In diesem Heft

- Colson Whitehead
- Kevin Willmotts *The Only Good Indian*
- Afroeuropäische Poetiken
- Wilhelm Raabe
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LWU

literatur in wissenschaft und unterricht | neue folge 1/2025

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ISSN 0024-4643
ISBN 978-3-8260-9521-4
eISBN 978-3-8260-9522-1

www.anglistik.uni-kiel.de/LWU|

Redaktion/Managing Editor: André Schwarck, Tel.: (0431) 880-2671 – e-mail: schwarck@anglistik.uni-kiel.de
Redaktionsassistenz/Assistant to the Managing Editor: Charlotte Webert – e-mail: lwu@anglistik.uni-kiel.de

Englisches Seminar der Universität Kiel, Olshausenstr. 40, D-24098 Kiel

Verlag/Publisher: Verlag Königshausen & Neumann GmbH, Postfach 60 07, D-97010 Würzburg – Leistenstraße 7, D-97082 Würzburg, Tel.: (0931) 32 98 70-0, Telefax (0931) 83 62 0, E-Mail: info@koenigshausen-neumann.de – Internet: www.koenigshausen-neumann.de

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Satz: Redaktion der *LWU*. Druck: docupoint, Magdeburg, Printed in Germany

königshausen & neumann

LWU

literatur in wissenschaft und unterricht | neue folge 1**/20**25

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Hidden in Plain Sight: Navigating Racialized Invisibility and Hypervisibility in Colson Whitehead's *The Intuitionist*

Introduction

Whiteness is not only a racial construct but also a racializing force that structures Western society in fundamental ways, from daily interpersonal interactions to larger political, economic, and social institutions. It impacts the very way white people *see* nonwhite others—indeed, white looking relations are a key component to the perpetuation of whiteness and racism on a broad scale, despite seemingly relying on individual sight. The white gaze's impact is two-fold: Firstly, as many Black and PoC writers have shown, whiteness makes nonwhite people invisible by not fitting them into their perception of the world. Most famously highlighted by writer Ralph Ellison, Black people feel themselves to be invisible in US-society, both in instances of literal imperception as well as on a broader level when People of Color are systemically overlooked. At the same time, the white gaze places nonwhite people in a state of hypervisibility. Historically and still today, Black people are made to stand out in a world structured by whiteness: They may be made hypervisible simply by being Black in a white space, by becoming a token, or by being placed under surveillance by a white systemic apparatus such as the police or justice system. Consequently, the white gaze places Black bodies in a tense position between states of invisibility and hypervisibility.

A literary work that examines the complex push and pull between these two states is Colson Whitehead's debut novel *The Intuitionist* (1999). Set in an ambiguous time between the 1940s and 60s[1] in an unnamed city in the US that largely emulates New York City, *The Intuitionist* tells the story of Lila Mae, the first Black female elevator inspector. From the beginning of the novel, Lila Mae gets caught in the midst of a tense election for the guild chair of the Department of Elevator Inspectors between the Empiricist Frank Chancre and the Intuitionist Orville Lever. The two rivaling philosophies, Empiricism and Intuitionism, represent not just two different political camps and schools of inspecting elevators, but also different ways of *looking* at the world: Empiricists base their inspection on facts and numbers, and Intuitionists commune with elevators on a phenomenological level. When an elevator unexpectedly crashes in the Fanny Briggs Memorial Building, Lila Mae becomes the prime suspect for the machine's sabotage not only as a Black woman but also as an Intuitionist. To prove her innocence, Lila

1 This ambiguous time frame is indeed a point of debate among academics. Some scholars believe to have pinpointed the exact timing to the 50s or 60s (Liggins 361) while others remain more cautious and simply summarize the time setting as "pre-civil-rights-era" (Lem-Smith 23).

Mae begins a journey into the underground dealings of elevator inspection that leads her all the way to her alma mater, the Institute for Vertical Transportation. There, she learns that James Fulton, the former Dean of the Institute and founder of the school of Intuitionism, was a Black man passing as white—a revelation that changes her way of looking at the world she inhabits.

Initially often read as a story about racial uplift (see Selzer; Lieber 46), Whitehead's novel is imbued with a variety of hermeneutical layers on structural racism and the improvement of Black people's positioning in white US-society. One of these aspects are the white looking relations that structure all parts of the novel's institutional and personal spaces. In the novel, Whitehead stages the intricate dynamics of the white gaze as a racializing force that makes Black bodies both hypervisible and invisible. Following in the footsteps of literary predecessors like Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Whitehead singles out white looking relations as the perpetrator of the racialization and disenfranchisement of his Black characters and shows how nonwhite bodies navigate these states of invisibility and hypervisibility. Moreover, Whitehead reveals the subversive opportunities invisibility opens up against the white racializing gaze. Thereby, Whitehead presents his Black characters as not only victims suffering under the white gaze, but grants them agency in these instances of invisibility/hypervisibility. Beyond the characters, Whitehead cements the white gaze epistemologically in the school of Empiricism, which comes to represent a reliance on racialized sight—a reliance that is counteracted by Intuitionism's rejection thereof.

Through this analysis, I want to highlight that Whitehead's novel is fundamentally about visibility and the racializing structures employed through a gaze. While other researchers have noted aspects of racial invisibility in the novel, research has largely overlooked the power of looking relations as a structuring force. For instance, Kimberly Fain in her comparison of Ellison's *Invisible Man* to *The Intuitionist* highlights instances of social and economic invisibility for Black characters in the novel, but disregards sight as an active agent. Preston Park Cooper, too, attempts to examine the role of invisibility in the novel, yet not only misses the dichotomous dynamic of hypervisibility and invisibility, but also egregiously extends the state of invisibility to all "city-dwellers" (185), instead of differentiating between the vastly different positions of white invisibility and the invisibility of Black characters. Similarly, using Bourdieu's theory of habitus, Marlon Lieber has examined the effects of the embodiment of race on the Black body, but leaves the role sight plays in this inscription of race into the skin unaddressed. Lastly, while the racializing white gaze does appear in Timothy Lem-Smith's reading of intuitionism and *The Intuitionist* as a whole, it remains only a puzzle piece to his reading of the text through the lens of paranoia. Consequently, with this article I want to bring white sight and racialized visibility in *The Intuitionist* out of their liminal positions in the scholarly discussion and into the foreground. For this purpose, I employ theories of whiteness and the white gaze by Richard Dyer, Frantz Fanon, and bell hooks. After reviewing the theoretical

framework, I will begin my analysis of *The Intuitionist* with an examination of the invisibility of both whiteness and Black people in Whitehead's novel. Then, I will analyze the states of hypervisibility Black characters experience, before moving onto the subversive potential of invisibility that characters like Lila Mae and James Fulton make use of to counteract a white gaze.

The White Gaze and Racialized Invisibility/Hypervisibility

> I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids—and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. (Ellison 3)

Many Black authors, both literary and academic, have noted the phenomenon of invisibility—the idea that nonwhite bodies are unseen in (white) Western societies—but none have done so as famously in the US-American literary history as Ralph Ellison in his novel *Invisible Man*, from which the above quote is taken. In this novel, an unnamed Black protagonist, who lives in a basement filled with light bulbs powered by stolen electricity, recounts his journey of realization that he is invisible to society because he is Black. Framing this story, the protagonist narrates his invisibility as the transformation into a specter on the streets; his literal invisibility becomes a stand in for both the literal failure of white people to fully *see* him as a person as well as his structural, social, and political impotence in white US society. In *Invisible Man*, Ellison points toward looking relations as a key to the racialization and the subsequent disenfranchisement of nonwhite people. In doing so, he adds to W.E.B. Du Bois's concept of "double consciousness." With this concept Du Bois also implicates looking relations as a racializing force, as the white gaze creates two versions of himself, making him "double conscious" of how he perceives himself and how he is perceived by white people (Du Bois 3). This white gaze, a way of looking that makes some bodies more visible than others, not only upholds racist categorizations, but itself acts as a racializing force that seeps into the most fundamental parts of Western society. It functions as the basis for the *in*visibilization as well as the *hyper*visibilization of nonwhite people. However, to understand the invisibilization/hypervisibilization of Black bodies, I will first have to turn to the ubiquitous invisibility of whiteness itself as a foundation for the racializing white gaze.

Invisibility as a racial force is not singular to Black bodies. Indeed, at the heart of Black invisibility (and hypervisibility) lies the invisible nature of whiteness itself (Petherbridge 105). Film and whiteness scholar Richard Dyer has written extensively about whiteness as a (non-)*visual* racial category. Whiteness, as he writes, "secures its dominance by seeming not to be anything in particular, but also […], when

whiteness *qua* whiteness does come into focus, it is often revealed as emptiness, absence, denial or even a kind of death" (Dyer, "White" 44). In other words, whiteness as the hegemonic and racializing force naturalizes itself by becoming invisible, by remaining outside of social consciousness. Further, whiteness differentiates itself from non-white categories by being "unmarked." As Dyer explains,

> [i]n the realm of categories, black is always marked as a colour (as the term 'coloured' egregiously acknowledges) and is always particularizing; whereas white is not anything really, not an identity, not a particularizing quality, because it is everything—white is no colour because it is all colours. (45)

Consequently, while white people are visible (hypervisible even) in society, their *whiteness* is invisible. To exemplify this, Dyer highlights that in discourses about race people generally mean People of Color and rarely whiteness as a racial category ("White" 46).[2] The invisibility of whiteness (by being "everything" and "nothing") allows it to become ubiquitous: Because it is "everything" whiteness can pervade all aspects of society, both in private and public places, and structure those spaces in a way that disenfranchises non-white people. At the same time, because it is "nothing" whiteness hides its hegemonic position and secures its status quo.[3] This leads to an important difference when considering the invisibility of whiteness in comparison to the invisibility of People of Color: The former comes from a position of power, or rather supports a position of power, while the latter is imposed on nonwhite bodies as a way of subjugation.

It is from this position of invisible hegemony, that the racializing force of whiteness is then inscribed into a racialized system of sight—a white gaze. Dyer highlights that "the ultimate position of power in a society that controls people in part through their visibility is that of invisibility, the watcher" (*White* 44). As a voyeuristic dynamic, a white gaze "reproduces racial power relations" through forms of *looking*, of visually classifying bodies as white or nonwhite based on constructed racialized categories that are perceptible to the eye (*White* 45). It is by being apprehended by a white gaze that a person is inscribed with a racial category. French scholar Frantz Fanon has famously captured the experience of being made Black by a white gaze in his book *Black Skin, White Masks*. He begins his chapter "The Lived Experience of the Black Man" with words thrown at him

2 Specifically, Dyer's example is about the categorization of movies: "Any instance of white representation is always immediately something specific—*Brief Encounter* is not about white people, it is about English middle-class people; *The Godfather* is not about white people, it is about Italian-American people; but *The Color Purple* is about black people, before it is about poor, southern US people" ("White" 46).

3 I want to note that, while being generally invisible on a societal scale and on an individual level to white people, who are often unaware of their privileges, whiteness is often quite visible to People of Color who, by suffering under its racializing force, are often painfully aware of it.

when apprehended within a gaze: "'Dirty n*****!' or simply '*Look*! A Negro!'" (Fanon 89, censoring and emphasis mine).[4] Immediately, Fanon implicates looking practices in his racialization as a Black person and added subjugation through the slur. Fanon describes his apprehension within the gaze of a white person as a violent yet almost clinical experience:

> The white gaze, the only valid one, is already dissecting me. I am *fixed*. Once their microtomes are sharpened, the Whites objectively cut sections of my reality. I have been betrayed. I sense, I see in this white gaze that it's the arrival not of a new man, but of a new type of man, a new species. A Negro, in fact! (95, emphasis in original)

Fanon exemplifies here that by being captured by a white gaze, he becomes Black. His racial identity is inscribed on him, his body is apprehended, taken apart in a visual analysis, and then classified as Black.[5] Because this process is entirely based on visualization of race, by *looking* at a body and observing socially constructed and arbitrary racial markers, Nicole Fleetwood calls this process "epidermalization" (22)—an inscribing of race onto the skin.

It is this inscription of race onto the Black body through the white gaze that allows for both its invisibilization and its hypervisibilization. Beginning with invisibility, the process of being made Black is utterly dehumanizing: Fanon is made not only "a new type of man," but an entirely different "species", non-human (95). When captured by a white gaze, Fanon becomes its object: "the Other fixes me with his gaze […] I explode. Here are the fragments put together by another me" (89). As he is apprehended, Fanon recreates white looking relations through the double consciousness of himself, which puts him together again. As he is "dissected" with clinical precision and then remade along racialized categories and stereotypes, he then becomes "another me." Fanon as a person with individuality and humanity becomes invisible; left behind is a racialized, stereotyped version of himself based on the white view of his double-conscious self. Fanon's invisibility consequently is an ontological one: He is perceived (and is made to perceive himself) as not-human, he becomes a racialized object/subject/alien Other. Building onto this ontological invisibility, there is a societal invisibility, where Black people are denied participation in social life because they have been classified as object/alien/animal. This social invisibility can range from failing to be recognized in the streets, being overlooked for job opportunities, to being excluded in public policy.

4 I have made the decision to censor the n-word here, because as a white writer I am conscious of my position of power, and I do not wish to perpetuate the harmful slur even in writing. I believe that censoring the word will not impede the meaning of the original text.

5 The clinical nature of this visual dissection and categorization of course also speaks of a history of eugenics and racial categorization in medicine. Despite the biological categorization of race having long since been refuted, medical racism haunts the discipline until today (see for instance Nuriddin et al.)

In addition to the direct invisibilization of Black people through whiteness itself, comes the "encouraged" invisibilization of Black people. Bell hooks traces this "compelled" invisibility through the history of the US: "One mark of oppression was that black folks were *compelled* to assume the mantle of invisibility, to erase all traces of their subjectivity during slavery and the long years of racial apartheid, so that they could be better, less threatening servants" (168, emphasis mine). Consequently, making oneself invisible was trained, and not doing so could lead to punishment. This also points to the dynamic of invisibility acting as a safety measure against the white gaze—hiding oneself as to not be regarded by white people and to evade their employment of a racializing sight system. Fanon describes this desire of turning invisible to escape the white gaze upon being apprehended: "I slip into corners; I keep silent; all I want is to be anonymous, to be forgotten. Look, I'll agree to everything, on condition I go unnoticed!" (96). Thereby, the white gaze not only invisibilizes Black people by erasing them from their visual landscape (both consciously and unconsciously), but also by encouraging them to don invisibility to avoid that gaze.

From Fanon's experience we can also derive the other dichotomous force of white looking relations: hypervisibility. As Fanon is captured by the gaze he describes being "[l]ocked in this suffocating reification, […] [the gaze] gliding over my body suddenly smoothed of rough edges" (89). The white gaze, upon perceiving him, marks him as Other and makes him in his Blackness hypervisible against the whiteness of the person looking. Being hypervisible as Other in white spaces has similarly been described by Zora Neale Hurston who writes: "I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background" (96). Because, as Dyer has pointed out, whiteness is invisibly ubiquitous in a majority of institutional and political places, Black bodies are constantly made to stand out among what Sara Ahmed calls "a sea of whiteness" (135).

I want to highlight here two variations of hypervisibility for Black people, namely surveillance and tokenism. Surveillance makes people hypervisible through looking relations, as a person or group of people impose power by visually racializing and policing a now made hypervisible Other or group of Others (Foucault 6). Whiteness, through its ubiquitous invisibility, replicates the Foucauldian panopticon, which uses the analogy of a prison tower surveilling encapsulated prisoners to reflect how power structures surveil members of society and enact (self-enforced) policing on those members. Importantly, in Foucault's analogy, the officer surveilling from the tower is invisible to the prisoners, who are unable to tell whether someone is watching them at all. Therefore, the prisoners will police their own actions simply because they feel themselves to be watched (see Foucault 5-6). Foucault's panopticon translates to the surveilling and obscure ubiquitousness of whiteness (see Dyer, "White" 44), which invisibly polices non-white bodies through the white gaze. Additionally, hypervisibility and surveillance are a self-perpetuating combination: Being hypervisible initially allows for one's surveillance, but that surveillance then also furthers one's sense of hypervisibility.

Black bodies made hypervisible against "the sharp white background" (Hurston 96) are constantly under threat of surveillance from the hypervisibilizing white gaze. This surveillance can appear in many different (personal and institutional) spaces, but perhaps the most powerful and pervasive arbiters of surveillance are the police and the justice system. Black bodies have been overpoliced (including Black people experiencing higher amounts of arrests, higher amounts of convictions and more violence and death at the hand of the police [NAACP; Brame et al.]) since the dawn of slavery (Spruill). In the context of the police, being observed by an officer is often translated into being perceived and categorized as "a 'threat' or 'hazard'" (Petherbridge 108). This racialized viewing of a Black person allows for their surveillance and overpolicing—the argument goes that because they are a "threat" (which is a racialization inscribed by the white gaze), Black people need to be placed under heightened monitoring and regulation. In the context of the surveilling justice system, hypervisibility of Black people thereby comes with a danger—an existential one that could cost one's livelihood and live itself.

Another variation of hypervisibility of Black people is tokenism. Here, one (or more) Black person will be made hypervisible, often even under "positive" pretenses, to stand in for the entire racial group or as a way of showing "diversity" (Settles et al. 63). Katrina McDonald and Aida Harvey Wingfield describe this dynamic of being both singled out yet representing many, as being viewed as "exotic spectacles, as racial/ethnic/gender/other-category experts, or so highly unique as to be [sic.] warrant special praise or special handling" (32). Here, the Black person is actively made hypervisible not only through the initial racializing gaze but also by the resulting idea that one Black person can act as representation or expert for all Black people. This aspect of representation then often creates another step of hypervisibilization, when the tokenized Black person is placed into a position of high visibility due to being Black, for instance in marketing material.

Both forces of hypervisibility and invisibility come together to create an oblique positioning of Black bodies in white society. Black people are constantly and simultaneously under the pressure of the double semantic layer of the white gaze *looking over* them: they are in their state of invisibility *overlooked* while also made hypervisible by being *looked over*. Importantly, and despite having so far been portrayed as two dichotomous forces, invisibility and hypervisibility of nonwhite people are two sides of the same coin: "[O]ne creates overdetermined perceptions in the gaze of the other; the other is de-subjectifying" (Petherbridge 105). Going further, the two supplement each other. For instance, both forms of hypervisibility I have mentioned also inherently invisibilize Black people. In the case of surveillance and overpolicing, hypervisibility subjugates and dehumanizes Black people invisibilizing their personhood. Tokenism, respectively, invisibilizes their individuality and distinctness, as well as often making invisible other instances of racism, such as racist hiring practices by using Black people for promotional material. On the other side, invisibility of Black people is often

"self-imposed," as a way of escaping the hypervisibility of the white gaze, as Fanon also exemplifies. When faced with surveillance and overpolicing, trying to make oneself invisible may simply be a measure of safety.

Nevertheless, navigating the dimensions of invisibility/hypervisibility can occasionally allow for acts of resistance against the white gaze and white society. Such acts include making oneself actively hypervisible in a white space to call attention to one's existence, using invisibility so that one can "slip" past the white racializing sight system, or offering new ways of seeing that counter white hegemonic gazes.[6] Sara Ahmed, for instance, highlights the reparative and empowering potential in focusing on the invisible. For her, it is a way that "allow[s] the oblique to open up another angle of the world" (172). Forgoing further explanation here, I will use *The Intuitionist* to exemplify the subversive potential of invisibility by examining how Whitehead allows his characters to navigate their states of invisibility/hypervisibility under the white gaze.

Invisibility/Hypervisibility in Colson Whitehead's *The Intuitionist*

"She doesn't know what to do with her eyes." (Whitehead 1)

Seeing and perceiving is, in and of itself, an integral part of Colson Whitehead's *The Intuitionist*. This already becomes clear in the above quoted second sentence of the novel—first, if one does not consider the epigraphical description of the falling elevator. Here, Lila Mae, the Black female protagonist, is introduced through her use of the organ of sight. Importantly, her eyes are not simply a source of an unequivocal gift of perception, but cause insecurity: "She doesn't know what to do with [them]" (1). Consequently, Whitehead's second sentence immediately introduces not only the importance of *looking* but also the precarious and ambiguous nature of sight. Seeing (or not seeing) something or someone, modes of visibility and invisibility, will be proven to be arbiters of systems of power and oppression as well as grant opportunities for transgression. Throughout the novel, Whitehead's staging of these systems of racialized and racializing sight often takes place in an ambiguous place between literalization and metaphor. Sight, whiteness, and invisibility are often physically manifested in the novel, but nonetheless retain their metaphorical implications. Whitehead employs the same literary technique in the context of the elevator symbol, which literalizes the uplift ideology commonly maintained by thinkers like W.E.B. Du Bois (see Seltzer). By making manifest abstract ideas, yet allowing them to stand

6 While I will examine one way of creating a countering gaze in *The Intuitionist*, I want to point towards another work of art where a new way of looking is created through the donning of invisibility: In his 2017 series *Night Coming Tenderly, Black*, Dawoud Bey utilizes photography to highlight the power of invisibility (for a full analysis of the piece see Smith's article „Photography, Darkness, and the Underground Railroad").

for more than themselves, Whitehead asks the reader to continuously negotiate between the physical and the abstract, the literal and the metaphorical, indeed, the visible and the invisible.

With its preoccupation with looking relations, *The Intuitionist* falls into the footsteps of the genres and literary movements whose practices it employs. The novel's tone and style is an amalgamation of genre tropes and modes of literary movements, but among the most notable influences are noir detective fiction and postmodernism (Maus 18–19, 26). For instance, the detective fiction genre, which Whitehead's novel heavily emulates (Lem-Smith 23), usually features a narrative of something hidden being revealed by an investigating detective over the course of the novel. The issue of invisibility is also often employed in postmodern writing, where hidden forces and conspiracies may be the course of anxiety and paranoia and heightened feelings of solipsism (as is the case in Pynchon's *Crying of Lot 49*—another author whose tone Whitehead emulates [Maus 26]). This sense of invisibility, anonymousness, and paranoid solipsism can be found all throughout *The Intuitionist*,[7] such as in descriptions of the cityscape: "She'd [Lila Mae] never experienced anonymity like that: it's as if the place stimulated enzymes that form a carapace" (Whitehead 27). By casting this uneasy invisibility into the novel's foundation—its noir urban setting (Liggins 360)—it becomes the basis for the display of the complex racialized power dynamics in being visible/invisible/hypervisible in US society. Whitehead, therefore, makes use of his literary genre toolbox to convey how a white gaze is employed through the invisibility of whiteness to place Black bodies into states of invisibility and hypervisibility—and how his marginalized Black characters can use the mantle of these states for subversive power.

Invisibility

At this point I would like to again begin not with the invisibility (and hypervisibility) of nonwhite characters, but with the invisibility of whiteness that sits at the core of the white gaze, in the metaphorical tower of the Foucauldian panopticon. In *The Intuitionist*, whiteness is pervasive throughout all systems of power, most notably in the structures of the Institute for Vertical Transport and the Department of Elevator Inspectors which function as the proxies for the various institutions of the US (including political, legal, as well as professional bodies). Essentially all higher positions of institutional, political, or economic power are occupied by white people, such as the candidates for the chair of the Guild of Elevator Inspectors (the Empiricist Frank Chancre and the intuitionist Orville Lever), or the mob boss Johnny Shush. Even the former Dean of the Institute for Vertical Transport and founder of Intuitionism James Fulton, who is

7 For a more thorough analysis of paranoia and *The Intuitionist* as a work of postmodern detective fiction, see Timothy Lem-Smith's article "Colson Whitehead's Paranoid Styles."

a Black man passing as white, continues the invisible pervasiveness of whiteness because he is *considered* to be white and his "whiteness" allows for his ability to come into power. Consequently, whiteness is ubiquitous in the institutions of *The Intuitionist*; it is the norm, whereas Blackness is novelty: Lila Mae was the only Black student at the Institute, and now she and her colleague Pompey are the only two Black inspectors at the Department.

While whiteness is certainly named and made visible throughout the book, there are instances where Whitehead highlights its invisibility. Occasionally, whiteness is made semantically invisible when it is simply assumed for characters. For example, it is never explicitly stated that Lila Mae's only friend Charles "Chuck" Gould is white—this is only implied by his "red hair" (Whitehead 20), his "Jewish name" (108), and the fact that Pompey and Lila Mae are stated to be the only Black people at the Department. Going even further, the mob boss Johnny Shush is never even physically described at all, but his whiteness is implied by the literary catalog of white (Italian) mobsters before him. In other cases, Whitehead makes this invisibility of whiteness physically manifest. One example is Orville Lever, who Lila Mae describes as "one of those translucent white people, every vein swims up to the surface of his skin" (124). Here, Whitehead literalizes the metaphor of white invisibility, inscribing it into the skin in a distorted "epidermalization" ala Fleetwood (22).

On a social level, the unseen pervasiveness of whiteness is explicitly captured by Jim and John, two associates of Johnny Shush who meticulously search Lila Mae's apartment:

> Jim and John are white, and thanks to the vagaries of statistical distribution, average citizens of this country. […] They look alike, and look like a great number of other people. Their fraternity glut the police files of known assailants; they reach for the grocer's last box of cereal to prevent the next customer from enjoying it, and don't even like cereal. Banks are full of them, and movie theatres and public transport. The invisible everymen, the true citizens. (28–29)

Jim and John remain invisible because of their skin. Their invisibility, granted by the ubiquitous nature whiteness, allows them to blend in with the rest of society, which is white. Naturally, the ubiquitous whiteness that makes them "invisible everymen, the true citizens" (29), also makes Black people both hypervisible among that "sea of whiteness" as well as invisible: If white people are the "*every*men, the true citizens" (emphasis mine), nonwhite characters become *no*thing, no citizens at all, and outside the bounds of civic and social standing. Importantly, these characters' whiteness facilitates their positioning as people of institutional and political power and their invisibility in turn comes from their position of power. This is in contrast to the Black characters, whose invisibility is enforced upon them as a form of social and political disenfranchisement.