

What Yellowface Hides: Video Games, Whiteness, and the American Racial Order

ANTHONY SZE-FAI SHIU

I think Lo Wang is a great character and I would love to be him.
James R. Horning, computer game player¹

IN 1996, 3D REALMS SOFTWARE RELEASED WHAT HAS BECOME ONE OF THE best-selling first-person perspective video games: *Duke Nukem 3D*. In Spring 1998, the same company released *Shadow Warrior*, a “sequel” that became the companion game for *Duke Nukem 3D*. Marketed under the title “East Meets West,” the two games were sold in a single package. Similar to other games in the genre—like *Doom*, *Marathon*, and *Quake*—the major difference within the 3D Realms games is that the player, in effect, becomes the character in the game. By securely suturing the first-person views of the action and the user-controlled, real-time speech of the video game characters, the games allow the characters’ speech to become our “own.” These characters, then, establish a scenario where the player’s control over virtual embodiment demands critical decisions concerning subjective investments in the games’ scenarios and narratives. As such, both *Duke Nukem 3D*’s and *Shadow Warrior*’s speculations concerning white subjectivity and “yellowface” performance call for an investigation into the value of performing as a racial other for the sake of game play.

The problems and dynamics of “yellowface” (or the donning and use of the “yellow” body by whites) emerge in the narratives of *Duke Nukem 3D* and *Shadow Warrior*. By investigating the racial stakes of these games’ representations of white masculinity and Orientalized characters and contemporary cultural studies’ reassessments of the legacy of

The Journal of Popular Culture, Vol. 39, No. 1, 2006
© 2006, Copyright the Authors
Journal compilation © 2006, Blackwell Publishing, Inc.

blackface minstrelsy, we are able to rethink how to enter current conversations concerning the concepts of race, culture, and authenticity, especially in light of recent critical work carried out in Whiteness Studies and Asian American studies. As futuristic visions, these two video games present the public with the opportunity to revisit and revise contemporary understandings of racialized representations and subjectivities. Current thinking about race and cultural politics does not significantly differ from the logics used in *Duke Nukem 3D* and *Shadow Warrior*: logics of race, racial masquerade, and racial “truths” that make use of a racialized body—literally and figuratively—always surface. What can racial masquerade tell us? Thinking about yellowface helps to mediate the problems that studies of blackface minstrelsy have presented. In the largest possible sense, yellowface directly questions cultural studies’ investments in representation and identity by exposing the dangers of analyses that uncritically use notions of cultural identity, race, and subjectivity. In the end, the two games (and cultural studies in general) present futures that redeploy and reinvest in the concept of race via a general strategy of “disidentification.” This disidentification presents us with an impasse of sorts, especially in terms of how we approach the thorny problem of representation’s relation to both racial subordination and equality.

The Games

Duke Nukem 3D presents us with a post-apocalypse Los Angeles taken over by space aliens; the mission of the game is to save the white women whom the aliens target for “breeding.” At the same time, the only human characters present in the game are white; representing “interracial” L.A. as the territory of whites only, the aliens—in a strange act of substitution—become minorities and the ground of Duke’s mission shifts from preventing inter-species breeding to the threat of interracial miscegenation. This is a far cry from the Los Angeles that Mike Davis refers to as a “poly-ethnic, poly-centered metropolis” and the city that Lisa Lowe describes as “nearing a time in which more than 50 percent of the population will be Asian, Latino, African American, and other ‘minority’ populations” (Davis 82; Lowe 85–86).

There are three examples of this miscegenation logic at work. First, a section of the game’s story appears on a “help” screen, revealing Duke

Nukem's motivation for "saving" L.A.: while traveling in his intergalactic cruiser after defeating the alien Rigelatins, Duke claims, "A babe, a stogie, and a bottle of Jack. That's what I need right now." Then, Duke's ship is hit by alien fire and he mutters to himself, "What's the problem with all these aliens attacking Earth anyway? How many alien races have to get their asses kicked? . . . I guess one more."² In the game itself, extradiegetic images mirror further the racial logics used in the narrative. The first level of the game, entitled "Hollywood Holocaust," presents us with a billboard that reads "Innocent?" with the question mark scrawled in blood. In "Red Light District," the next level, Duke can approach a television playing footage of O. J. Simpson's white Ford Bronco driving down an L.A. Freeway. By means of a temporal confusion, the alien invasion and apocalypse is not in the distant future but right now and always under our gaming surveillance; the saga that is known as O. J. signifies fears of miscegenation, "biracial" offspring, and murderous black men only hinted at in Duke's mention of "alien races."

"The Birth" episode, a short movie that plays before the "It's Impossible" game level, further reveals the game's anti-miscegenationist longings. In this film, a general (from an unnamed branch of the armed forces) narrates a scene that is played on a television monitor next to him; we see a group of alien invaders surrounding a visibly pregnant woman lying on a metal exam table. Laboriously straining, the woman gives birth to a half-alien, half-human child while the extraterrestrial invaders dance and gesticulate in a circle around her. The threat of racial mixing spurs Duke to retaliate for the violation of a white female. The mission, then, is to regulate by force that which populates/inhabits/violates the white female body; this white female body becomes a "biological spectacle" and the "womb serves as a metonym for the entire family body" (Balsamo 80). The "families" here are racial families, and it is the white race that is under attack.

What makes *Duke Nukem 3D* unique is that it was the first to use real-time speech by the main character; periodically, after killing aliens, Duke mutters pre-programmed phrases—fourteen in all. The character of these phrases—"Suck it down," "Come get some," and "You suck," for example—assert a heterosexualized, hyperbolic notion of white "masculinity" tinged with homoerotic possibilities. Duke's brawny body, rife with intense muscle definition and implied physical strength, bears similarities to Susan Jefford's thoughts

about how Ronald Reagan's body and persona was marketed as both something to identify with and, by extension, something to consolidate patriotism,

[T]he image of [Reagan's] body could serve equally well as a sign of unity . . . there is a dual identification taking place: first, with the individual body, as citizens might choose to see themselves *as* that body, desiring its strengths, expressions, and stances; and second, with that body as a national emblem, as a collective symbol for a nation that individual citizens receive pleasure from feel themselves part of. (26)

The popularity of the game, the racial narrative it advances, and the bodily representations used clearly raise the stakes for the game, and the prevention of miscegenation also becomes the protection of an "America" before "alien" invasion. In essence, *Duke Nukem 3D* is all about a hyperkinetic display of testosterone-laden, nationalistic white male heterosexuality played out against a backdrop of alien invasion in a whites-only apocalyptic representation of Los Angeles. And this parallels what Douglas Kellner refers to as the "white male paranoia" that informs American films like *Rambo: First Blood* where "males [are presented] as victims of foreign enemies, other races, the government, and society at large" (65–66). This places the gamer in a position of identification that is, actually, a disidentification with the possibilities and potentialities of "America" in the greatest possible sense: the proximity of racialized bodies to white bodies will be negated via the regeneration of white power, pride, and identity.

By game's end, Duke Nukem must repopulate Los Angeles (and America, by extension). After defeating the head alien at the end of the game—the battle takes place on a football field atop a Los Angeles skyscraper—we are presented with the game's logo and a voice over by Duke and a female companion:

Duke: "My name's Duke Nukem. After a few days of R&R, I'll be ready for more action."

Woman: "Awww! Come back to me, Duke. I'm ready for some action . . . now!" [Groans and sex sounds. Fade out.]

There is now sanctioned breeding. Hinting at more alien-killing escapades, Duke's address to the player serves as a circular gesture; when he rests, the player rests, and after a few days of not playing the game

(theoretically), Duke/player can go back and start the racial and gendered policing of Los Angeles anew.

Conversely, *Shadow Warrior* attempts nothing as grand in scope as *Duke Nukem 3D*. The game is set in a Japan rife with “pan-Asian” iconography; *tatamis*, sliding bamboo doors, yin-yang symbols, statues of Buddha, Ming vases, coolies in rice-paddy hats, flatulent sumo wrestlers, and dogs and rats hanging from stands in the food markets. The gamers are definitely not “at home” and the player is allowed to “appropriate and manipulate place and hence to invent space . . . with a claim to establishing authority and, to varying degrees, the illusion of ‘truth’” (Manderson 124). The main character, named Lo Wang, is a ninja warrior motivated to defeat his former boss, Zilla, and his “scheme to rule Japan, using creatures summoned from the dark side.”³ Indeed, the yellowface gesture demanded by *Shadow Warrior* is also a demand to prevent the spread of corrupt Japanese capital that uses supernatural creatures and ghouls. The general strategy of disidentification advanced by the game works in an ambivalent manner; to counter the rise of racialized and extraterritorial capital, the gamer must become a sovereign, independent subject that is forever locked into systems of racialization.

Diverging from Duke Nukem’s perpetually asserted phallic virility, Lo Wang is characterized by a certain sense of diminished capabilities. Besides the choice in names—a sly jab at questions of penis size and a constant reminder to look “down there”—Lo Wang is visibly older and more prone to injury and death than Duke Nukem. Likewise, the common substitution of “r’s” for “l’s” (and vice versa) in his speech further demarcates the line between imagined white game player and tortured English-speaking computer character. When Duke Nukem approaches women during gameplay, he utters, “Shake it baby” and “Wanna Dance?” while Lo Wang sheepishly states, “You wash wang or you watch Lo Wang wash wang?” Apart from general claims concerning the lack of “equal” representations of an Asian/Asian American heterosexual male that are as “virile” or “competent” as Duke Nukem, it is essential to note how *Shadow Warrior* relies on the same sorts of racial logics of difference as *Duke Nukem 3D* while instating an abject yellow body dependent upon a sexual economy of auto-eroticism.

The final enemies that Lo Wang and Duke Nukem meet at the end of their respective games further demonstrates the racial threat in each game: brown, rapacious aliens in one and the machine-like threat of

Japanese capital in the other. As mentioned earlier, Duke meets the alien “boss” on a football field; this boss has suspiciously brown skin, buck teeth/fangs, plated armor, and rocket/laser guns as hands. This is the racial monster/specter of interbreeding, his appendages as weapons and ready to “play ball” with Duke and “his” women on the gridiron of American masculinity. Lo Wang’s rival Zilla, by comparison, is a Japanese businessman sitting inside and controlling a samurai “machine” (a robot that is three times Zilla’s height). The key difference between the two bosses is that Duke’s nemesis implies a menacing “colored” virility and an impending sexual violation, while Lo Wang’s symbolizes Japanese economic hegemony in a modernized “cultural” costume: the East is traditional, mutable, and controlled by economically rapacious businessmen. Zilla’s machine counteracts the cyborg nature of the gamer donning yellowface in order to become Lo Wang; Lo Wang, then, becomes the “real” human subject who must rely on his (decrepit) body and vigilante attitude.

What is most interesting are the conversations that have circulated around the release of *Shadow Warrior* and the attendant defenses of the game as either “play” or just “imaginary.” The quote from James R. Horning in the epigraph is curious because of the presumable absence of racialist terminology; Horning posits an affiliation with Lo Wang that goes beyond just “liking” him to a state of ontological longing/affiliation. And yet what gets accomplished over the yellow body is not some sort of late 1990s interracial male bonding or understanding but rather a debate surrounding the potentiality for the yellow body of Lo Wang. George Broussard, president of 3D Realms and project leader for both *Duke Nukem 3D* and *Shadow Warrior*, explains his motivation for creating the character of Lo Wang and its possible implications:

We intentionally mixed the nationalities [of Lo Wang], not out of ignorance, but because we knew it would generate mass amounts of flames [derogatory e-mail] and e-mail debates online. We just wanted to give people something to talk about. In the end Lo Wang is who you want him to be, and since “you” sort of become him in the game, we think it’s good to have a fuzzy background, so you can assume his role more easily. (“Exclusive”)

Of course, there is no “real” Asian male for Broussard to portray, and Broussard implicitly realizes that Lo Wang is ultimately a simulation; but when expressing a need to have a “fuzzy background” for the

gamers, Broussard articulates an anxiety over the insecure and, quite possibly, irreducible yellow body. Coupled with this is that all of the designers/programmers for both games are white males; although this guarantees nothing, what it does reveal is that *Duke Nukem 3D* and *Shadow Warrior* are game texts where the stakes very much reside in who decides what a racialized body can mean, what it can signify, and why it is still of value to us.

And yet protests over the game, most notably in a column by Chinese American Elliot Chin in the September 1997 *Computer Gaming World*, are not necessarily much better.⁴ Lodging his complaint in terms of “authenticity” and racial “sensitivity,” Chin offers up a scathing critique tinged with ways to “properly” represent an “Asian” character and setting,

I can respect a company for taking an admittedly appealing idea such as a ninja facing off against mythical Asian beasts and evil samurai, but only when it's done well. As I played SHADOW WARRIOR, every time I heard Lo Wang's thickly accented voice spouting out some fortune-cookie wisdom, I got increasingly offended . . . The other thing that offended me was how 3D Realms didn't even try to create an authentic or accurate Japanese, or East Asian, atmosphere.

This article was followed by Fred Snyder's letter to the editor in the October 1997 issue,

Unfortunately, I cannot look upon Mr. Chin's comments as any sort of objective review because, I'm sorry, he's Asian. Perhaps I would have respected the article more if he had come to the rescue of our downtrodden Midwestern brothers so rudely affronted in *Redneck Rampage* [Xatrix, 1997] . . . If I seek cultural education, I'll see *Farewell, My Concubine* again. (“Letters”)⁵

Conflating “race” and “class” while ablating any possibility for racial critique, Snyder begs for an evaluation of the pathological portrayal of white Midwesterners while securing Chin in a non-“objective” position of “Asian/not-Asian American.” What this signals—in the case of the ambiguous, self-derisive yellow body and the always assertive hyperbolic straight white hardbody—is that representing both yellow and white are rife with anxiety over how exactly to approach and assert a primacy of subjectivity through representation; if *Duke Nukem* is

ostensibly meant as a temporary securing of embattled and uncertain white status against a “colored” and threatening world, then how exactly to approach the use of yellowface in terms of what it negotiates? In other words, what end does such a representation serve and, in the end, how does this affect conversations about representation, racial “masquerade,” and anxiety?

Whiteness, Asian American Studies, Disidentification

Studies that explore whiteness generally attempt to eradicate the hierarchy implicit in any conceptualization of race while simultaneously maintaining a somewhat strong belief in race; this tactic is nothing more than a revision of the racial system that never moves to eradicate such a system. David Roediger, in *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness*, short-circuits any possibility of a theoretical critique of race by advocating for a pragmatic criticism that expresses the “need to attack whiteness as a destructive ideology rather than to attack the concept of race abstractly” (3). By avoiding any “abstract” dealing with the concept of race, Roediger calls for a politics that invests in the “possibilities of nonwhiteness” (17). What is maintained in this vision is still a politics that relies upon ideas of nonwhiteness, and nothing guarantees that the exclusionary politics of so-called whiteness will not resurface in the “possibilities of nonwhiteness.” Political exigency demands something other than whiteness—something that is still racist—to realize an equalitarian future.

This future vision relies upon a two-fold logic; whiteness is pathological and blackness (or African American culture) is the revelation that revives the possibility for equality. Roediger, after dismissing any attempt to call “into question the concept of race generally,” calls for an “activism” that realizes that “while neither whiteness nor Blackness is a scientific (or natural) racial category, the former is infinitely more false, and precisely because of that falsity, more dangerous than the latter” (12). Roediger goes on to explain that it is not just that whiteness is infinitely more false, but that it is also nothing in particular, “It is not merely that whiteness is oppressive and false; it is that whiteness is *nothing but* oppressive and false. We speak of African American culture and community, and rightly so” (13). As an alternative, Roediger advances a notion of “specific ethnic cultures” (Italian American, Slavic

American, etc.) that can battle whiteness, but his investment in African American culture (or blackness) reveals a tenuous logic at the heart of Whiteness Studies: the refusal or disidentification with whiteness demands that a reinvestment occur in particular cultural/racial identities. As it turns out, this reinvestment relies upon a notion of blackness or African American culture from which whites can extract an inventory or schematic for understanding (and performing) in a liberating, non-white manner.

The notion of a racial inventory emerges in other critical works on whiteness, most notably in arguments about cultural appropriation. Fred Pfeil sets up this dynamic in his discussion of rock stars and what he calls “rock authenticity”:

{W}hat rock authenticity means is not just a freedom from commerce and opposition to all straight authority, combined with a deep vocational allegiance to the music, but being a free agent with ready access to the resources of femininity and Blackness with no obligation to either women or Blacks. (79)

Yet, the question remains as to what exactly makes up the “resources” that characterize “femininity” and “blackness” and can these “inventories” (cultural, gendered, etc.), if they exist at all, ever be “poached” with “obligation”? Likewise, what would the shape of this obligation look like? Eric Lott, in *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, further delineates this struggle over “responsibility” and appropriation:

{Popular culture} is itself a crucial place of contestation, with moments of resistance to the dominant culture as well as moments of supersession. Talking about the minstrel show this way reveals the most popular American entertainment form in the antebellum decades as a principle struggle in and over the culture of black people. (18)

What this “struggle in and over the culture of black people” relies on, however, is a set repertoire for being black—or what may pass for a belief in “blackness” in Pfeil’s case—that resides in the realm of “culture.” Lott qualifies this, “[M]instrel men visited not plantations but racially integrated theaters, taverns, neighborhoods, and waterfronts—and *then* attempted to create plantation scenes”; mirroring Pfeil’s “resources,” Lott acknowledges a specific, knowable, and learnable way

of being “black” that, in the end, relies upon a sort of anthropological knowledge of the Other through “folklore, dance, jokes, songs” (9).

The justifications for blackface minstrelsy—at least in reference to antebellum performances—do not vary much. In *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, David Roediger posits the following:

Just as the minstrel stage held out the possibility that whites could be “black” for awhile but nonetheless white, it offered the possibilities that, via blackface, preindustrial joys could survive amidst industrial discipline. (118)

These “preindustrial joys,” which are most likely pre-lapsarian as well, force the critique of blackface into a mode where it is primarily concerned with class status; Eric Lott directly mirrors (and uses the same term as) Roediger, “The blackface body figured the traditional, ‘pre-industrial’ joys that social and economic pressures had begun to marginalize” (*Love* 148). These critiques seem perilous not because class supersedes race in terms of speaking about racial masquerade, but that such uses of the racialized body run the risk of naturalizing the body’s use through white ethnics’ negotiation with the industrial order. When Lott writes that minstrelsy was a “cheap racist libidinal charge,” the nuances and structures of racial belief/investment in racial masquerade are dismissed and a reassessment of “white” subjectivity is avoided (149). And, eerily, the desire to return to the “preindustrial” is mirrored in *Shadow Warrior* through the game’s investment in defeating corrupt, yet racialized, corporate interests to secure a working-class “manhood.”

Roediger qualifies these arguments, noting that the possibilities for racial violence were always present:

But if there is reason to suspect that the identification mitigated the repulsion toward the stage character in blackface, there is little evidence that it mitigated white hostility toward real Blacks . . . And blackface-on-Black violence suggests that just the opposite logic—one of hatred toward the object of desire—could prevail. (124)

The labeling of blackface as a practice enabling racial “understanding” is evident here through substitution—the opposite of the logic of “hatred” toward the object of desire is “love”—but where are the

“obligations” to and desires for the other that Pfeil so insistently advocates for? They happen to reside in the present and contemporary, over discussions about hip-hop and black “culture.” Roediger’s introduction to *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness* addresses this issue as follows:

Hiphop offers white youth not only the spontaneity, experimentation, humor, danger, sexuality, physical movement and rebellion absent from what passes as white culture but it also offers an explicit, often harsh, critique of whiteness. Of course it would be ridiculous that every white hiphop fan is finding a way out of whiteness, let alone out of racism. There will be no simple fix for the white problem and it is well to emphasize limits as well as possibilities. (15–16)

In a very serious and pathological way, Roediger’s argument posits that what whites “possess” in terms of a “cultural inventory” is predicated upon the lack(ing) of a vanguard subjectivity, one that can challenge the “white problem” through something like hip-hop. To find a way “out of whiteness” is to find a place somewhere else but not beyond anything; in effect, the “somewhere else” resides in black performances of hip-hop, an ultimately liberating “cultural” engagement that counters a pathological whiteness. And it is hard to shift the ground from “white privilege” to something approximating equalitarian standing by simply divesting and disabusing oneself from such privileges. The “cure” for whiteness in this instance is an entrance into a new racial schema that smacks of the old racial order. Lott argues that “whiteness itself ultimately becomes an impersonation” (“White” 491); perhaps what Whiteness Studies cannot admit to is that the realization of whiteness as “impersonation” and “infinitely more false” does nothing to advance a greater project of deracialization.

Yet, the state of the art in Asian American cultural studies runs in tandem with Whiteness Studies by using racial/cultural identity as a “strategic” maneuver to counter racial domination. For example, the question of South Asian American panethnic inclusion into mainstream Asian American cultural studies has been answered in this fashion. Deepika Bahri writes that a “kaleidoscopic and futuristic vision” for Asian American cultural politics involves a strategy where we “spot moments when (cultural) differences can and must be dissolved into a principled unity *for the moment*” to achieve the

“ultimate goal of undoing categories designed to keep us in place” (42). This “principled unity” demands that group politics follow a specific racial course. The only way that this strategy can succeed, however, is if the end point is fully understood and delimited; the hazy goal of “undoing [racial] categories” solves nothing in particular, and nothing is guaranteed in Bahri’s vision that will bring about a full realization of a deracialized future.

The work of Lisa Lowe explains this strategy in a more sustained, explanatory manner, and we can trace out examples of strategic essentialism and disidentification in her work *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*. Lowe argues that the “making” of Asian American culture “includes practices that are partly inherited, partly modified, as well as partly invented” while the question of who can “invent” culture is up for debate (65). Lowe then formulates a notion of “Asian American” that is a “socially constructed unity” assumed for political purposes; this unity, again, is premised on a “strategic essentialism” that helps in “revealing the internal contradictions and slip-pages of ‘Asian American’ so as to insure that such essentialism will not be reproduced and proliferated by the very apparatuses [Asian Americans] seek to disempower” (82). In order to prevent racial essentialism, Asian Americans must use it—“invent” it—in a fashion that even Lowe cannot describe. The strategy of assembling a group identity and representation, then, runs short on solving the dilemma of race but, in the short term, provides an imaginary (group) subjectivity that can be used for equalitarian ends. It is in this sense that the futuristic vision of Asian American cultural studies is actually a vision that depends upon a “temporary” investment in racial identities.

This vision is rounded out with Lowe’s discussion of Asian American performance and narratives. Noting that the “logic of multiculturalism” demands “simple” identification(s) between groups like Thai Americans and Thai immigrants, Lowe argues that “oppositional practices exploit the contradictions of identity and rearticulate practices of ‘disidentification’” (91). In *Duke Nukem 3D*, *Shadow Warrior*, and Whiteness Studies, the strategy of disidentification comes with its attendant problems, not least of which is its rebuttressing of racial essentialism and identities. Even though Lowe calls for performances that rearticulate “culture” through contradiction in order to produce “alternative histories and memories that provide the grounds to imagine subject, community, and practice in new ways,” such an approach

will always contain a kernel of strategic essentialism within the new (and purportedly different) ways of expressing a racialized identity (96). In other words, oppositional practices and disidentification solve nothing whatsoever, and there is no assurance that such “new ways” actually work to advance a project against racial oppression. Whiteness Studies and Asian American cultural studies, in the examples given above, reinvest in the concept of race for the sake of addressing political exigencies. And perhaps the solution to the hedging implicit in disidentification and strategic essentialism can only be found in that which Roediger and Lowe pass over, calling the concept of race into question in the first place. Without this crucial step, Roediger, Lowe, Bahri, Pfeil, Lott, and others will always replicate that which yellowface and blackface invest in: a strategy of using the racialized body in a search for racial/cultural truths.

Thinking Otherwise

All of these possibilities for affiliation and equalitarianism are rooted in the death of the stereotype and the opening up of the lines for “race” disavowal or oppositional cultural expression through representation and performance. Implicit in the logic of “defeating” the stereotype, though, is a counter-maneuver of simultaneously asserting and approximating the “real”—which is not so far from the supposed “authentic.” This circuit of representation, ostensibly meant as a re-valuation of subjectivity, ultimately replicates the logic of racial difference from the very start. In *The Birth to Presence*, Jean-Luc Nancy addresses the implications of representation as follows:

It is certainly neither false nor excessive to say that all production of sense—of a sense making sense *in this sense*—is a deathwork . . . the “work of mourning,” an elaboration concerned with fending off the incorporation of the dead . . . *is the very work of representation*. In the end, the dead will be represented, thus held at bay. (3, emphasis in original)

For Nancy, representation is a “closure”—otherwise known as “appropriation, fulfillment, signification, destination, etc.”—a closing off of singular “exposed beings” that are related from the very beginning (1). The nature of representation, in this sense, is indebted to and depends upon the continuation of the stereotype. What makes possible Pfeil’s

“obligation” to women and blacks is the death of relationality and the rise of segregated spheres based upon a group’s specific “resources.” “Black culture” for Lott is a separation and closure that sets up the dynamic of cultural appropriation through blackface. Finally, Roediger’s notion of hip-hop as liberatory for the sake of disputing “whiteness” is also reliant upon a death of representational possibility of sorts, “finding a way out of whiteness” through something specifically called “hip-hop” paradoxically freezes for a moment the “spontaneity” of hip-hop as specifically “black” and available for “enlightened” whites. How could cultural studies begin to think about representations that “recuperate nothing” opposite the lines of White Studies (3)?

Ray Chow explores the possible future of cultural studies and attendant analyses of images/representations. Chow offers up a new line of analysis of the “gaze” in relation to representation,

Contrary to the model of Western hegemony in which the colonizer is seen as a primary, active “gaze” subjugating the native as passive “object,” I want to argue that it is actually the colonizer who feels looked at by the native’s gaze. This gaze, which is neither a threat nor a retaliation, makes the colonizer “conscious” of himself, leading to his need to turn this gaze around and look at himself, henceforth “reflected” in the native-object. (51)

If there is any criticism to be lodged against yellowface and *Shadow Warrior* in terms of representation, it may not rest on the grounds of how it utilizes the stereotype to fix Lo Wang in a position of Orientalized abjection and (auto)erotic (im)possibility; rather, the criticism can rest on the grounds of how the representation of the yellow body and the encouragement for the gamer to don yellowface is a direct result of white men possibly thinking too much about themselves as “white” men.

Put another way, *Shadow Warrior* and yellowface are both, as Lott puts it, “cheap racist libidinal charges,” and they also reveal the extent to which investments in racial distinctions carry on. Patently racist, the game refuses any move to castigate it for the mere fact that Lo Wang is simulacra with no correspondence to anything actual, save the “anxiety” that white men may decide to participate in for the sake of re-evaluating, reifying, or reinforcing a white racial status. Part of a project to make use of the yellow body through a “fuzzy background,” *Shadow Warrior* un.masks what can be interpreted as

“white subjectivity,” but a strategy of identity recuperation that empowers anybody cannot be guaranteed. What the games tell us, in hushed tones, is that the limits of representation as they relate to racial masquerade have been met and that the conditions for critique lie not in a recuperation of more “just” subjectivities, but in a recognition of disaffiliation. Perhaps this is the final lesson. Kent Ono, in reassessing the need for the term “Asian American,” calls for a futuristic vision where we aim for a “reconfiguration of discursive relations that may necessitate the evacuation of the need for such terms [such as Asian American] in the first place” (76).⁶ The evacuation necessary to create a future without racialized identities—a liquidation of racial and cultural “selves” understood as either pre-political or entities with innate qualities—can only be thought of apart from representation but with an endless, ethical commitment to investigating the social fabrications and representations that instate the same old relations with ourselves and others. It is only with the dissipation of this self/other relationship, defined as such, that the replicatory racial, cultural, and romanticized visions of ethnic identity can be put to rest.

NOTES

1. “Letters to the Editor: Shadow Horror,” *Computer Gaming World* Oct. 1997: 28.
2. The sections from both *Duke Nukem 3D* and *Shadow Warrior* come from a variety of places within the games themselves: help screens, playing levels, user manuals, etc. The source of each example will make clear where the information can be found.
3. The full story is given in the instruction manual:

Lo Wang. Master ninja assassin for 20 years. A shadow warrior. Shadow warriors are the best of the best, and Lo Wang was the best of the shadow warriors. Every top company in Japan had a shadow warrior . . . a protector, a negotiator, a cleaner. Lo Wang worked for Zilla Enterprises, a conglomerate with control in every major industry. Too much control. Power corrupts, and Master Zilla’s corporation was corrupted to the core. Lo Wang discovered Master Zilla’s demonic scheme to rule Japan, using creatures summoned from the dark side. A man of honor, Lo Wang quit. But one as powerful as Wang either must be on your side, or no one’s side. Master Zilla unleashes his creations for their first test: to kill a single man, a shadow warrior . . . Lo Wang.

4. I have been unable to attain a copy of this particular issue of *Computer Gaming World*. As such, the citation provided is a Web page that, presently, is not online.
5. *Redneck Rampage*’s premise is that you are one of two “redneck” characters whose pig has been stolen. The gamer must find the thief by using his/her weapons.
6. In his work on the “Psy-” disciplines, Nikolas Rose points out that the creation of a subjectivity is to be understood by locating it “in a complex of apparatuses, practices,

machinations, and assemblages within which human being has been fabricated, and which presuppose and enjoin particular relations with ourselves" (10).

Works Cited

- Bahri, Deepika. "With Kaleidoscope Eyes: The Potential (Dangers) of Identitarian Coalitions." *A Part, Yet Apart: South Asians in Asian America*. Ed. Lavina Dhingra Shankar and Ranjini Srikanth. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1998. 25–42.
- Balsamo, Anne. *Technologies of the Gendered Boy*. Durham: Duke UP, 1996.
- Chin, Elliot. "3D Realms' Folly: 'Shadow Warrior's' Offensive Stereotypes Are too Offensive to Stomach." 1 Dec. 1997 <<http://cgw.gamespot.com/cgw.nsf/e2662fa4bd9ae6b6852564890073765d/99380a506438b2e1882564c900766274?OpenDocument>>.
- Chow, Rey. *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993.
- Davis, Mike. *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*. New York: Vintage, 1992.
- Duke Nukem 3D: Atomic Edition*. 3D Realms Entertainment, 1997.
- "Exclusive Interview with SW Creator, George Broussard." *Shuriken Times* 1 Nov. 1997 <<http://www.shadowwarrior.com/times.html>>.
- Jeffords, Susan. *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1994.
- Kellner, Douglas. *Media Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- "Letters to the Editor: Shadow Horror." *Computer Gaming World* Oct. 1997: 28.
- Lott, Eric. *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*. New York: Oxford UP, 1993.
- . "White Like Me: Racial Cross-Dressing and the Construction of American Whiteness." *Cultures of United States Imperialism*. Ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease. Durham: Duke UP, 1993. 474–95.
- Lowe, Lisa. *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*. Durham: Duke UP, 1996.
- Manderson, Lenore. "Parables of Imperialism and Fantasies of the Exotic: Western Representations of Thailand—Place and Sex." *Sites of Desire/Economies of Pleasure in Asia and the Pacific*. Ed. Margaret Jolly and Lenore Manderson. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1997. 123–44.

- Nancy, Jean-Luc. *The Birth to Presence*. Trans. Brian Holmes, et al. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993.
- Ono, Kent A. "Re/signing 'Asian American': Rhetorical Problematics of Nation." *Amerasia Journal* 21.1&2 (1995): 67–78.
- Pfeil, Fred. *White Guys: Studies in Postmodern Domination and Difference*. New York: Verso, 1995.
- Roediger, David R. *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness: Essays on Race, Politics, and Working Class History*. London: Verso, 1994.
- . *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. New York: Verso, 1991.
- Rose, Nikolas. *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power, and Personhood*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996.
- Shadow Warrior*. 3D Realms Entertainment, 1997.

Anthony Sze-Fai Shiu is an Assistant Professor of English at Springfield College. His research focuses on issues in Asian American Studies and comparative Ethnic Studies.