadelphia. Not that I have terrible memories of growing up there between 1958 and 1977, before I moved to New York City to attend the Cooper Union. Rather it is the unfortunate historical and economic circumstances that transformed this region and most of the city's northeastern suburbs into a world of endless strip malls, car dealerships, and gas stations where privileges that city residents lack are taken as a birthright.

I was born in Philadelphia in 1956, but two years later Carol Sholette and Julia (formerly Kennedy) Sholette used my father's World War II veteran's pay to leave the city for the all-white suburbs of Bucks County. One thinks, of course, of Andrew Wyeth's paintings of rustic barns. But the part of the country I come from was then, and remains now, perpetually governed by what Guy Debord derided as the "Dictatorship of the Automobile." Crisscrossed with lanky roads, this sidewalk-less Philadelphia satellite community is especially unforgetting to anyone who lacks a private means of transportation. Such as me.

I guess it was sometime around 9:30 pm, several hours after our meeting at the ICA the other day, Liz, that I found myself standing alone on the nearest SEPTA commuter train station to my mother's home. At that time of night, those without a car have three options: call family or friends, find a taxi, or take a hike. Latecomer crossed the first two off my list so I began to walk, forgetting that the distance to cover was considerably longer than I remembered it by car. After navigating the narrow shoulder of nighttime roads for about an hour I began having second thoughts about my plan. And this is when my paces in the dark led me to think about your question. With the sound of recently collected rainwaters rushing by below me and colorful headlights repeatedly winking out any sight of stable footing, I recalled my all-white upbringing, but also an awakening, for lack of a better term, to the dramatic political and cultural shift going on in the country.

In the fall of 1969, 500,000 draft-age students descended on Washington, D.C., with the goal of shutting the capital down as a protest against the war in Vietnam. I was 13 and begged my parents, unsuccessfully, to let me attend. Around this time, a small group of equally precocious, long-haired friends and I (the bullying we received for our views and appearance is another story) printed an "underground newspaper." I don't recall what we called it, though I am pretty sure we took our cue from *The Drums*, a Philadelphia-based paper that

mixed psychedelic graphics with stories about the anti-war movement, rock culture, and the Black Panther Party. A sympathetic teacher let us run off copies of our paper using the school's mimeograph machine, an outmoded printing process that squeezes a noxious blue ink through paper stencils. My memory of this is not good, but did we make a pissish depiction of then police commissioner Frank Rizzo, whose racist diatribes against the city's black population made national news headlines? I am not sure. The 1964 Columbia Avenue uprising some six or seven years earlier is said to have facilitated his rise to power from "tough guy cop" to commissioner and then beyond. I do know that we portrayed Mickey Mouse on the cover with a clenched fist raised above his head. (It is likely that our drawing was inspired by the famous photograph of Tommie Smith and John Carlos raising their fists in a Black Power salute during the 1968 Olympics.)

As to the KKK, I have no personal recollection of any activities at this time though it would not come as a surprise to learn that the Klan had infiltrated the Philadelphia police department, and perhaps also our local police as well. I do recall that in 1970, Rizzo made headlines again when his officers raided the local Panther headquarters, arrested its members, and strip-searched them in front of clicking news cameras. He was home and alive at the time, yet stood by their actions and never disciplined his men. Amazingly, pathetically, two years later Rizzo was elected Mayor of Philadelphia and remained Mayor until 1980.

The drivers either do not notice me or think it unnecessary to slow down. A pedestrian, after all, without a car, is someone who does not belong here. Despite being neither young, homeless, nor a person of color, I anxiously anticipated one vehicle that would stop for me: the police. Perhaps this was a touch of paranoia, or simply the recognition that we live in an increasingly authoritarian society with roots that go deep. Eventually I made it to my mother's place where I jettied down these thoughts for you.

Best regards,
Greg

October 15, 2014

P.S. On the topic of race and Philadelphia, back in 1999, I was asked to participate in a show here in New York, supporting Munia Abu-Jamal, a former Philadelphia Black Panther and noted journalist who has been imprisoned since 1982 for shooting Officer Danny Faulkner at 13th and Locust Street on December 9, 1981, after Abu-Jamal's brother was traffic stopped by said officer. But the trial has been criticized as faulty and racially biased by a wide range of critics from Amnesty International to Jacques Derrida. A series of exhibitions held under the banner "Munia 911" (<http://artists.reflectionsociety.org/munia/munia911.html>) took place in different cities in the United States and abroad on Sept. 11, 1999, with the goal of raising awareness about the case while calling for a new trial. Soon after I submitted my piece, I noticed that the Fraternal Order of Police listed my name on their website along with many others. You may not want to send them an invitation to *Traces in the Dark*, by the way.

"The following persons or organizations either lent their names to paid advertisements in support of or have lent their support in other ways to the man

convicted of murdering Philadelphia Police Officer Danny Faulkner."

—GREGORY SHOLETTE

Harold—As someone who has thought a lot about visibility and invisibility, especially of violent and traumatic history, how do you interpret this exploitation of invisibility by the Klan and/or others who have the power to take refuge in the dark by choice?

—LIZ PARK

In Michael Tussig's book *Beauty and the Beast*, he asks, "What sort of history can be built on seeing as not seeing as the basis of knowing?" The publication discusses how high-profile Colombian criminals disguise their identity through surgery as well as Colombia's extensive history of violence. In any case, I would say that there are various ways in which invisibility is exploited here. Colombia doesn't have a history of groups such as the Klan, but what it does have in common is a history of veiling its violence.

While reading this book, I came across a quote by Salvatore Mancuso, Colombian paramilitary leader, that really complicates my thoughts on seeing and violence. The quote is: "We were the mist, the smoke curtain, that hid everything." To further complicate how history is built on seeing, the quote positions concealment or places blinded from view as a body. It's from this point that I think of visibility being veiled with regards to violent and traumatic histories.

You can call it a hood, or a shroud, even a measure, but veiling allows for a distance to be measured between the body and the sight seen—"seeing without being seen."

In both cases (Klan activities and violence in Colombia) we seem to find greater tragedy the more we look. But what's at stake when looking? Or seeing? How can we render what's invisible or make a case for its impermanence to be permanent (even if it's only in thought or memory)?

There are entities (traces) lurking in the dark. We all know that if we look for them we will find them but what do we do when they are brought into focus?

—HAROLD MENDEZ

An in-person conversation with the three artists, held March 4, 2015, at ICA, picks up on the questions posed here. For an online version with embedded links to reference sources, visit bit.ly/TracesConversation.



Traces in the Dark

- Liz Park
- Deanna Bowen
- Harold Mendez
- Gregory Sholette

ICA
Institute of Contemporary University Art of Pennsylvania

Dear artists,

I proposed that we engage in a conversation over a shared Google document leading up to the opening of our exhibition. The purpose of the conversation is foremost to share our ideas so that we are not isolated silos thinking through the same questions. In talking to each one of you, I sensed that we can benefit from collectively parsing the questions you are raising in your own political and historical investigations that have cast long shadows onto the present. Let's begin with Deanna's work, as she and I have been engaged in an email exchange about a very intriguing piece of local history here in Pennsylvania.

Deanna, of course you would be the best person to give an overview of your research, but I am taking the liberty to summarize here. You are embarking on research specific to two Klansmen with a Philadelphia connection: Daniel Burros, who killed himself, when it was revealed that he was in fact Jewish, and Roy Frankhouser, Grand Dragon of the Klan in Pennsylvania, in whose apartment Burros allegedly committed suicide. This took place in 1965, a year after the Columbia Avenue riots in Philadelphia, which were sparked from a false rumor that a black woman was beaten to death by a white police officer. The 1960s was a time when civil rights activism was at its height, but, as your research reminds us, Klan activities were also quite heightened. You wrote to me with a burgeoning theory: "I had a hatching of an idea about some correlation between highly memorialized civil rights events and the concurrent erasure of Klan activity."

My takeaway from your email is that the occlusion of concurrent Klan activities by media coverage of civil rights activism was ironically to the detriment of people of color because the attention is directed to the struggle rather than the oppressors. In my address of invisible and underrepresented histories, it is often the case that I am thinking of marginalized groups. But your research does, Deanna, in turn this assumption upside down. Invisible Empire was the term used by the Klan to refer to their realm, and I am both repelled and fascinated by the use of this term. I am reaching out to you as help me make sense of this. Could you elaborate your theory a bit more and perhaps unpack this term?

—LIZ PARK

The term is as simple as that. The Ku Klux Klan and its hidden white-collar, political, and political compatriots have operated as a visible/invisible, secretive, extreme right-wing organization on-and-off for nearly 150 years. Most academic texts will define the Klan's evolution in waves: First Wave: 1865-70s; Second Wave: 1915-45; and Third: 1946-present. Ironically, these historical parameters are somewhat dependent on the existence of documented public presence (that is, when the Klan was transparent/aggressive about its ideology and activities) and alleged membership numbers. Stepping away from the academy and relying on internal wisdom and lived experience, I would argue that the Klan has been in existence from 1865 to present day. In my mind, the Klan's existence and history are not so much about "they exist when you can see them," but a more nuanced understanding that there are waves of tolerance for public expressions of Klan ideology, and then times when there is none. My research hasn't specifically focused on determining what social factors contribute to unfavorable climates for the

Klan, but if pressed I would venture that the Klan is most present and active during moments of critical political/economic/social advancement for black peoples and other marginalized/racialized groups.

As for my "hatching of an idea..." this is something that has arisen out of my own auto-ethnographic practice and primary research of African-North American history and migration, which is informed by efforts to excavate and document my family's migration to Canada from Alabama and Kentucky via Indian Territory (Oklahoma) in the early 1900s. How I got to the Klan via my family history is a long-winded story about "unintentionable" teachings, etc., but the short of it is that I have been driven by community silences in the face of documented anti-black aggression. Extending this to Philadelphia, I originally started researching the Columbia Avenue riots on August 28-30, 1964, and then the Cecil B. Moore Street riot in the mid-1960s. The riot, the retelling of the story of the riot, and the act of renaming the site of uprising (others would call it chaos or self-destruction) are compelling, particularly because this story is told with an underlying biased notion that the riot was self-inflicted. That is, much of the reporting and post-riot analysis fails to cite any external antagonisms, save for broad overarching narratives about weakly defined "tensions" between blacks and the police.

Yet, at the time of the riot, the House of Un-American Activities was conducting a nationwide investigation of the Klan organizations that culminated in a series of hearings in 1965-66. Imperial Wizard Robert Shelton (of my Paul Good/Robert Shelton performance) was a key defendant and much of the press coverage focused on him. New York Grand Dragon Daniel Burros's testimony in the HUAC hearings was curtailed by his (questionable) suicide at the home of Pennsylvania Grand Dragon Roy Frankhouser on October 31, 1965. Burros is said to have shot himself after the New York Times published an investigative report that detailed his Jewish heritage. Much of the national press took up the Jewish Klansman story with relish, but Philadelphia press focused on the city's post-riot re-build, in turn giving little attention to Pennsylvania Grand Dragon Roy Frankhouser's testimony in the HUAC hearings. (He pleaded the Fifth Amendment for nearly all questions.) This is curious given that the Klan was very active in 1920-40s Pennsylvania. Again, working on internal wisdom, I know that the Klan doesn't just pack up and leave a tolerant site. They might go underground, but they don't cease operating.

My concerns about the conditions leading up to the Columbia Avenue riots and its commemoration are with a long-term understanding that other things were going on. They simply weren't reported on. The line of this gene and omission of perpetrators imply that black people inflict their own torture and suffering, which is a paternalistic perspective that has a history of its own; but also the repeat presentation of these images of "unprovoked" violence entrench a particular narrative about blackness on to African-American peoples, while simultaneously with the academy and relying on their own wisdom, also works to re-traumatize and cyclically violate African-Americans. The predominant (white) narrative that circulates with these images is one of utter wonder and bafflement that these horrific (unassumed) things happen to black people. Taking a step back, one could argue that these acts of omission (perhaps traumatic *dis-association*) are the formative gesture/mechanics of the construction of "whiteness." And then, borrowing from Louis F. Miron and Jonathan

