

“Between the Eyes”: The Racialized Gaze as Design

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Individuals “shape their interests through the *design* of messages with the resources available to them in specific situations,” British educator Gunther Kress maintains (*Multimodality* 23; original emphasis). Rooted in the classical Latin word *dēsīgnāre*, or “to mark out,” design as a *verb* spotlights the *processes* of strategic choice making involved in deploying representational resources, such as images and words, to enact our communicative purposes. At the same time, design as a *noun*, or *available design*, focuses on the existing *resources* from which those representations are crafted.¹ Scholars have long recognized the ways in which visual representations are always interwoven with rhetorical purposes for meaning-making. Despite our acceptance of the visual-rhetorical intersection and the Design decisions influencing that intersection, we are less attentive to the ways in which a culture’s dominant perceptual practices implicate that culture’s design and available design, thus affecting designers’ choice making for their rhetorical agendas.² After all, we invent what we see. Yet the role of these dominant perceptual practices in Design remains invisible and unconscious. I use uppercase “Design” to refer *both* to verb and to noun, while lowercase “design” refers *only* to verb, or to designers’ choice-making processes.³ Given the ubiquity of images and, implicitly, the habits of looking that influence the production of those images for both representation and

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communication, English studies requires a theory of Design that better accounts for dominant perceptual habits that function both to constrain acts of choice making and to restrict the repertoire of available resources.

In this essay, I contribute to that agenda by focusing on one perceptual habit: *the racialized gaze*, a dominant cultural habit for perceiving race-related visual phenomena. I argue that the racialized gaze as Design provides a valuable theoretical framework for visual rhetoric, exegesis, and cultural analysis by directing our attention to how designers may unwittingly sustain practices of racialization and perpetuate racially based sociocultural exclusions. Such increased awareness offers the potential for the active creation of unique and innovative ensembles, produced from a range of available resources, with the goal of transformation. Design has the means to imagine future human dispositions and to enact dynamic social action through visual meaning-making.

The racialized gaze as Design, as a theoretical framework, opens up at least three transformative possibilities for the use of images to communicate and persuade. The first possibility is methodological. Contributing to the bread-and-butter work of English studies that involves close reading, analysis, and critique, scholars may employ the concept of racialized gaze as Design to promote a conscious awareness of the recursive relationship between rhetorical purpose and perceptual habits, where visual representations shape even as they are shaped by our ideologies on race relations. Even as scholars in English studies expand the work of exegesis to include image analysis, scholars in rhetoric, composition, and professional communication increasingly include the principles of Design to guide the production of “texts.” As designers draw on multimodal resources for meaning-making, they must attend to how perceptual habits, such as the racialized gaze, are interwoven with their production of persuasive ensembles.

The second possibility is theoretical. The concept of the racialized gaze as Design enables scholars to focus on how both processes and resources are always already sedimented with perceptual habits that may run counter to designers’ professed goals. Relevant to visual rhetoric and critical race studies, this second possibility concerns Design that advocates for progressive, race-related social reforms, given that “there is power in looking,” as bell hooks observes (115).

The third possibility is pedagogical. The plethora of global imagery we encounter through digital technologies requires designers to cultivate an overt awareness of the diverse culturally dominant perceptual habits that influence Design. Considered the “Father of the American cartoon” (Paine 582), Thomas Nast (1840–1902) created political cartoons that advocated for cultural inclusiveness and racial tolerance as the foundation for a racially integrated, progressive America. The cultural challenges of Emancipation and Reconstruction to which Nast responded offer us a historical object lesson for conceptualizing Design in today’s transnational era, which is marked by

increased immigration and persistent racial tensions. An investigation into the visual strategies Nast used to promote universal suffrage, and the derailment of that agenda by the racialized gaze as Design, provides an instructive analogy for contemporary efforts to navigate global race relations through imagery.

The racialized gaze as Design encompasses *both* the choice-making processes of design *and* the available resources used. First, I propose that the racialized gaze as design in verb form operates through the characteristics of *sight* and *site*. Second, the racialized gaze as available design, or as a noun, impinges on the selection of sets of resources by means of two seemingly contradictory yet mutually constitutive dynamics, *authenticity* and *universality*. Third, I turn my attention to the rise of nineteenth-century visual culture, enabled by technological advances and social changes during Nast’s lifetime. This ambient culture provided a rich terrain for Design that seeks to enact transformational changes. Fourth, to demonstrate the manifestation of the racialized gaze as Design, I analyze four of Nast’s cartoons to describe how both characteristics and dynamics circumscribed the cartoons’ potential for ameliorating anti-Chinese politics in Nast’s lifeworld. In my conclusion, I argue for a robust version of Design that takes into account the ways in which a culture’s own perceptual habits influence and may even limit the rhetorical purposes of images seeking to initiate social transformation.

THE RACIALIZED GAZE AS DESIGN AND AVAILABLE DESIGN

No one approaches images with an innocent eye. Designers’ perceptual habits, such as the racialized gaze, influence their choice-making processes, including choosing, sequencing, and combining resources. Art historian Ernst Gombrich tells us that visual stimuli, by themselves, acquire meaning only within a particular utterance, a set of shared assumptions (53–54). That shared perception gains dominance as “culturally inflected visual practices” and is specific to a historical period and ideology (Jay, “Vision” 3). We are not simply sets of disembodied eyeballs: perception is *always* a “view from somewhere” (Jay, “Scopic” 24). The gaze, referring to normative habits for selecting and perceiving visual input, influences *how* we make sense of *what* we see by reinscribing the dominant culturally authorized values and beliefs (J. Berger; Hum). Importantly, historian Martin Jay argues that the gaze not only interpellates human subjects, but also contributes to the production of their subjectivity within particular sociohistorical circumstances (*Downcast*). Constituting one manifestation of the gaze, the racialized gaze participates in what Michael Omi calls “a system of racial meanings and stereotypes” (122). If we seek to understand how Design enables or inhibits persuasion, then we need to consider the ways in which our perceptual habits have an active, systematic, and ideological impact. In this section, I provide the theoretical framework for the racialized gaze as Design, which functions both as

verb and noun to affect designers' processes and resource selection, and by so doing reinforces those processes of racialization. First, the racialized gaze as design, or as a verb, influences choice-making processes for representing and communicating through two interrelated characteristics, sight and site. Second, the racialized gaze as available design, or as a noun, directs the designer's eye to specific sets of race-related existing resources, constrained by the dynamics of authenticity and universality.

The racialized gaze predisposes designers to illustrate according to the culturally established relationship of visible corporeal difference and social hierarchy. Difference "should not only be known but *visible*" (17), Nicholas Mirzoeff observes.⁴ Design of visible difference involves acts of seeing and being seen, a phenomenon to which we are all susceptible. For example, Franz Fanon describes seeing himself through white eyes: "I am overdetermined from without. I am the slave not of the 'idea' that others have of me but of *my own appearance*" (115–16; emphasis added). Fanon's methodology, Gibson argues, highlights how whites employ what he calls a "racial gaze," which operates at the level of a body's surfaces. A "racial gaze," by foregrounding the "epidermalization" of difference, locks blacks into their bodies (Gibson 21). At the same time, blacks who internalize the white racial gaze experience self-alienation: "In the man of color there is a constant effort to run away from his own individuality, to annihilate his own presence" (Fanon 60).⁵ However, people of color are not immune to racist perceptions manifested in practices of looking. For example, W. E. B. DuBois echoed the dominant anti-Irish, class-related prejudices of the small Massachusetts town where he grew up (Moore 17): "none of the colored folk I knew were so poor, drunken and sloven as some of the lower Americans and Irish," a racial prejudice later attributed to ignorance, a lack of thrift (DuBois 75), and a lack of opportunity for the Irish (82). The racialized gaze intertwines image and body in a perception-based power relationship of seeing and being seen where race is constrained to visible corporeal differences.

The racialized gaze as design operates as a verb, manifesting the processes of racialization in choice making through two interrelated characteristics, sight and site. The characteristic of sight imbues visible corporeal differences, such as physiological features, with facticity. Philosopher Linda Martín Alcoff notes that the "processes by which racial identities are produced work through the shapes and shades of human morphology, the size and shape of the nose, the design of the eye, the breadth of the cheekbones, the texture of hair, and the intensity of pigment" (191). These visible corporeal differences are believed to signify a host of social attributes of identity, including breeding, intelligence, morality, and nationalism (Eze; Finnegan). Nineteenth-century cartoonists chose to replicate the a priori racial prejudices against blacks through images that underscored African primitivism, including wide lips and nappy hair (Rice 30). American Indians were depicted as the

half-naked, marauding “noble savage” (Huntziker 48). Floyd Cheung describes the emasculation of Chinese men through depictions of “limp arms and buckled knees” and flowing, womanly garments (295–96). Hence, the characteristic of sight imbues socially identified visible corporeal differences with facticity. It confers significance on socially determined corporeal markers to construct bodies of color as a homogeneous group. This racial group, then, becomes a “reliable” avenue for establishing social hierarchy and cultural probity. For example, the Chinese were transformed through visual and verbal imagery into the “Celestial,” who then became the “yellow peril” or “yellow terror,” a social, cultural, and economic threat to the American “nation, race, and family”; the construction of yellow peril paralleled the consolidation of whiteness (Lee 10, 106–13). Yellow peril imagery in the widespread press coverage of Sino-American relations fanned the cultural anxiety about large-scale Chinese immigration (Miller 3–15).

Although Nast deliberately minimized the use of exaggeration and caricature, he also developed political cartoons with an “instantly recognizable” set of racial characteristics to affect public opinion and influence the legislative process (Nevins and Weitenkampf 10). This “champion of the abused and maligned Celestial” (Paine 148), scholars agree, created a sea change in the grammar of American political cartooning, from one that relied on dialogue to an emphasis on images, creating a “genuine art form and a deadly political weapon” (Fischer 8).⁶ However, Nast continued to use the Chinese body as a homogeneous site, a commonplace strategy of his time, albeit for his own progressive aims.⁷ Through the characteristics of sight and site, the racialized gaze as design, functioning as a verb, influences processes such as choice making, even as designers seek to remake and transform their cultural conditions. To argue for racial integration, Nast created political cartoons that sought not to caricature, as was the traditional approach of his day, but to persuade mimetically with the subtle sensitivity of fine, meticulous pencil work and the depiction of recognizable faces through faithful illustrations.

The racialized gaze as available design, operating as a noun, methodically filters that inventory of concrete, existing resources from which visual representations are created. The racialized gaze as available design predisposes designers to use certain image vocabulary, structures, and grammars for depicting race. Consequently, existing resources are narrowed to two mutually constitutive, interrelated dynamics: authenticity and universality. The dynamic of authenticity names a practice by which people of color are depicted through aesthetic and surface markers; those skin-deep differences are then augmented into significant social distinctions, ones that matter (double entendre intended). At the same time, the dynamic of universality names a practice by which material differences resulting from the lived experiences of people of color are downplayed or erased by an assumption of sameness, of a shared common

humanity; racial differences are simply skin-deep. Although I describe the dynamics of authenticity and universality independently, both dynamics are inextricably intertwined and can be separated only at the level of language.

The racialized gaze as available design relies on the dynamic of authenticity to emphasize verisimilitude, or the truth-value and facticity in visible corporeal difference, thus reinforcing the characteristic of sight. Valuing high degrees of resemblance, the dynamic of authenticity refers to the depiction *not* of what is real, but of what a culture *perceives* as real and true (Gledhill 96). Authenticity in available design emphasizes what society has identified as physical markers, recognized as “facts” of race. Phenotypical characteristics are infused metonymic significance: observable physical features represent innate cultural differences and racial distinctions of identity and society. Historian Robert Lee notes that physiognomy is “relevant to race only insofar as certain physical characteristics [. . .] are *socially defined* as markers of racial difference” (2; original emphasis). While Nast’s drawings communicated powerful ideas in a humorous, accessible manner, those political cartoons also extended the nineteenth-century nomenclatures for conflating visible corporeal markers with race. Nast’s eye and pencil detailed particular physical aspects to construct Chinese racial identity. His cartoons were recognized for articulating close physical likenesses in face and form.⁸ The perceived verisimilitude in Nast’s cartoons, a justification for benevolence, integrated the racialized gaze as available design. Framed by the dynamic of authenticity, race was reduced to visible difference and stereotypical iconography, augmenting the exotic, strange natures, and by so doing, emphasized the Chinese’s alienness, immorality, and lack of assimilability.

While the dynamic of authenticity infuses visible corporeal difference with “factual” racial significance, the characteristic of site is intertwined with the dynamic of universality in the racialized gaze as available design. Although site homogenizes bodies into a racial group, such as the “yellow terror” for nineteenth-century Chinese, the dynamic of universality underscores a transcendental universal humanism. This “Everyman” phenomenon of universality elides the lived experiences of peoples of color by overlooking how differences are produced by histories of oppression and ideologies of exclusion. In essence, the dynamic of universality involves an ahistorical, acontextual, disembodied approach to racial identity. Perceived through the lens of similarity, socially identified race-related characteristics become inconsequential, considered surface differences only. Deep material differences are erased, forgotten, or ignored. Readers are expected to see past the Chinese’s physical racial characteristics to treat them as human beings with analogous desires and needs. To do so is to ignore willfully the ways in which race and racist beliefs inform both visibility and their sociocultural practices. Through mental acrobatics of purpose and selective perception, the dynamic of universality seeks to counter the dominant perceptual habits of specific historical contexts.

As Design is integrated into analysis and pedagogy, scholars must attend to the ways in which perceptual habits influence acts of meaning-making. In particular, the racialized gaze as design, functioning in verb form, circumscribes the actions and processes of choice making to the characteristics of sight and site. Meanwhile, the racialized gaze as available design, functioning in noun form, confines the scope, breadth, and depth of existing resources to the dynamics of authenticity and universality, thus narrowing the inventory from which designers may select as they create ensembles that imagine the world afresh. Binding design and available design, the racialized gaze as Design, both in actions and resources, plays out its influence within the context of a designer’s visual lifeworld. In the next section, I examine the nineteenth-century lifeworld, which provided opportunities in Design for Nast to counter overtly racist and derogatory popular images and to ameliorate growing calls for Chinese exclusion.

THOMAS NAST’S VISUAL LIFEWORLD

Just as processes and resources of Design influence and are influenced by perceptual habits, all acts of production or transformation operate within a “lifeworld,” or specific “site of subjectivity and agency” (Cope and Kalantzis 206). A lifeworld comprises sets of invisible, frequently unconscious habits, behaviors, values, and interests that may result in the “unreflective appropriation of representational and cultural resources that are circumstantially available” (207). Understanding the racialized gaze as Design requires an understanding of the ambient visual lifeworld within which it operates. In this section, I argue that technological advances and social changes in Nast’s lifeworld offered him unique opportunities for social activism through Design. Even as he tried to harness those opportunities, he was influenced by specific sociohistorical attitudes that directed his eye and his pencil, and thus constrained his progressive agenda for transforming his lifeworld.

Nast describes his visual strategy for enacting a reformist agenda: “I try to hit the enemy between the eyes and knock him down” (Keller, “World”). The blow of a pointedly composed image was “beyond recall” (Paine 123). This direct “attack” through Design involved influencing average Americans who lacked direct knowledge of and face-to-face interactions with the Chinese. Census data show that most Chinese lived in settlements primarily in California, so that “most Americans outside of California had never actually seen a Chinese person” (Metrick-Chen, “Chinese” 115).⁹ Yet anti-Chinese hysteria in response to the yellow peril became increasingly virulent by the mid-1800s, resulting in physical violence, property destruction, and murders, particularly along the West Coast.¹⁰ California’s labor concerns, vocalized vociferously by labor leader Dennis Kearney, took the national stage when Maine Senator, Secretary of State, and Republican presidential candidate

James Gillespie Blaine emphasized the dangers of the Chinese “hordes,” and fears that California was becoming a “civilization of Confucius” (Campbell 115). It is such fear-mongering that Nast worked to undermine, explains his biographer Albert Paine: “Nast never had the slightest sympathy with any sort of organization or movement that did not mean the complete and absolute right of property ownership, as well as the permission to labor, accorded to every human being of whatsoever color or race” (386). Through detailed, sympathetic physical portrayals of the Chinese, Nast endeavored to educate his readers, including those with no tangible experience of the Chinese and little investment in anti-Chinese politics, to adopt his progressive ideals of universal suffrage. Nast’s artistic efforts could not forestall a series of legislation, beginning with the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, passed with overwhelming bipartisan support, which marginalized, prohibited, and suspended Chinese integration in and immigration to America (Gyory). After almost sixty years, the Magnuson Act of 1943 allowed Chinese immigration to resume, but continued the ban on property and business ownership by ethnic Chinese (Lee).

Nast’s reformist agenda included his re-creation of the artist as political crusader, redefining the established role of cartoons as merely illustrative and descriptive.¹¹ The cartoonist shouldered the weighty responsibility of “protest art,” becoming a “social commentator” (Shikes 304–7). Political cartoons developed into “pictorial reporting” or “illustrated journalism,” composed to tell their “story with instant effect” (Nevins and Weitenkampf 15), helping the public judge in a “quick way” the positions presented (Leonard 102). This crusader role was intricately linked to intense urbanization resulting from mass migration to cities, thus contributing to the development of new forms of leisure connected to visual culture (Schwartz and Przyblyski 287). By the 1850s, the growth of general magazines was tied to the rapid increase in a literate, urban middle class eager for knowledge and entertainment (Fischer 102; Hiley 28; Tebbel and Zuckerman 8). The mid-nineteenth century saw an upsurge in mass-circulation magazines, including *Harper’s Weekly*, sold by subscription and circulated through cheaper postage rates, paid by publishers (Mott). In this increasingly urban lifeworld, *Harper’s Weekly* was produced for a specific audience: the educated upper class who had means, leisure, and influence as “opinion makers” (Tebbel and Zuckerman 20). Despite the initial prejudice against the use of images in news reporting, the public appetite for such images intensified even as readers devoured cartoons drawn for social amusement and political commentary. In sum, an urban public, predisposed toward visual culture, contributed to the rise of political cartoons as an avenue and a medium for political debate.

Although normative cultural replication involved the recycling of ready-made images with slight modifications to illustrate commonplace events, Nast transformed existing resources into “awesome weapons,” using “wit, symbolism, animalism [appropriate application of traits from animals]—to direct at men and institutions”

(Keller, *Art* 3). The use of political cartoons for racial activism was enabled by advances in image-making technologies and mechanical reproduction, which brought about the expanded circulation and mass consumption of visual prints. Improvements in paper and printing afforded Nast significant artistic control (Halloran 102), allowing him to yoke the performative muscle of the visual arts to engage in debates on slavery and racial policies during Reconstruction (Aarim-Heriot; Cho; Hills).¹² These technological developments provided Nast with rich avenues to hone his art into a sharp-witted weapon for a variety of social issues, including the plight of the Chinese. Nast’s efforts and successes, acknowledged during his lifetime, confirmed his artistic prowess and social authority. In a public ceremony, the Union League Club, in recognition of the remarkable genius, political power, and public influence of Nast’s political cartoons, celebrated his commitment to the “popular sentiment in favor of the Union and of Equal Rights for All” (“Testimonial” 307).

In short, Nast’s lifeworld cultivated fertile ground for Design that aims to transform; yet, his perceptual habits, influenced by the race relations of his time, circumscribed that potential for change. In the next section, I turn to four Nast cartoons to demonstrate the powerful role of the racialized gaze as Design.

RACIALIZED DESIGN

Published during the height of racial debates on Chinese Exclusion, four of Nast’s political cartoons respond to the unsettled, tumultuous nature of racial politics: “Nineteenth-century America’s relationships with Chinese people and objects were neither simple nor unilateral” (Metrick-Chen, *Collecting* 2). Yet his political cartoons, I argue, inadvertently inculcated a specific sociohistorical ideology on race that undercut his progressive message. In this section, through an analysis of four separate cartoons, I demonstrate the ways in which the racialized gaze as Design—as verb and noun, as processes and resources—manifests through the characteristics of site and sight, along with the dynamics of authenticity and universality. These four cartoons highlight the inescapable influence of perceptual habits in our acts of choosing and deploying available resources in our lifeworld. Though I address each aspect of the racialized gaze as Design separately, this division is artificial at best. Fluid and intertwined, these characteristics and dynamics work collaboratively in each cartoon to affect Design.

Sight in Design as a Verb

Nast’s cartoons illuminate the processes of selecting and assembling through the characteristic of *sight*: physiological traits represent the facticity of social characteristics. That directed choice making, which undermines his central message, is readily evident in Nast’s cartoon, “The Chinese Question,” published in 1871 (Figure



Figure 1. Image courtesy of Louisiana State University

Chinese victim. By depicting Columbia surrounded by darkness, Nast spotlights the argument for racial protection and equal rights visibly, verbally, and symbolically. Her close proximity to the Chinese victim underscores her role as defender of equal rights. The caption, spoken by Columbia, reminds the armed mob in the background and *Harper's* readers, “Hands off, Gentlemen! American means fair play for all men.”

Despite the message of equality in “fair play for *all* men,” Nast emphasized racialized features in the visage of the Chinese man, which in turn highlighted the cultural differences at the heart of racial slurs he sought to combat. The characteristic of sight in design as a verb includes the negative stereotypes against the Chinese, inscribed on the wall behind Columbia and the Chinese victim. That graffiti voices dehumanizing racial insults, including “barbarian” and “rat eater,” to represent qualities such as “vicious,” “immoral,” “idolater heathen,” and “lowest and vilest of the human race.” These specific invectives refer to the Chinaman, whose racial features are clearly portrayed, even though a hand half blocks his face. His eyes are exaggerated, slanted slits; the upper forehead is shaved bald; and, over his right shoulder, a braided queue hangs, all socially identified phenotypical markers of Chineseness. These visible racial differences function metonymically, signifying a lack of social

1). Despite the cartoon’s racially inclusive, progressive message, Nast inadvertently weakens that message through sight in design as a verb by underscoring the metonymic significance of phenotypical traits. Design processes prioritize observable physical features, believed to embody innate cultural differences and racial distinctions of identity and society.

Symbolizing his message of inclusion, Columbia, a prior name for Lady Liberty and a personification of the United States, serves as the central focus of Figure 1. Classically dressed, she is a shining beacon of protection for a frightened, demoralized Chinese man, sitting at her feet. A mouthpiece for Nast’s message of freedom and equality, Columbia represents a boundary or dividing line, physically separating the white mob from the vulnerable

desirability by pointing to an inherent facticity: the alien nature in the Chinese. The racialized gaze functions through the characteristic of sight to spotlight visible corporeal difference, conflated with sociocultural facticity, to undermine Nast’s claim that the Chinese be included in the words “*all* men.”

However, that same metonymic strategy—imbuing racial features with negative stereotypes in the Chinese, albeit as critique—is one Nast replicated in the portrayal of the angry mob, held back by a defiant Columbia. Brandishing clubs and guns are brutish men with violent faces. Comprising mostly working-class, white men of Irish and German descent, this mob can be identified by their simian countenances produced through pronounced pugnacious jaws, large noses, and distinctly broad, low foreheads. Such physical characteristics highlight these white, working-class men’s propensity for viciousness. At the same time, Nast makes a historical reference to the Civil War draft riots of 1863, when primarily Irish American mobs in New York City protested the Union draft and Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation (Kennedy). Irish racism is further exemplified in the far background, including the burnt remains of the “Colored Orphan Asylum,” destroyed during the riots that also perpetrated widespread lynchings. Patricia Hills notes that Nast “castigates only the ignorant and bigoted who engage in reprehensible deeds” (115). He condemned such social discrimination, political exclusion, and mob violence as an “affront to the values of an open society,” whether it was the Irish-Democratic violence toward the Negro or the Chinese (Keller, *Art* 108). This violence is exemplified through physical characteristics. In sum, the portrayals of the Chinaman and the Irish in Figure 1 are so racialized that Nast inadvertently undermined his own inclusive message through the characteristic of sight in design as a verb.

Site in Design as a Verb

Just as the racialized gaze is pernicious in the impact of sighting, it is equally pernicious through the characteristic of *site*, referring to the use of corporeal markers to create a homogeneous racial group and then situate that group within a social hierarchy. Nast’s advocacy for racial equality relied on physiological homogeneity to express the social probity of the Chinese, a manifestation of site in design as a verb. Published three years before the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, “The Civilization of Blaine” (Figure 2) seeks to turn the tide against 1884 Republican presidential candidate James Gillespie Blaine, who vociferously supported Chinese exclusion to court the Irish and working-class vote (Halloran 257; Paine 386). A loyal Republican, Nast drew a series of cartoons against his party’s candidate, whose presidential bid he would not support “even if the Democrats nominated the Devil” (Paine 493). In Figure 2, the use of the word “civilization,” defined as both society and refinement, spotlights both Blaine’s vulgar racism and the centuries-old traditions of the Chinese empire. This wordplay on the notion of civilization, represented by John Confucius, expresses



Figure 2. Image courtesy of University of Texas at Austin

African primitivism, as witnessed by his wiry, nappy hair, pug-like nose, broad lips, and extra-wide mouth, along with the very dark shading representing his complexion. The Negro lacks moral stature, exemplified in his shortened neck and abbreviated torso. His squat physique and fawning posture connotes untrustworthiness; he is cozying up physically to the pompous Blaine, who personifies the anti-Chinese perspective. Site in design, seen in the visual exaggeration of the Negro's features and crouching figure, underscores Nast's growing disillusionment with African Americans (Hills; Keller, *Art* 218–21). However, Nast also undermined his own message of racial inclusiveness through the characteristic of site.

Even as Nast's eye and pencil carefully detailed external, physiological characteristics of all three, he constructed the identities of African Americans and Chinese from a discrete set of physical markers. The construction of Chinese racial identity includes slanted eyes, a thin mustache, and a long queue to be combined with traditional attire of flowing robes and Celestial headwear. In addition to individual physical features that portray an upright physique, refined facial features, and unassuming demeanor, Nast augmented those racial differences through a

Nast's progressive message. Although his vision of racial equality became an increasingly minority position within the Republican party (Keller, *Art* 219–21), Nast continued to advocate in his cartoons for a radical postwar America, reconstructed through civil equality.

Site in design as a verb manifests itself, whether imbued with positive or negative messages, in the portrayal of the respectable Chinaman and the caricature of the ingratiating Negro. Both figures represent race similarly, even though the racist caricature of the Negro is negative and the venerable John Confucius is positive. Despite the connotative differences in meaning, race is represented as merely physical, recognizable traits, which then stand in for an entire group. For instance, the Negro is portrayed not only stereotypically but also through the framework of

backdrop of Orientalist objects, including the Chinese vases and scrolls, which also contributed to the creation of a homogeneous Chinese culture. In Figure 2’s caption, we encounter a generic yet racialized moniker, John Confucius, which transforms the individual Chinaman into a member of a homogeneous group, a characteristic of site in design. The designation “John” denotes a common Western name, referring to the assimilated Chinaman, who has stayed long enough in America to acquire a Christian nickname. The distinguished John Confucius asks the rhetorical question—“Am I not a man and a brother?”—by appealing to the dynamic of universality, discussed in more detail later. In brief, “brother” underscores the Chinaman’s role in a “human” family, while “man” redirects attention away from racial identity and to a generic Everyman. Yet, it is difficult to see “a man and a brother” in the Chinaman, whose racialized differences are depicted in such careful, fastidious detail.

The racialized gaze directs the designer to underscore certain physical aspects of bodies of color, but it also affects available design by circumscribing the resources used to constitute an effective image. Twin dynamics of authenticity and universality play out in the creation of specific visual forms and vocabulary from which Nast created in his cartoons, a perceptual imposition that served inadvertently to weaken his progressive agenda.

Authenticity in Design as a Noun

The dynamic of authenticity refers to the physical detail and racial likenesses that underscore verisimilitude, not for what is real but what is *perceived* as real, derived from the perceptual habits of nineteenth-century America. Authenticity in available design, functioning as a noun, is exemplified in Nast’s “Youngest Introducing the Oldest” (Figure 3), published in 1868 to highlight the positive shifts in American diplomacy. These include the Burlingame-Seward Treaty, the creation of a Celestial Embassy, and the appointment of Anson Burlingame as special Chinese ambassador. Formal, friendly diplomatic relations resulted in the “unrestricted voluntary migration between China and the United States” (Williams 147). Nast foregrounds these diplomatic changes as justification for a revised approach to racial tolerance for the Chinese.

Authenticity in available design directs Nast’s attention to a particular inventory of available resources, out of which he creates racial identity and emphasizes the cultural differences between the West and East. In Figure 3, Prince Kung is depicted through precise pencil work that prioritizes racial likenesses. Petite in build by comparison to the more substantial Western dignitaries, the noble, imperial prince is easily distinguishable by his physical differences, such as slanted eyes; a slim, trimmed mustache; long hair tied back in a queue; and a swarthy, darker complexion. Those visible corporeal differences are augmented by material differences, such as a tall headdress, flowing robes of Chinese attire, embroidered shoes, and an ivory fan



Figure 3. Image courtesy of Louisiana State University

as an accessory. This visual vocabulary emphasizing authenticity stems from Nast's study of portraiture and his tendency to combine "character and personalization with direct presentation of political issues of national concern" (Vinson 10). An "authentic" representation of the Chinaman, albeit sympathetic, widens the cultural gulf between West and East. How can the Chinaman be a member of the family when he is so very alien, as witnessed by visible corporeal differences?

The Chinaman is constructed through not only an emphasis of phenotypical features, but also the cartoon's composition and frame for racial identity. Composition, defined as "an overarching logic of integration" where representational and interactive elements relate to each other (Kress and van Leeuwen 181), emphasizes the racial differences between West and East. Though the august political leaders of "Christendom"—(from left to right) France, Britain, Turkey, Russia, Prussia, Spain, and Italy—might bow in greeting to Prince Kung, they also congregate together on the left side of the room, standing in solidarity even if their nations have warred in the past. West and East are arranged to occupy two separate spaces of a room, depicting a dichotomous relationship between the "white" European and the "yellow" Chinaman. This visual arrangement and spatial separation articulates both the cultural barriers Nast imagines can be traversed and the existing racial differences that need to be negotiated. Such a tableau, although imagined by Nast, reflects authentically

the racial identity of Chinese through a “speaking likeness” of a scene (Vinson 9), an expression of the dynamic of authenticity in available design. It is that likeness that inadvertently emphasized the cultural divide, which in turn accentuated racial boundaries, thus inhibiting a sea change in American attitudes on racial tolerance.

The cartoon’s framing, defined as the continuous and complementary connection of elements in a composition (Kress and van Leeuwen 176), emphasizes further the importance of cultural negotiation. This framing underscores hegemonic values and social hierarchy in subtle ways to manifest the dynamic of authenticity in design as a noun. For example, Columbia, a striking, classically dressed figure, serves as the central focus in Figure 3. Her stance—both physically and ideologically upright—is emphasized by the light that shines on and from her. As Nast’s envoy for racial and cultural goodwill, Columbia leads the Chinese prince into the room, holding his right hand while placing her left on his shoulder. Such physical contact, though perhaps appropriate in the West, is unacceptable in the East, especially in such a formal diplomatic context, and thus smacks of benevolent paternalism. The prince stands in for the “oldest member of the Family, who desires our better acquaintance,” the caption articulates. Visible corporeal differences along with material, institutional, and social resources, expressed in this cartoon’s visual grammar, frame racial identity by rendering it instantly recognizable while reiterating visually the racist power structures of nineteenth-century America.

This cartoon’s accompanying editorial, “The Celestial Embassy,” seeks to counter public prejudice visually *and* verbally on two fronts: first, the widespread, accepted belief that Eastern peoples were barbaric, uncivilized, and grotesque; and second, the invitation to its readers to engage in “a more intimate examination of the structure of Chinese civilization [. . .] [including] their temperance, their patience, their habits, their scholarship, their competitive examinations, their high culture of tea and silk” (450). Despite the racially tolerant views expressed in the editorial, the companion political cartoon operationalizes authenticity in design as a noun through the visual grammar and elements, narrowing the inventory that Nast uses to portray race. That constricted inventory, grammar, and structure in turn reduces the options for picturing race in a way that supports his progressive agenda.

Universality in Design as a Noun

Although the artistic verisimilitude Nast exercised created “authentic” depictions of the Chinese, who he perceived as raced by their physical features and cultural differences, I maintain that he also sought to accentuate their humanity, an expression of the dynamic of universality in available design as a noun. This emphasis on universal human sameness, the justification for Nast’s advocacy of racial integration, plays out in “Pacific Chivalry,” published in 1869 (Figure 4). Nast condemned the anti-Chinese bloodshed by depicting the heinous restraint and whipping of a defenseless a Chinese

worker in mid-flight. Nast's central message—the victim is a *human being*—illustrates the dynamic of universality in available design. At the same time that it underscores Nast's advocacy of the Chinese as human beings, it also dilutes that advocacy by implicitly arguing for an erasure of difference. That erasure of history, context, and material differences elides the very factors that construct and maintain those racial disparities in the first place.

Nast's progressive agenda involved challenging widespread notions of the Chinese coolie, by reworking that stereotype to emphasize a human being who requires sympathetic support.¹³ In Figure 4, the coolie, his hands positioned in surrender, is portrayed as vulnerable, defenseless, and childlike. This alien-victim, depicted as a small, feeble figure, flees in physical distress. Despite his visual foreignness, the coolie needs the support and solidarity of Nast's readers. Readers should not malign the coolie, whose oversized, half-shaved head, high forehead, buck teeth, long queue, and unfamiliar attire portray him as almost inhuman. Nast sought to humanize the coolie, who was considered an invading yellow peril. Art historian Lenore Metrick-Chen argues that the concept of "horde" characterized the Chinese "as a singular violent and mindless entity," and by so doing altered the terms of the pro-exclusion ideology as "self-protection, rather than racism" (*Collecting* 131). Although Nast did portray the influx of Chinese workers as a horde—in "The Comet of Chinese Labor," published in 1870—he and *Harper's*'s editors understood that fears of an invasion were unsubstantiated. Figure 4's accompanying editorial, "The Heathen Chinese,"

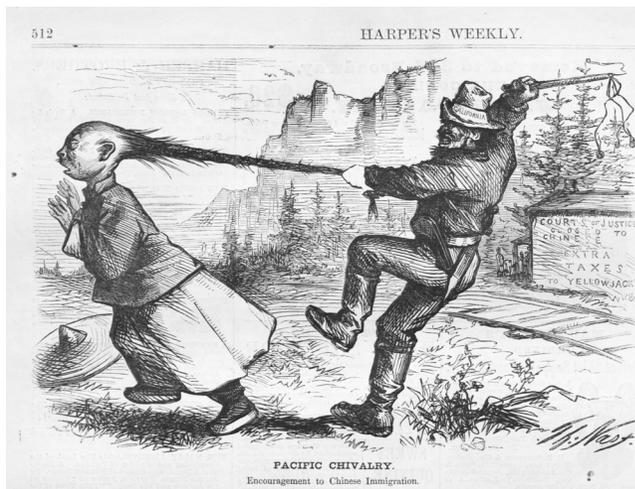


Figure 4. Image courtesy of University of Texas-Austin

describes the public fear as “altogether mythical” because fewer than 64,000 lived in the entire country in 1870 (Kennedy).

Nast employs the visual vocabulary of stereotypes to wield a coolie-victim-“Paddy” villain relationship in Figure 4. In both cases, he reduces victim and villain to two-dimensional figures, stripped of historical and material differences, contributing factors to the existing racial divide. This sociohistorical erasure through the dynamic of universality undermines his progressive agenda. For example, Nast uses available resources to underscore this Chinese figure as a human being; his distress invites public sympathy and emphasizes his need for protection. Nast’s inclusive racial politics result from his investment in equal rights for minorities, grounded in the belief that a universal brotherhood promoted the preservation of the Union (Keller, *Art* 105–9). Contradicting the perception of an invading horde by focusing on a single Chinese worker, Nast uses a visual grammar to direct viewers’ attention to the human aspects of this beleaguered laborer, an expression of the dynamic of universality in available design.

To heighten the despicable nature of white mob violence, Nast features a villainous white native by drawing on a common racialized stereotype for the Irish, or “Paddy” (Lee 68). The violent perpetrator’s face is indistinguishable under his hat, accentuating not a specific persona but the common white laborer who embodies anti-Chinese sentiments. Yet, Nast asks his audience to see beyond race, both yellow and white, to perceive the rogue as a universal bully *and* treat the victim as a general casualty of brutality. To do so, Nast draws again on the dynamic of universality to underscore the bully’s cruel features, simian-like countenance, bared teeth, and jutting, pronounced lower jaw. This thug is rendered even more contemptible because he is attacking a fleeing victim. Nast redirects his audience’s attention to the humanity of the Chinese, emphasizing that *all* humans should be concerned about unprovoked assaults, whether through mob violence or legislative discrimination. This cartoon, then, is not *just* about white-on-yellow violence. Universality in racialized gaze as available design, functioning as a noun, reframes both the Chinaman and the Paddy in a villain-victim relationship, one that should be of interest to all right-minded citizens.

Even as Nast employs the dynamic of authenticity to highlight racial differences represented through visible corporeal markers, he also relies on the dynamic of universality to shift the focus to the basic human needs of safety and belonging. The Chinese faced social discrimination and legal alienation, adding to their economic burdens and political marginalization. The inscription—“Courts of justice closed to the Chinese; extra taxes to Yellowjack”—in Figure 4 augments Chinese distress. Common racial epithets, “Yellowjack,” “John Chinaman,” and “Ah Sing,” replace individual identity with a generic group identity, a characteristic of site in design as a verb. These epithets, when combined with visual and linguistic stereotypes,

highlight the inferiority and degeneracy of the Chinese culture while justifying the dominance of existing white culture (Kim 111).

To counter such racism, Nast turned to the dynamic of universality, lamenting the lack of legal protection and the imposition of additional taxation as bully tactics. Through irony, Nast names the bully's actions in the cartoon's title, "Pacific Chivalry." Chivalry, a framework for social and moral beliefs guiding the behavior of medieval knights, involved a system of conduct founded on courage, honor, and defense of the weak. Nast mocks the actions of this villain, and, by extension, all white aggressors, who lack both honor and valor, for their ferocious verbal and physical antagonism against the weaker members of society. However, the protective framework of chivalry, like the dynamic of universality, elides the vast material, cultural, and historical differences crucial to racial identity and the resulting oppressions and exclusions. This desire to see past visible corporeal differences—to be color blind—is an outgrowth of the dynamic of universality. However, such post-racial visibility strips away history, context, and processes constituting race relations.

In sum, the racialized gaze as Design, operating through actions and resources, manifests itself in characteristics and dynamics in Nast's political cartoons advocating racial equality and inclusion. Sight and site in design as a verb involve a two-step process of establishing facticity from physiological markers of race, and then imposing on those raced, homogeneous bodies a group identity, resulting from a culture's hegemonic beliefs. These processes draw on available design, or sets of resources, filtered through the dynamics of authenticity and universality. When Nast drew the Chinese, he foregrounded visible corporeal differences that embodied an inevitable *and* necessary social and political hierarchy, and inadvertently derailed his own progressive racial ideals.

CONCLUSION: DESIGN FOR ENGLISH STUDIES

The racialized gaze as Design, both as verb and noun, offers three implications for English studies that affect literary close reading and analysis of imagery, persuasion and communication through images, and the production of images in writing studies. In this increasingly transnational age, Design involves *processes* of imagining anew the choices and arrangements that promote a socially tolerant and racially inclusive future. Design also provides *tools*, drawn from existing resources, with which old stereotypes can be redrawn according to the goals of transformation. Current work in Design focuses on the potential to enact innovative ensembles, wherein designers employ multimodal resources to rework the established choice-making conventions and create new meanings for representing and communicating. But, as we have seen with Nast, designers alone cannot sketch a racially inclusive future without attending to perceptual habits, such as the racialized gaze. A robust conceptualization

of Design—*both* the creative ensemble-making and persuasive strategies *and* the perceptual habits circulating in designers’ lifeworlds—informed by the racialized gaze is what holds these three implications for English studies.

1. *Racialized gaze as Design problematizes image exegesis.* To develop a more robust methodology for image exegesis, English studies must cultivate an increased awareness of the role perceptual habits play in Design by attending to both the *what* and the *how* of visual phenomena. Traditionally, an aesthetic approach to image interpretation has focused on the image itself, both in terms of the elements that comprise an image, such as line, color, and perspective, and in terms of its relational features, such as contrast, framing, and proximity. In addition, the rhetorical approaches have emphasized audience, purpose, genre, and even ideology in image analysis and critique. These aesthetic and rhetorical approaches scrutinize the image alone, thus making it central in any act of interpretation.

However, exegesis cannot turn a blind eye to the perceptual habits permeating all designers’ work. All images created within a lifeworld are imbued with the *interested* perceptual habits of that lifeworld. The racialized gaze as Design sustained the power alignments of a nineteenth-century racist culture where the bodies of people of color functioned *both* as a transparent text, read within a specific historical, cultural, and institutional context, *and* as a manifestation of ideologies, produced by that regime of visibility. Nast could conceive of racial identity only as visible physical differences. By attending to perceptual habits, we recognize that “we don’t just ‘see’ but have to learn *how* to see and *what* to see. [. . .] [What] we decide to see is determined by what we know and what we believe and what we want” (A. Berger 49; original emphasis). Design broadens the scope of exegesis in English studies by including the *how* with the *what*, by recognizing and grappling with the latent perceptual habits permeating all images, and, by so doing, has the potential to remake the world.

2. *Racialized gaze as Design, although selective, is not a brute condition.* A theory of Design recognizes that perceptual habits, composed of a lifeworld’s inherited meaning systems, have the potential to influence, structure, and limit designers’ creativity by serving as an ideological filter. Perceptual habits not only interpellate designers, influencing the manifestation of that designer’s subjectivity, but also circumscribe the potential of Design to enact transformation within each lifeworld. As I have argued, the racialized gaze as Design constructed the Celestial through a combination of characteristics, such as sight and site, and dynamics, such as authenticity and universality. Although Design involves a partial blindness from the influence of perceptual habits, that influence does not constitute a *brute condition*, a term I use to refer to the totalizing hegemony of visibility. Despite the formative power of the racialized gaze as Design, Nast did initiate small alterations to race relations in his lifeworld through two strategies: combination and exploration. Combination refers to the new associations brought to old ideas, such as envisioning the Chinese neither

as rat eaters nor the yellow peril, but as man and brother, as family. Exploration includes the new perspectives created from alterations that destabilize existing rules, such as the redefinition of *chivalry* and *civilization* to apply to not just white men, but to *all* men. Such small steps may accumulate into larger changes through a more racially sympathetic perspective of Design.

3. *Racialized gaze as Design cultivates critical production.* To redefine students as designers and thus producers of images is to develop curricula that nurture a critical awareness of processes, available resources, and lifeworlds. An investigation of Design through both historical recovery projects and contemporary global patterns spotlights how perceptual habits shape and are shaped by the ideological territory of a lifeworld. For example, Victorian America constituted racial identity through physical difference, and by so doing, instituted a racial hierarchy that justified a series of social, cultural, and political practices against the “unassimilable aliens.” Such a racist landscape rendered credible cries by labor leader Denis Kearney: “We intend to try and vote the Chinamen out, to frighten him out, and if this won’t do, to kill him out. [. . .] The heathen slaves must leave this coast” (qtd. in Weisberger 24). This historical inquiry offers students an understanding of the broad array of contextual decisions involved in producing images. It also highlights how well-intentioned designers, as a result of the perceptual habits of their time, may be blind to the ideological grammar, structures, and conventions of their lifeworlds, such as the racialized gaze as Design. Such knowledge helps underscore the necessity of investigating designers’ own cultural blindness. Consequently, students may develop the necessary rhetorical tools for the production of images while taking into consideration their own perceptual habits. This approach to Design equips students with the necessary skills to be critically aware, transformative ambassadors in a transnational world.

Design is decidedly partial. To act with Design is to act on *and* beyond that partiality. A more comprehensive and inclusive theory of Design seeks not only to reshape the available resources in order to craft new contexts and associations, but also to subvert the dominant perceptual habits, such as the racialized gaze, of our lifeworld.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This essay was birthed with the generous midwifery of Kristie Fleckenstein, Nancy Myers, and Crystal Colombini. Thanks to Rosemary Vasquez for obtaining the images. And a special appreciative acknowledgment goes to Kelly Ritter and the two anonymous reviewers of *College English* for their insightful, astute feedback.

NOTES

1. In composition studies, *design* as a concept encompasses both processes and products, including cultivating short- and long-term relationships (Newcomb), constructing physical spaces (Selfe), developing

programs and curricula (Marback), teaching visual literacy (Wysocki), emphasizing usability in architecture (MacDonald), and composing digital documents, including websites (Arola). *Computers and Composition* 28.3, Sept. 2011, features a critical engagement with design, digital technologies, and social expression.

2. Designers draw on a variety of representational resources including images (Fleckenstein; George), multimodality (Cope and Kalantzis; Murray), smells and tastes (Shipka), gestures or movement (Axtell), and silence or sounds (Glenn; McKee).

3. The use of both noun and verb to characterize design and available design relies on an unstable differentiation because existing words in English do take on new syntactic functions, identified by linguists as *functional shift*. Garland Cannon provides a data-based analysis of functional shift as a means for adding new items to the English lexicon. The instability between noun and verb, along with the permeable boundaries between design processes and available resources, is beyond the scope of this essay.

4. The racialized gaze epitomizes the nomenclatures of eighteenth-century positivist “science,” which identifies and categorizes race based on socially marked visual and physical characteristics. For example, Samuel George Morton focused on physical characteristics, including the size of the brain, and German naturalist J. F. Blumenbach used geography and skin color to develop hierarchical racial classifications (Gould).

5. Nigel Gibson underscores two phenomena in Fanon’s investigation of corporeal racial markers: first is the difference in black behavior among whites and among blacks, resulting not from ontology but from colonial relations; and second is the objectification of blacks when race becomes “the lens” of social relations (16).

6. See J. Chal Vinson for a discussion of Nast’s public activism, Stephen Hess and Milton Kaplan for his prowess in using visual shorthand, Roger Fischer and Allan Nevins and Frank Weitenkampf for his artistry, and Ralph Shikes on his simplistic style.

7. Nast was equally sympathetic of American Indians, yet his portrayals of African Americans grew increasingly negative when he became disillusioned after emancipation (Keller, *Art* 106–7).

8. A Nast cartoon is credited for the identification and capture of fugitive William Tweed in Spain, whose physical likeness was so “accurately” depicted that the cartoon might today be perceived as “photographic” (Berkelman 157).

9. In 1860, about 35,000 Chinese workers resided in Chinatowns in California (Campbell 113). By 1880, the Chinese in California accounted for about 10 percent of the state’s population but, in the United States as a whole, the Chinese population reached only about 105,000 or 0.002 percent (Gibson and Lennon). By contrast, only 58 Chinese lived among a New York population over 63,000 (Metrick-Chen 2).

10. A variety of socioeconomic factors contributed to the isolation of the Chinese. During the mid- and late-nineteenth century, the United States saw a rise of large-scale immigration—the Irish fled the Great Famine, Russian Jews the murderous pogroms, and Chinese wide-scale scarcity, poverty, and war—resulting in the racialization of common labor (Montgomery). Industrialists took advantage of this influx of cheap yet temporary Chinese labor as a countering response to rising organization among Euro-American workers (Saxton). Revisionist histories challenge the seminal work of Elmer Sandmeyer, who argued that the Chinese refusal to assimilate resulted from a cultural incompatibility with American norms. Ping Chiu maintains that Chinese laborers became targets of white workers’ aggressive, xenophobic behavior despite the postbellum economic changes that led to the consumption of “mass-produced and mass-distributed goods” (qtd. in Aarim-Heriot 4). Alexander Saxton describes how the Chinese became an “indispensable enemy” and a rallying point for American labor and political organizations.

11. Nast influenced the national politics of his day: two of Nast’s 1864 cartoons were used in Lincoln’s successful bid for reelection; other cartoons were key features in Ulysses S. Grant’s presidential elections of 1868 and 1872 (St. Hill). Nast also embarked on a very successful, well-documented, widely studied campaign against the corruption of Boss Tweed and the Tammany Ring (Leonard).

12. “The Emancipation of the Negroes, January, 1863—The Past and the Future,” published in *Harper’s Weekly*, 24 January 1863, argues idealistically for civil rights and racial equality.

13. Indentured or contracted workers, known as Chinese coolies, settled primarily on the West Coast, but did not consider California their home (Meltzer 84). The Chinese, constituting about one-quarter of the manual labor, worked in the railroads and mines, even though they made up only one-tenth of the local population (Metrick-Chen 127). The Western construction of “coolie” first referred to the debased laborer, then to a specific class of workers, and finally encompassed all Chinese (128).

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