



“INSUFFICIENT PROJECTIONS” IN VIDEO INSTALLATION ART ABOUT SKIN TONE BIAS: PARASITISM IN TAU LEWIS’ *FLESH-TONE MASK*

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ABSTRACT

This essay revolves around the question of how parasitism as fate of video’s insufficiency may metaphorically contribute to the contents of a video, as well as to the meanings of the installation in which it is included. A case study of Tau Lewis’ *Flesh-tone Mask* will serve as basis for addressing this concern. From the perspective of haptic visuality, it is clear that this video parasitizes on the surface of the masks included. At the same time, the video also acts as masked host, which provides new insights into parallels in insufficiency between video projection and casted, heterogenous masks. Moreover, the video’s symbiotic relationships strengthen its contents: the black woman considered “insufficient” can be said to “parasitize” on the appropriated pale skinned masks, thus evoking spectators’ “skin-awareness” while also breathing life into them as host. If Christine Ross argues that video’s insufficiency helps to complexify perception, I develop the argument that *Flesh-tone Mask* extends the suitability of this statement to the politics of skin tone bias.

KEYWORDS

Parasitism | Haptic visuality | Insufficient projections | Masks | Skin tone bias

Despite its fairly short history, video art is marked by a larger variety of different forms than can be found in many other artistic media, even when their history covers a far longer timespan. The fate of video as medium is that from its formative years it struggled with its materiality, and as a result, with its own identity. From its inception, video art has been feeding like a parasite on the materiality of another medium, starting out in its analogue stage as a supplement to the magnetic audiotape, to be presented on television. Later, in its digital stage, it became dependent on the projector and screen, parasitizing on the apparatus of film. When the led-flatscreen was introduced, video art could be presented as framed picture on a wall, becoming a parasite of the electronic screen, as well as sponging on a likeness with paintings. As rightly commented by François Bovier, in his general contemplation on video art, it is hard to define a visual medium that is both “essentially hybrid” and “capable of absorbing all forms of artistic expression” (Bovier, 2017: 41). In mixed-media installation art, however, video usually does not mainly survive on another materiality (though it still needs a support somewhere in the installation to be visible), but it is *juxtaposed* and *interrelated* to physical objects. This notion made me wonder how this kind of parasitism could contribute as metaphor to the contents of a video, and even to the meaning production of the installation art in which it features.

The artwork which immediately came to mind when contemplating this issue was Tau Lewis’ *Flesh-tone Mask* (2016, Figs. 01-03). Not because the video included in this installation artwork would obviously act as a parasite, but rather because the video seems to act in subtle ways as parasite *and* as host for other parasites, in relation to form as well as content. Before delving into this complex process of intermediality, it is useful to provide a brief visual analysis of this artwork created by the Jamaican-Canadian artist, whose miscellaneous oeuvre mainly consists of mixed-media installation art.

The most eye-catching component of *Flesh-tone Mask* is the metal clothes rack. Three pale-coloured silicone masks are hanging on hooks on the rack; the masks are casts of faces, and one of them is enlarged to include a female torso. The rack is kept in place through metal chains connected to a cinderblock. Next to it, a

beamer installed on a pedestal projects a video on the nearby wall. In the looping video, we see a woman (apparently the artist herself) who covers her body with the torso-shaped mask which the spectator will immediately recognize. Her own brown skin significantly contrasts with the pale pink skin tone of the mask. This observation is confirmed by a statement overlapping the moving images: “The masks replicate the features of African bodies without the presence of African skin” (Fig. 02). These words stimulate the spectator to return to the rack in order to look even more carefully to the features of the masks. Using a voice-over, the video provides insight into the process of creation, explaining why the features of the faces do not match with the colours of the masks. The artist took silicone castings of “black” bodies, and added grinded chalk pastels as pigments, about which is said: “The chalk pastels that I used to colour the masks belonged to three different brands, and were all labelled either ‘skin-tone’ or ‘flesh-tone’. ... This is one small example of the way POC’s [people of colour] are dehumanized on a daily basis”. In an interview, Lewis recalls memories of flesh-toned stockings and bras, panties and dresses that never matched her own skin tone (Parris, 2016: unpagged).

Flesh-tone Mask is a quite early work in the oeuvre of Lewis, who was born in the early 1990s. On her website, she characterizes her artistic work in general as dealing with personal, collective and historical traumas.¹ Her installation *Flesh-tone Mask* drew my particular attention, because it confronts notions of coloured people marginalized as “insufficient” versus video marginalized as “insufficient” artistic medium. What does video’s insufficiency and parasitism in this confrontation contribute as metaphor to the contents of this video, as well as to the meaning production of the installation artwork in which it is included? Video seems to present itself here as more than just an insufficient medium which needs objects to accomplish a strong embodied experience in the spectator. If video acts here as well in a clever way as masked host for other parasites, which new insights does it provide into relationships between video projection and casted masks?

To answer these questions, I will develop the following concerns as a theoretical framework. Several studies about video art and installation art are useful because

1 In: <http://www.taulewis.com> (Access: 15 July 2020).

they provide insights into topical debates on this medium, whereas views on concepts such as remediation (Bolter and Grusin) will help to understand the meaningful role of intermediality in this case study. Furthermore, I discuss the spectator's close-up confrontation with various representations of skin from the perspective of the embodied experience, and, more specifically, as haptic visuality (Marks; Barker). Finally, I rely on recent texts on the politics of skin tones (e.g. Lafont) which will allow me to explore specific connections between the medium and the subject of the artwork.

Before pursuing this approach, however, it is relevant to put into perspective the notion of "parasitism", as used here. Parasitism is commonly defined as a type of symbiotic relationship, or even a long-term relationship between two species. The one of the two which is called the parasite "gains benefits that come at the expense of the host member".² In the first paragraph, I mentioned how much the medium of video relies for its materialization on physical devices or supports. After being drawn in by the moving images, the viewer will commonly start ignoring the "host". Below, I will discuss how video's parasitism may contribute to the spectator's understanding of the contents of the installation artwork as a whole. Because *Flesh-*

-tone Mask obviously deals with skin tone bias, my argument will start with positioning this artwork into the context of the historical roots of prevailing views about people in terms of colour, as well as in hierarchical order, as found in the Euromerican part of the world. As a consequence, the term "parasitism" takes on a specific political meaning here. In this instance, to gain benefits at the expense of someone else is not a matter of a more powerful host, but comes at the cost of vulnerable people of colour. Subsequently, I will focus on the position and embodied experience of the spectator of *Flesh-tone Mask* as complementing the video's insufficiency. This is followed by a more specific reflection on the experience of projected images next to physical objects, in order to understand the insufficient projections as sophisticated masking aspect of this intriguing artwork. In so doing, my essay follows in the footsteps of Christine Ross' suggestion – in her essay 'The Insufficiency of the Performative: Video Art at the Turn of the Millennium' – that "aesthetic insufficiency" may draw attention to the option of a society which does not dictate "who we have to be and how to conduct ourselves", adding, in reference to Donna Haraway, that recent video art appears to play an important role in the re-articulation of the cyborg, in the meaning of a creature that forms itself through the confusion of boundaries (Ross, 2001: 30).

THE POLITICS OF INSUFFICIENCY

IN THE WHITE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON PEOPLE OF COLOUR

In 'How Skin Color Became a Racial Marker: Art Historical Perspectives on Race', Anne Lafont explains how from the beginning of the eighteenth century, skin colour became the qualifying system of division of the human species. Since then, this classification has been accepted as a "natural" border due to its visible obviousness. Previously, geographic divisions in the world were mainly based on an order of regions. Lafont demonstrates how around 1700 art, natural history and colonial law merged in stimulating and stabilizing skin tone as main categorizer. One of the most well-known classifications is Linnaeus' division into four groups of skin pigmentations: white, yellow, black and red (Lafont, 2017: 109, 90, 95). Since his mid-eighteenth-century ordering, the kinds of colour classifications changed, but categorizing people on the basis of skin tones and considering the category of

"white" as superior persisted. The seminal text *Black Skin, White Masks*, published by Frantz Fanon in French in 1952, could be considered as a historical root of the discussion included in *Flesh-tone Mask*. More than six decades later, Lewis presents herself in her video as a more emancipated woman, but she also notes the still common practice, as recently also criticized by the "Black Lives Matter" movement.

In the past, several efforts were undertaken to change the terminology based on colour and race into one based on culture. In *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam discuss initiatives, from Franz Boas in the 1920s to Jesse Jackson in the 1980s, of promoting names such as African-Americans and European-Americans – actually a return to an order of regions – rather than spea-

² In: <https://biologydictionary.net/parasitism/> (Access: 15 July 2020).

king of colours, such as Blacks and Whites. Shohat and Stam elaborate on the advantages of the concept of “ethnocentrism”, because any group of people can be ethnocentric when seeing the world through cultural lenses of their own (Shohat; Stam, 1994: 22, 359). Contrary to efforts to overcome categorization on the basis of skin tones, groups of activists such as the Black is Beautiful movement and the Brown Pride movement gained support in the past few decades. They emphasized the colour of their skin as crucial for their identity. An increasing number of artists sympathized with this tendency. For instance, the Afro-American artist Kerry James Marshall became famous in the 1990s for his paintings depicting people with a pitch-black skin.

It is striking perhaps that Marshall, in his emphasis on black skin, did not choose to depict nude models. In a 1992 study, Judith Wilson concluded that the female nude, as a traditional subject in Western high art, has been avoided in the fine art production by African-American artists for almost two centuries. She explains this phenomenon by referring to the political connotation of the nude African female in mass media. In particular in nineteenth-century travel albums and early-twentieth-century magazines, smiling bare-breasted African “maids” appeared. The process of coping with this collective trauma evolved very slowly in the second half of the twentieth century, when the above-mentioned Black is Beautiful movement inspired black artists to “reclaim their body” (quoted in Kester, 1998: 270-271). Looking from this perspective at Lewis’ *Flesh-tone Mask*, it is interesting to note that in the video we see the artist “hiding” behind a pale pink torso mask, while clothed in her underwear (Fig. 03). This pose could be interpreted as critically “parasitizing” on the hegemony of the “white female nude” in the history of European painting.

The labels attached to Lewis’ masks include information which objectifies the masks. The text on the grey-brownish mask reads: “flesh-toned mask ‘Afro-Kittian Nevisian’”. The one on the whitest mask says “flesh-toned mask ‘Jamaican Canadian’”, suggesting that

this is perhaps a cast of the artist’s face. Labels on objects hanging on a rack may evoke associations with commodities, but the texts on the labels rather evoke associations with ethnographic archives in Euromerican museums. *Flesh-tone Mask* does not explicitly address the Euromerican visitor, however. In this respect, it is interesting to observe that the “inclusivity” of the visual communication in the work of Lewis differs from that of artists from the first generation of socio-political African-American artists, who explicitly addressed the audience as being white. For instance, Adrian Piper’s video installations confront the white public with their xenophobia. In *Cornered* (1988), Piper suggested to the white viewer that she or he actually appears to be black. After inhabiting a multi-ethnic continent for some centuries, they should be aware that racial uniqueness got lost. As she put it: “There are no genetically distinguishable white people in this country”, and “if racism isn’t just ‘our’ problem, but equally ‘yours’, how are you going to solve it?” By making Whites realize their hybridity as well as their privilege, Piper undercuts the comfortably voyeuristic premises of the classic scene of Whites watching Black performance (Shohat; Stam, 2014: 357-358). Although Lewis less explicitly calls on the white spectator to account, her critical comment about the discriminating “skin tones” of the chalks is an unambiguous condemnation. Moreover, when *Flesh-tone Mask* was presented in the Younger Than Beyoncé gallery in her hometown of Toronto, Lewis linked up her decision to use the cinderblock and chains with Toronto as being the most multi-ethnic Canadian city:

“The majority are Muslim and black. I’m incorporating cinderblocks into my work now, I take them from construction sites around the city’s gentrifying neighbourhoods. The cinderblock and chains that hold my work in place reference gentrification, ‘stuckness’ and slavery. I speak about appropriation with the acknowledgement that most of the pop culture we love was built on the backs of slavery (Parris, 2016: unpagged)”.

EMBODIED EXPERIENCE AND HAPTIC VISUALITY: SPECTATORS COMPENSATING INSUFFICIENCY

The life-size masks representing human skin, as well as the video which confronts the spectator with skin tone bias, strengthen the embodied experience of *Flesh-tone Mask*. Considering the title and subject of this artwork, the complex and much discussed notion of “flesh” (*chair* in French) from Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s late essays with philosophical reflections on the embodied experience is of particular interest. Debates about this notion, though, stress that the word should not be taken too literally. For instance, Taylor Carman argues that even if Merleau-Ponty described “flesh” as common to ourselves and the world around us, referring to what we and it are made of, and as being “tangible in touching, visible in seeing, sensible in sensing”, the term does not refer primarily to physical stuff. Merleau-Ponty’s use of the term is closer, according to Carman, to the “sensibility of things, perceptibility both of perceptual environment and ourselves as perceivers; visibility of vision, the tangibility of touch” (Carman, 2020: 159, 115).

This section deals with the question of the insights which recent debates about Merleau-Ponty’s concept of “flesh” and the resulting concept of haptic visuality of the “skin of film” can provide into meaningful experiences of the insufficient projections of the video in *Flesh-tone Mask*. Merleau-Ponty wrote his essays more than six decades ago, focussing on painting and the perspective of the artist. More relevant for a case study about contemporary video art and the interaction with the spectator, are subsequent studies such as Laura U. Marks’ *The Skin of the Film* (1999) and Jennifer M. Barker’s *The Tactile Eye* (2009). In these studies, terms such as flesh, skin and haptic visuality play a central role. Although the silicone masks in Lewis’ installation are more physical than the video projection, tactility is hardly applicable because we are only allowed to “touch” the masks with our eyes.

For the first chapter of her *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience*, a study about embodied, emotional experiences of film, Barker chose the title ‘Skin’. In the next two chapters she develops her argument by moving from the body’s surface to its inner realm, delving into musculature and, further, the do-

main of viscera. For the present study, particularly her first chapter is helpful. Her arguments include ample references to Merleau-Ponty, but if the latter focuses on the body of the artist in interaction with the surrounding world, Barker discusses the complex contact between the types of bodies of the characters, the viewer and the film itself. According to Barker, Merleau-Ponty’s concept of “flesh” is certainly not meant to refer literally to human flesh; his choice of the term would indicate “the crucial role of materiality and touch in the overall concept of reversibility” (Barker, 2009: 20). Most literally, Merleau-Ponty uses the example of the one hand touching the other hand. In this way, according to Drew Leder, Merleau-Ponty demonstrates that a body can act both as perceiver and perceived, subject and object (Leder, 1990: 210). From the perspective of the present study, one may wonder, who parasitizes on whom in the relationship of spectator and video (in particular in the literal meaning of the Latin word *video*, being “I see”).

Barker’s chapter ‘Skin’ starts with Carolee Schneemann’s film *Fuses* (1967), which shows the artist’s naked body and that of her partner entangled and in close-up, alternating or merged with projected textures of the physical film, such as dust, scratches and paint. According to Barker, these moving images invite the viewer rather to feel than to watch, because this film becomes in particular meaningful in the meeting of the film’s skin and the spectator’s skin (Barker, 2009: 23). It is noteworthy, regarding the discussion above about Merleau-Ponty’s interpretation of the concept of “flesh” as not or only partly tangible, that Barker’s notion of skin is apparently more tangible. Her characterization of skin is definitely applicable to the spectator’s (conscious or unconscious) awareness of the own skin: “the uniqueness of skin lies in its location at (and constitution of) the boundary between the body and the world. ... skin, which is not actually a limit at all but a place of constant contact between the outside and the inside” (Barker, 2009: 28). For a book about cinema it is quite surprising that Barker puts so much emphasis on surfaces and tactility. To understand this approach, it is necessary to turn to her source of inspiration, Laura U. Marks’ reflections on haptic images and haptic visuality.

In her seminal text *The Skin of the Film*, Marks applies the term “haptic visuality” in general to the way vision itself can be experienced as tactile, as if one is touching with the eyes, thus the eyes functioning like organs of touch, a view inspired by Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the embodied spectator. More specifically, haptic visuality refers to the spectator’s predisposition of experiencing specific images as haptic images. Marks calls images haptic when they evoke a sense of touch and invite the viewer to glance over the surface of the film screen (Marks, 2003: 162). Some of her arguments are applicable to the spectator’s experience of not only Lewis’ video but also the physical masks. For instance, Marks mentions as examples of haptic images close-up shots of bodies or cloths. It takes some time before the viewer realizes what he or she is looking at. In case of Lewis’ installation this means that the close-ups in the video encourage the spectator to close-up observation of the physical masks. Marks describes how a film camera zooms out of the close-up to show the meaningful context. In a comparable way, the visitor of *Flesh-tone Mask* is invited to go back and forth between the complementary parts of the installation. As a result, both the reversibility of the components and their interdependence become obvious, as if becoming parasites of each other. Interestingly, the etymological origin of the word parasite goes back to the Greek word *parasitos*, meaning “one who eats at the table of another”, which is a physical and dynamic action in a symbiotic relationship, in which in the case of *Flesh-tone Mask* the visitor also becomes involved.

If film is commonly considered as an immaterial projection, it is all the more intriguing that Marks distinguishes haptic perception from optical perception, the latter being a distanced view privileging the representational nature of images. Quite differently, haptic perception expresses a preference for material presence, which also involves the awareness of the spectator’s

own body as part of this experience, when “touching” the film with the eyes. This embodied experience is actually not much different from looking at objects and bodies represented in paintings and sculptures, especially when they evoke the inclination to caress their surfaces. The spectator is usually not allowed to touch artworks, which is unlike the common use of touch with respect to, for instance, a clothes rack or masks in a shop. Looking at the artist who touches the masks in the video, could be called an experience of “flesh” as reciprocal touch, in line with Merleau-Ponty’s concept. This observation relates to Marks’ mention that haptic cinema would present itself as an object to interact with, rather than an illusion to enter. Thus, if the narrative is considered to be a basic feature of film, it is all the more interesting that Marks argues that the haptic image forces the viewer to contemplate the image itself, instead of letting herself or himself be pulled into a narrative. Towards the end of her book, Marks notes that the difference between haptic and optical visuality is not as sharp as she suggested before. Most often, both are involved in processes of looking. She particularly observes an inclination to haptic images in feminist videos and intercultural cinema (Marks, 2003: 190, 163). *Flesh-tone Mask* complies with this identification as feminist as well as intercultural.

It is safe to argue, then, that for strengthening the spectator’s experience of haptic visuality, the video in *Flesh-tone Mask* parasitizes on the tactility of the masks. Moreover, the video encourages the viewer to close-up observation of the masks as hosts, which increases the haptic visuality of the masks. As metaphor, this kind of parasitism of the video may reinforce its contents: the black woman considered as “insufficient” parasitizes on the appropriated pale skin, while evoking an embodied “skin-awareness” in the spectator. In the next section I examine the masks as optional parasites of the video’s insufficient projections.

HETEROGENOUS MASKS SUPPORTED BY VIDEO’S INSUFFICIENT PROJECTIONS

In ‘The Insufficiency of the Performative: Video Art at the Turn of the Millenium’, Christine Ross notes how much recent media art has been preoccupied with “insufficiency-fallibility, limits, inhibition, dependency”. She concludes that the insufficiency in recent video art appears to be “an aesthetic strategy that reveals how fallible corporeality may well help us to complexify

perception” (Ross, 2001: 29, 33). It is interesting to relate these statements to Lewis’ *Flesh-tone Mask*, but in a different way than Ross does in her essay. Ross founds her argument on the basis of three video works: one by Douglas Gordon (*24 Hour Psycho*, 1993), one by Rosemarie Trockel (*Sleeping Pill*, 1999) and one by Diana Thater (*The best space is the deep space*,

1998). In these case studies, she mainly focuses on the resulting “perceptual insufficiency” of the spectator, due to the use of delay, evoked unawareness and getting lost. These terms are hardly applicable to Lewis’ installation. As became clear from the analysis on the basis of the concept of haptic visuality, the complexity of perception rather results here from the symbiotic relationship of the physical objects and the video projection, which is crucial for the meaning production in *Flesh-tone Mask*. In fact, the spectatorship of moving images merges with that of installation art.

The crucial role of the beholder in installation art was first addressed profoundly by Julie H. Reiss in *From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art*. Reiss argues that the spectator is integral to the completion of the work, or even the essence of installation art (Reiss, 1999: xiii). It is important to realize that Reiss focuses on installation art consisting of objects in the sense of “things”, often taken from daily life. As a result, the visitors who move along and in between the installation’s objects seem to be indispensable for linking objects with human beings. Quite differently, in installations which include videos that show people in action, the visitors entering the physical, static installation environments are actually met by virtual human beings in motion (Westgeest, 2016: 96-103). In their perception of these artworks the beholders have to integrate the presence of real objects with the virtual people in the illusory space (representing an event which took place elsewhere and earlier). The spectators become aware of the insufficiency of both media independently of each other. Ross’ terms such as “fallibility, limits, inhibition, dependency” come to mind, as well as her observation that recent video art would play a substantial role in the re-articulation of the cyborg. She does not limit the definition of a cyborg to the hybrid of the human being and a machine, but extends it to a creature “that forms itself through the confusion of boundaries” (Ross, 2001: 28). If Ross finishes her essay with the aforementioned words that the insufficiency in recent video art may be considered as an aesthetic strategy that uses fallible corporeality to demonstrate the complexity of perception, I would argue that *Flesh-tone Mask* even extends the suitability of this statement concerning the applied media to the politics of skin tone bias.

In *Flesh-tone Mask*, the meaningful use of fallible corporeality particularly applies to the issue of “projec-

tion”. If the common use of this notion is in the field of geometry, Liz Kotz’s article ‘Video Projection’ offers valuable insights into the essence of projecting the video’s light beam in the dark. Kotz delves into the origins of the term “projection”, derived from the Latin *projectionem*, indicating a throwing forward, an extension, but also referring to displacement, dislocation and transfer (Kotz, 2005: 102). Looking from this perspective to *Flesh-tone Mask*, the included video projection adds a political dimension to the installation by focussing on how skin tone bias is based on hegemonic projections regarding skin tone. The complexity of processes of projection is heightened by Lewis through multi-layered masking. Through casting, the faces of POCs are projected in the masks. The artist coloured them with pale-skin “displaced” pigments, and “dislocated” the casts onto another body. This process could be considered in line with Amelia Jones’ observation in ‘The Body and Technology’, in which she notes a recent return to the corporeality of performance art of the 1970s, but now the body is “defined through otherness (alienated in the visual or carnal experience of others), and specific in its identifications” (Jones, 2001: 20).

Lewis’ video about “projecting” someone else’s features in a mask of a displaced skin colour onto her own body is finally projected in the form of immaterial light rays on the conventional white flat surface (of the wall), next to the physical masks. The unusual combination of the traditional techniques of projecting film and casting of sculptures requires some effort on the part of the spectator to link the heterogeneous media in meaningful ways. The effect of putting the two parts of the installation apart as “insufficient in themselves” may be most evident when comparing this work to an artwork in which human skin, mask and projection literally merge. In Japanese artist Nobumichi Asai’s *Omote* [The public face], created in 2014 and two years before *Flesh-tone Mask*, moving electronic images are projected onto a Japanese woman’s face (Figs. 04, 05). Here, most literally, the video artwork “lives” as a parasite on the human skin. The projections change her skin into various colours and decorative patterns, but they also change her into a kind of cyborg. By means of the high-tech application of “real time face tracking” and “projection mapping”, the projections follow the model’s head while it moves. In an instructive documentary about Asai’s studio, it becomes clear that many tiny markers

were applied on the model's skin.³ Multiple projectors project the moving images onto the skin from various perspectives, directed by the tiny markers. This use of the human body as video projection screen is in line with an argument by Kate Mondloch in *Screens*. She notes that if the physicality of the film screen is ignored in cinema, it plays an increasingly important role in video art. Her case studies mainly include projection screens positioned in exhibition rooms as part of video installation art, on which, like in the case of Peter Campus, video recordings and shadows of the visitors are projected (Mondloch, 2010: 69-78). In *Flesh-tone Mask*, the shadow of the visitor who passes in front of the projector is also projected onto the wall, while "masking" the masked woman as an extra disguise. Although Lewis' installation does not include a spatially positioned (or living) projection screen, we may think of the heterogeneous masks as protagonists in this installation, as "physical and moving projection screens" supported by the video as host.

Strikingly, the eyes of both Asai's model and Lewis' masks are closed, evoking associations with death masks, a ritual applied in many different cultures in order to keep a memento of the deceased.⁴ Whether low tech or high tech, however, the association with the broader use of masks in many different cultures is more productive. Asai's *Omote* [The public face] explicitly relates to the use of masks in Japanese culture. Asai refers to Japanese theatre, but also to the common expression of the figurative masks of "the public face" versus "the private face".⁵

In this respect, given my essay's focus on insufficiency, anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss' views in *The Way of the Masks* come to mind as well. He argues that a mask primarily refers not to what it represents but to what it transforms, or, actually, to what it does not represent directly. And masks, like myths, can be said to deny as much as they affirm. Masks display as well as exclude (Lévi-Strauss, 1982: 144). Lewis' masks hide, but also reveal. Masks are thus a kind of cyborgs, which confuse boundaries between the hidden living being and its disguise. This means that the mask could also be considered a metaphor for video projections which display "living" human beings, but actually also confuse boundaries between the (absent) living being and its projection.

From a more comprehensive perspective, the described struggle of the medium of video with its insufficiency, which turned out to be a productive characteristic of a parasite, appears to come close to a remediation process. In this process, as claimed by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin in their seminal *Remediation*, a new medium does not only benefit from its predecessor; an older medium can also remediate itself by means of a newer medium (Bolter and Grusin, 1999: 45, 48). They even argue that the new medium always remains dependent on the older one, and can never efface it entirely (47), which calls forth characteristics of parasitism. In *Flesh-tone Mask*, the video uses the traditional technique of casting in the sense of "projections of bodies" to remediate or reinvent itself as a meaningful projection medium; conversely, the traditional casted masks were remediated by the video into a newer "moving" medium. If video projection has hardly been considered as a newer version of masks as casted sculptures, my case study made me aware of this option. We may regard casts as "projective medium", since they result from a projection, in the sense of an incomplete or insufficient transfer, because the mould can never escape entirely the relationship with its origin. In their central role in this installation, the masks remediated themselves as a reinvented medium. And as "projective media", both video and the casted masks remediated themselves in my case study as metaphorical media for issues of skin tone bias.

This essay revolved around the question of what parasitism as fate of video's insufficiency could contribute as metaphor to the contents of a video, and even to the meaning production of the installation artwork in which it is included. I investigated this concern on the basis of Tau Lewis' *Flesh-tone Mask* as case study. From the perspective of haptic visuality, as defined by Marks and Barker, it became clear that the video parasitizes on the tactility of the masks to increase the viewer's embodied experience. As a result, the spectator partly compensates video's insufficiency. These kinds of parasitism of the video may strengthen as metaphor the contents of the video: the black woman considered as "insufficient", "parasitizes" on the appropriated pale skin, while evoking an embodied "skin-awareness" in the spectator. More specifically, the pose of the artist hiding behind a pale pink torso mask, while clothed

3 In: <http://projection-mapping.org/face-hacking/> (Access: 10 August 2020).

4 In: <https://atlantacontemporary.org/press/atlanta-contemporary-presents-tau-lewis> (Access: 20 July 2020).

5 In: <https://www.nobumichiasai.com/works/131/> (Access: 10 August 2020).

in her underwear, could be interpreted as critically parasitizing on the hegemony of the white female nude in the history of European painting. If Christine Ross states that the insufficiency in recent video art may be considered as “an aesthetic strategy that reveals how fallible corporeality may well help us to complexify perception”, *Flesh-tone Mask* even extends the suitability of this statement for the applied media to the politics of skin tone bias.

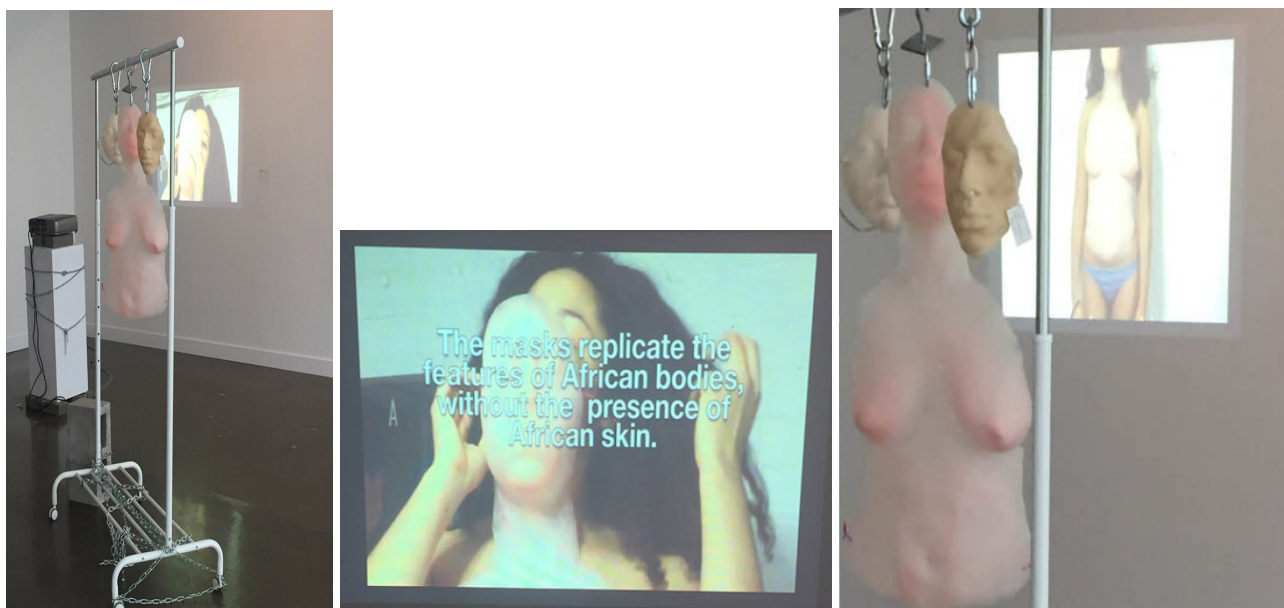
Conversely, the masks included in the installation as well as in the video may also be considered as parasites benefitting from the video as host. This means that the tactile surfaces of the masks not only function as host for the parasitizing immaterial video, but also the other way around: the masks, as physical and figurative projection screens, are “activated” by the movements of the video as host. The skins in the form of masks are hanging on the juxtaposed clothes rack as if waiting for a living body. Only after the woman (the artist) has appropriated the casts, life will energize

the masks as if parasitizing on her living body. Her “black” body has now become an active and critical host of the “white” mask. The video and masks never merge into a new unity, remaining two “insufficient species” in a mutual relationship, like the woman in the video who does not merge with the mask in the video. The meaningful role of this heterogeneity was revealed in particular through comparison with Asai’s *Omote*, in which model, mask and projection can be said to merge perfectly.

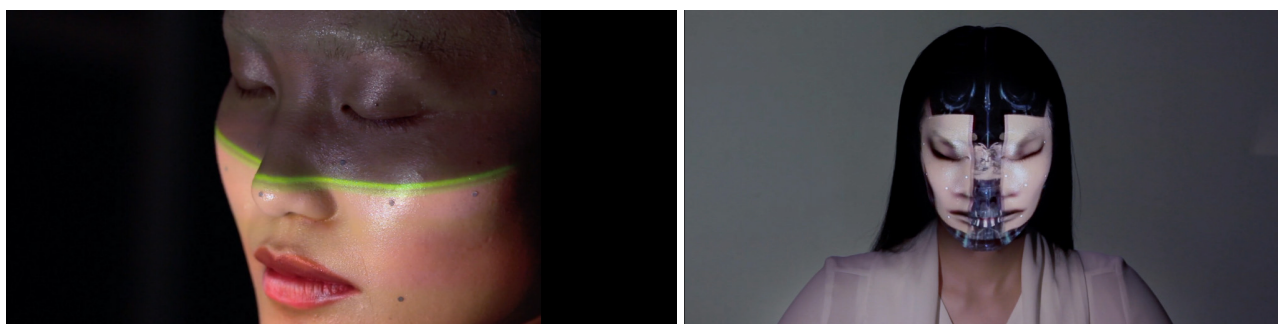
Initially, perhaps, my analysis of how the insufficient projections of video are applied in *Flesh-tone Mask*, as well as how skin tone bias is discussed in relation to the notion of parasitism, may have triggered negative connotations. In the end, however, it also appears to offer hope for a more positive symbiotic relationship through increased awareness of skin tone bias. Video’s insufficiency, in other words, underscores the importance of heterogeneity.

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Figs. 01-03. Tau Lewis; *Flesh-tone Mask*; 2016; video projection with voice over in installation including silicone masks hung on a clothes rack. Courtesy of the artist.



Figs. 04-05. Nobumichi Asai; *Omote [The public face]*; 2014; video; 2 minutes, with sound. Courtesy of the artist.