

#### TITLE

Claudia Rankine, from the First to the Second Person

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#### AUTHOR

Jeffrey Clapp

Department of Literature and Cultural Studies

Education University of Hong Kong

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3242-6300>

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## Surveilling Citizens: Claudia Rankine, from the First to the Second Person

### **Abstract**

*In both Don't Let Me Be Lonely: An American Lyric (2004) and Citizen: An American Lyric (2014), Claudia Rankine considers spaces of surveillance in the post-9/11 period. In particular, Rankine explores how the citizenship of black Americans consists of a confused conjunction: on the one hand forms of invisibility or even social death, and on the other hand the hypervisibility that results from contemporary regimes of policing and social control. This paper shows how Rankine's work frames these moments that insistently turn 'recognition' from empathetic identification into surveillant oversight. What could reverse this trajectory? Rankine answers at two levels, first by insisting that hers is an American lyric, and taking recourse to ideas like voting and citizenship, which Rankine positions against the spectatorial attitudes of both the well-intentioned and the media-glutted. This rather conventional approach, which emphasizes civic virtue and the virtue of civics, is further tied to Rankine's intensive interrogation of pronoun usage in these same works, an exploration I read as an extended comment on the contemporary meanings of the lyric form. I propose that Rankine's pronoun work can be understood as a reflection on the increasing proximity of surveillance society to the society of the spectacle, which work together in a new 'aesthetics of transparency,' one that hobbles classical liberal demands for political representation and personal expression.*

### **Keywords**

*lyric, surveillance, democracy, citizenship, invisibility, hypervisibility*

Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014) and its precursor *Don't Let Me Be Lonely: An American Lyric* (2004) have become two of the most galvanizing books of poetry published this century. Their impact is the result, in part, of their formal experimentation, including Rankine's dialogues with images and artworks, and her work's fluid blend of poetry and prose. Equally, however, these poems' power results from Rankine's return to two very familiar topoi: the rights and responsibilities of the citizen, and the form and meaning of the lyric. Despite the apparent distances between those two sets of ideas, Rankine has been considering contemporary citizenship through the lens of lyric form. As her lyric becomes an inquiry into what it now means to be a citizen, Rankine envisions how both lyric, and citizenship, are implicated with and inflected by contemporary practices of surveillance.

*Don't Let Me Be Lonely* and *Citizen* address two basic dimensions of surveillance experience: the responses to contemporary terrorism usually discussed under the rubric of 'national security', and the hypersurveillance of black citizens in

the United States, particularly by the police. In both these areas Rankine comes to the conclusion that will become the focus of this essay's consideration of contemporary spaces of surveillance: the advent of surveillance society has confused and challenged, in an essential way, the 'visibility regime' (Brighenti 2006)—that is, the assemblage of rhetorics, practices, and spaces of visibility—that undergirds liberal democracy. From this point of view, Rankine has been writing about how surveillance, and particularly racialized surveillance, participates in what Wendy Brown and others have been describing as the 'undoing of the demos' (Brown 2015) that comes with the imposition of neoliberal governmentalities, and particularly surveillance practices.

Rankine's work tends to confirm important surveillance studies contributions that articulate how, from the Middle Passage to the plantation, the Atlantic slave trade was as much a laboratory of modern surveillance practices as was Bentham's cylindrical prison (Parenti 2003; Mirzoeff 2011; Browne 2015). So these poems certainly explore the real opposition between surveillant and democratic practices. But by directing her attention to citizenship in particular, Rankine also develops the idea of an underlying contiguity between surveillance and democracy. For Anthony Giddens:

Movements oriented to the enlargement of democratic participation within the polity should be seen as always ... oriented toward redressing imbalances of power involved in surveillance. ... There is a basic flaw, however, in the [idea] that the expansion of organizations inevitably supplants 'democracy' ... The intensification of surveillance [is] the condition of the emergence of tendencies and pressures toward democratic participation. (Giddens 1985, p. 314)

Democracy, that is, does not merely pre-exist the surveillance which threatens it; equally, the development of democracy results from surveillance itself, a conclusion equally important to both Tocqueville and Weber (Dandeker 1990). Moreover, surveillance studies scholars have recently been emphasizing that *citizenship* is inextricable from surveillance—it specifically requires identification, cataloguing, tracking, and the discrimination of classes of individuals (Lyon 2010). At the same time there has been a notable return to citizenship on the left, as, critical theorists like

Jacques Rancière and Étienne Balibar have been arguing that it is primarily or even exclusively through the claim of citizenship that democracy can be renewed (Rancière 1999; Balibar 2015). From multiple points of view, therefore, and particularly in the case of citizenship, the possibility of even distinguishing the surveillant and the democratic seems to falter.<sup>1</sup> Forms of ‘representation’, and even forms of ‘self-expression’, can be equally well described in either idiom.

By locating her recent work directly within this problematic, Rankine contributes to our understanding of contemporary surveillance practices, especially insofar as they conform to what Rachel Hall has termed an increasingly ubiquitous ‘aesthetics of transparency’ (Hall 2007; 2015). For Hall, citizens are now rendered, and make themselves, *transparent* across numerous domains—whereas those who remain *opaque* become subject to suspicion, detention, and violence. Hall’s figuration might well be seen as a specification of Nicholas Mirzoeff’s argument that in contemporary visibility, authority makes an increasingly exclusive claim to be ‘able to look’—against which he would assert for the people a counterpoised ‘right to look’ (Mirzoeff 2011). But Rankine’s work does not quite reach an equally instrumental formulation. Instead, for example, in *Don’t Let Me Be Lonely* we witness Rankine at the airport, like everybody else, being asked to drink from her own bottle of water, and to take off her shoes—the now-familiar rituals of ‘security theater’ (Schneier 2009) which we supposedly undergo to demonstrate that our bottles and shoes do not contain explosives, but which also inculcate the aesthetics of transparency across new and expanding domains.

Among those domains, as we will see, is the space of Rankine’s poetry. That poetry explores how the aesthetics of transparency conceptually interferes with the visibility regime that has obtained in classical liberal democracy. Liberal democrats maintain, for example, that citizens have a right to representation, the right to be seen and known. And those who critique the state, the law, or even liberal democracy itself, generally accept this visibility regime, contending that most problems are failures of visibility: persons and groups are unjustly rendered invisible. But there is no self-evident correlation between the axis *visible/invisible* and the axis *transparent/opaque*. That which is transparent can be understood as visible or

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<sup>1</sup> Or, putting the point more colloquially: ‘the desire to watch and be watched is a more deeply rooted element of the liberal democratic impulse than we care to admit’ (Pecora 2002, p. 345). For Pecora as for many others, the new technologies of visibility, from reality television to social media, are not external to democratic culture but of its essence.

invisible; that which is opaque—the same. In fact, the aesthetics of transparency renders *invisibility* strangely proximate to *hypervisibility*—which is to say that it renders surveillance society strangely proximate to the society of the spectacle. An immediate consequence, as Rankine remarks in *Citizen*, is that ‘No amount of visibility will alter the ways in which one is perceived’ (2014a, p. 24).

While Rankine’s work now intervenes directly in this confused conjunction, she has been considering the visibility regime of American democracy since the first poem of her first book, published in 1994. In ‘American Light’ Rankine is already making the gestures that lead her to subtitle both *Don’t Let Me Be Lonely* and *Citizen* ‘An American Lyric’:

In the lit landscape, in its peeled  
back places, making the space  
uncomfortable, representing no fault  
in the self is a shadow  
of a gesture of wanting, coveting  
the American light.

(Rankine 1994, p. 2)

The poem anatomizes a partial citizenship, and it figures that partiality as a scarcely-perceptible shadow which is itself cast by the brilliantly lit, and brilliantly American, space of the public. The title of the book, *Nothing in Nature is Private*, similarly suggests the desire to step into the light: what sanction does nature give to our obsession with privacy? From her first book, Rankine calls into question the frequently reactionary insistence on privacy as the antidote to or opposite of surveillance (Nelson 2002; McGrath 2004).

What ‘American Light’ does not yet call into question, however, is the rhetoric by which increased visibility serves as the rejoinder and response to a shadowed and partial civic existence. The train of thought which led Rankine to her present interrogation may have begun, however, with the attack on Rodney King by police, in

1992.<sup>2</sup> In 2014, Rankine discussed the beating as crucial for her understanding of her position in American space:

I know when Rodney King's jury came back and said that despite the video, the police had done nothing wrong, that was a moment for me. I literally burst into tears. I had this weird feeling walking around the streets of New York, that I didn't know who these people were. ... Because I think I always sort of believed in the justice system before that, even though I knew the history. I still felt that when you're not leaving it up to hearsay, when you have documentation, people will step up. And it didn't happen. That was really a crisis moment for me. You just feel like, okay, you need to start paying attention. It's the same line, from Rodney King to Michael Brown. It's a continuum. (Rankine 2014b)

The death of Michael Brown, shot by police in 2014, has become an icon of the fact that black communities in the United States remain subject to a level of police surveillance and violence not manifestly distinct from that of the era of Emmett Till, of that of W.E.B. Du Bois, or that of Frederick Douglass. Rankine's response to the King beating merits specific attention because it begins to reread visibility not as representation or recognition, but instead as a kind of null value, one which may well be powerless to defend victims of police violence, or to relieve Rankine's intensifying sense of vulnerability in spaces like 'the streets of New York'.<sup>3</sup>

Rankine's comment on King begins to lead toward the idea that visibility might be a kind of 'trap' (Foucault 1977). This need not immediately mean what Foucault meant by it; there are many reasons to believe that the conceptual collapse of the surveillant into the panoptic occludes as much as it reveals (Mathiesen 1997; Haggerty & Ericson 2000; Wood 2007). For Rankine, visibility is a trap for reasons that have less to do with the institutionalization of discipline and disciplines, and more

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<sup>2</sup> It is not only Rankine who remembers the Rodney King beating as a crucial moment for understanding contemporary regimes of visibility. The incident is regularly recalled as the central example of 'counter-surveillance' or 'sousveillance': in short, the watching of the watchers (Mann, Nolan & Wellman 2003; Monahan 2006; Browne 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Writing about King in *Citizen*, Rankine compares the way that the images of Rodney King's beating, caught on video, 'trumped all other images'; whereas following Mark Duggan's death at the hands of police in the U.K., no images were recorded to contest the police narrative (Rankine 2014a, pp. 115-18). Though focused on the U.S., Rankine's exploration is a global one.

to do with the canonical idea that visibility, recognition, and representation can serve as solutions to injustice and inequality. Rankine touches directly on the single most wide-ranging consequence of the increasing implication of surveillance society and democratic culture: their rivalry over what it means, in each of its registers, literal and metaphorical, to be visible.

Watching, being watched, and watching the watchers are key themes in *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*. Rankine's poetic eye joins that of the military and the media to peer everywhere, even into Saddam Hussein's 'very red' mouth during the medical examination which followed his capture—the exact same moment which Rachel Hall has used to illustrate the 'aesthetics of transparency' (Rankine 2004 p. 124; Hall 2007). But even as Rankine joins millions of others to peer intently into that mouth, she also writes, in an immediately political way, about the fear of being unseen:

I have a dream, or rather, in my dream the lights are out in New York City. ... Then where I am going or what I want is behind a black curtain, but it is so dark the curtain becomes the night. I want to fall asleep inside my dream. This wish for further paralysis wakes me.

You think voting won't make a difference, says my husband. This might be a wise thing to think. He says all this without lifting his gaze from the morning paper.

My dream is about a voting booth? I am not convinced. He is not interested in convincing me. He is reading about candidates for the presidency. (Rankine 2004, p. 127)

Not convinced of the interpretation, perhaps, but Rankine's point is driven home obliquely: the lack of interest in 'convincing' other people of interpretations gestures toward a degradation of democracy—in the very context of democracy's core component, the election.

Where the husband does not 'lift his gaze' in *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, in *Citizen* Rankine takes up many other ways in which a person's presence fails to result in that person's ethical and political recognition. The book repeatedly transitions from narrating experiences of *invisibility* to narrating experiences of *hypervisibility*,

beginning with the former:

You are twelve attending Sts. Philip and James School on White Plains Road and the girl sitting in the seat behind asks you to lean to the right during exams so she can copy what you have written. ... Sister Evelyn never figures out your arrangement perhaps because you never turn around to copy Mary Catherine's answers. Sister Evelyn must think these two girls think a lot alike or she cares less about cheating and more about humiliation or she never actually saw you sitting there. (Rankine 2014a, p. 5-6)

*Citizen* offers many more anecdotes of racialized humiliation like the one above, and Rankine insistently frames them as experiences of invisibility:

Yes, and you want it to stop, you want the child pushed to the ground to be seen, to be helped to his feet, to be brushed off by the person that did not see him, has never seen him, has perhaps never seen anyone who is not a reflection of himself. (Rankine 2014a, p. 17)

Further:

Apparently your own invisibility is the real problem causing her confusion. (Rankine 2014a, p. 43)

Rankine's framing suggests that to be invisible is not really the same as to receive 'black looks', those 'epidermalizing' gazes which link skin color to race, and link race to racist caricature (hooks 1992; Browne 2015). Though she does sometimes write about that kind of gaze, Rankine is specifically focused on understanding the racializing gaze not as discriminatory or derogatory, but as simply incapable of sight.

We can see this more fully by noting how Rankine figures racialized hypervisibility in a parallel way. In *Citizen* Rankine writes at length about watching Serena Williams play tennis on television, and how the tennis court and tennis culture more generally make manifest the dilemmas of racial visibility. While, on the one hand, 'Serena and her big sister Venus brought to mind Zora Neale Hurston's "I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background"' (Rankine 2014a,

p. 25), Rankine also figures Serena's body as occluding sight itself:

Though no one was saying anything explicitly about Serena's black body, you are not the only viewer who thought it was getting in the way of [the referee's] sight line. (Rankine 2014a, p. 27)

From the invisible body we move to the body that is opaque.. It is worth emphasizing that Rankine figures Serena's situation through the ideas of the seen and the unseen, and particularly as that which is so visible that it prevents something else, namely the position of a tennis ball, from being seen. This is a curious and perhaps yet more complicated kind of blindness, but one that shares the same central idea as Rankine's other anecdotes: not now the racializing and discriminatory, but the visible and invisible as such. Rankine extends this logic to the street policing which forms a central element of racialized surveillance in the contemporary United States:

I left my client's house knowing I would be pulled over. I knew. I just knew. I opened my briefcase on the passenger seat, just so they could see. ... And you are not the guy and still you fit the description because there is only one guy who is always the guy fitting the description. (Rankine 2014a, p. 105-109)

Here Saddam Hussein's opened mouth has become an opened briefcase, and Serena's hypervisibility has become the same as that of the victim of the 'driving while black' paradigm: even though this driver does not resemble anybody, when perceived he is so intensely visible that his image blots out any particular person's description.

Rankine has described a literary response to this kind of immediate visibility. Because 'To be a person of color in a racist culture is always to be addressable ... So a writer of color may be fueled by a desire to exit that place of addressability' (Rankine & Loffreda 2015, p. 16). In her own work,, Rankine says that she has moved away from 'truth', through 'transparency', to create a 'recess':

[Another poet suggested that *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*] was simple and direct in order to perform truth-telling. This reading of the style of the book surprised me because I worked hard for simplicity in order to allow for projection and open-endedness in the text, for a sort of blankness and transparency that would

lose the specificity of ‘the truth’. ... I am not interested in narrative, or truth, or truth to power, on a certain level; I am fascinated by affect, by positioning, and by intimacy ... What happens when I stand close to you? What’s your body going to do? What’s my body going to do? On myriad levels, we are both going to fail, fail, fail each other and ourselves. The simplicity of the language is never to suggest truth, but to make transparent the failure. The linguistic failures are disappointing and excoriating, as you say, and the images don’t exactly recoup or repair—they are a form of recess ... (Rankine 2014c)

In *Don’t Let Me Be Lonely* Rankine arrives at a clear counterpoint with her earlier enunciation of ‘longing for the American light’. In choosing ‘blankness’, ‘transparency,’ and the idea of a ‘recess’ to describe her writing, Rankine explicitly identifies an impasse with contemporary regimes of visibility. That impasse is not broken by identifying and denouncing invisibility. Instead, Rankine writes toward the aesthetics of transparency—even if that means abandoning the modes of speaking that are conventionally aligned with the claim to be ‘visible’ or represented’, like ‘truth-telling’ or ‘speaking truth to power’. Thus the affective register of Rankine’s new poems is ‘failure’, and failure is itself a representation of how Rankine understands citizenship. In a refrain that recurs in *Citizen*—and in that book’s only explicit discussion of citizenship—Rankine writes: ‘Yes, and this is how you are a citizen: Come on. Let it go. Move on’ (2014a, p. 151).

What is to be ‘let go’ is the affective burden imposed by the experiences of invisibility and hypervisibility that Rankine relates. So despite the fact that visibility would seem to be the necessary mediator by which an individual’s presence would lead to recognition, visibility in Rankine does not have this function. Instead, Rankine’s juxtaposition of invisibility with hypervisibility frames visibility as a locus of what Lauren Berlant has called ‘cruel optimism’:

‘Cruel optimism’ names a relation of attachment to compromised conditions of possibility whose realization is discovered either to be impossible, sheer fantasy, or too possible, and toxic. What’s cruel about these attachments, and not merely inconvenient or tragic, is that the subjects who have x in their lives might not well endure the loss of their object or scene of desire, even though

its presence threatens their wellbeing. (Berlant 2006, p. 20)

Rankine has referenced Berlant's work in discussing *Citizen*:

In *Cruel Optimism*, Berlant talks about things that we're invested in, despite the fact that they are not good for us and place us in a non-sovereign relationship to our own lives. And I thought, on a certain level, that thing that I am invested in that is hurting me would be this country [laughs]. (Rankine 2014b)

An *American* lyric. Berlant's description of the cruelly optimistic corresponds very closely to Rankine's articulation of contemporary visibility: on the one hand, for those rendered invisible, it is impossible to achieve; at the very same time, it is all too easy to become hypervisible. This double bind is reproduced at multiple scales in *Citizen*, not least in paradoxes, like 'trying to dodge the buildup of erasure' or 'fighting off the weight of nonexistence' (Rankine 2014a, p. 11,139).

For Rankine, citizenship is the apotheosis of cruel optimism's exhausted endurance. In *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, it's that 'You think that voting won't make a difference' (Rankine 2004, p. 127). In *Citizen*, not only does citizenship amount merely to 'mov[ing] on', but from the very first line of *Citizen*, there is a sense of weariness: 'When you are alone and too tired even to turn on any of your devices ...' (Rankine 2014a, p. 1). Lauren Berlant has herself attempted to recuperate *Citizen's* gestures of exhaustion, noting that:

*Citizen's* great phrase about your being 'too tired even to turn on any of your devices', ... is metapoetic but also implies that the maneuver of tone is one of your citizen-actions, a weapon for resisting defeat and depletion in the face of the supremacist ordinary. (Rankine 2014c)

Berlant seems to refer to an unembellished frankness she perceives in Rankine's style, a style that Berlant implies is without rhetorical 'devices'. But Rankine's sentence is metapoetic not only because of the play on the word 'device', but also because in this very sentence Rankine specifically 'turns on' not only 'any' device, but what is in some ways the device of devices: apostrophe, in the form of Rankine's unusual use of

the word 'you'.

As several of the citations above have suggested, much of *Citizen* is written 'in the second person', a *you* who suffers both the imbecile and the cruel aspects of living in a racist culture. Of course, one way to read this unusual 'point of view' would be to see in this 'you' an attempt to 'put the reader in the shoes of' somebody who is familiar with those experiences.<sup>4</sup> But as we have seen, Rankine does not frame herself as a teller of truths to those who do not know them. Rankine's 'you' is not primarily a kind of direct address, but rather a use of or even a reference to apostrophe: 'A figure of speech in which a thing, a place, an abstract quality, an idea, a dead or absent person, is addressed as if present and capable of understanding' (*Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms*).

To read Rankine's 'you' as apostrophe rather than an interpellation is to honor her insistence that her recent work constitutes an American *lyric*. While the idea of lyric is a congeries of concepts and histories and involves many other elements than the apostrophic, the tradition of J.S. Mill, taken up by Northrop Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism*, seems to be directly upheld in Rankine's recent work:

[In lyric,] to go back to Mill's aphorism ['eloquence is heard, poetry is overheard'] ... the poet, so to speak, turns his back on his listeners. (Frye 1957, pp. 249-50)

Frye goes on to define lyric in an even more pertinent manner: 'a literary genre characterized by the assumed concealment of the audience from the poet' (Frye 1957, p. 366). Many commentators have tended, perhaps following Paul de Man, to attribute a certain absoluteness to the disjunction that Mill and Frye have described as merely an obliqueness or turn, claiming that a poem can *never* address an audience (de Man 1984; Smith 2007). Conversely, others insist that the lyric is hardly spoken in solitude:

Criticism tends to read acts of speaking to you as the doomed attempts to

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<sup>4</sup> *Guernica*: Talk to me about your decision to set many of these poems in the second person. *Claudia Rankine*: There were a number of things going on. Because some of the situations were mine and some belonged to other people, I didn't want to own them in the first person....But that was the least of it. The real issue was, the second person for me disallowed the reader from knowing immediately how to position themselves. I didn't want to race the individuals. (Rankine 2014b)

‘reconcile’ alienated minds through a series of rhetorical strategies. That is to say, the apostrophic model is misleading, insofar as it has encouraged subjectivist interpretations of poetry. ... It is time, I think, that this long familiar notion that an I calls to a you, but cannot confirm anything beyond its own unanswered and unanswerable speech, is met with an anti-subjectivist, anti-Cartesian account of address. (Pollard 2012, p. 11)

For Rankine’s lyric, however, the truth lies, as in her account of citizenship, somewhere between the solipsistic and what one might call the ‘dialogic’ accounts—which is to say, directly within the classical account that gives us the lyric as a ‘turning away’ and an ‘assumed concealment’.<sup>5</sup> In fact *Citizen* all but explicitly writes through Mill’s well-known account of the lyric:

I they he she we you turn  
only to discover  
the encounter

to be alien to this place.

Wait.

[...]

Overheard in the moonlight.

Overcome in the moonlight. (Rankine 2014b, pp. 140-1)

The moonlight that plays across this poem, in which there is a turn away, an expectant pause, and the merest ‘overhearing,’ is the etiolated reprise of what Rankine offered in her first book’s floodlit ‘American Light’. For this reason, the new work may not be well-described as what Berlant terms a ‘weapon’ (Rankine 2014c) on behalf of a

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<sup>5</sup> Because of the ongoing debate about the political valences of lyric, one critic attempts to evade the problem thus: “As its title suggests, Rankine’s most recent book *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014) develops the writer’s postlyric poetics.” (Tucker 2015). I think Rankine’s generic claim should be taken at face value.

citizen's action; instead, to quote Rankine herself, it seems that *Citizen* is invested in 'a truce with the patience of a stethoscope' (2014a, p. 156).

Rankine's lyric 'you' does not offer the creation of what she calls an 'encounter'. Like visibility and citizenship, the notion of a lyric encounter is another form of cruel optimism. Rather than striking through the poem to a direct prose style or to 'direct address,' Rankine's 'you,' and the designation 'American lyric,' both designate the oblique overhearing that constitutes a theory of the lyric, and a theory of the citizenship, that obtain within surveillance space. Rankine has said that she collected the anecdotes in *Citizen* not only from her own life, but also from friends and colleagues. So it is possible to conceive that she might have simply adapted them using the conventions of the memoir, in the first person. Or she might have hidden them behind fictional names, in the third person. But Rankine had already tried those strategies—in a certain sense they are the strategies of hypervisibility on the one hand, and invisibility on the other: 'Tried rhyme, tried truth, tried epistolary untruth, tried and tried' (2014a, p. 71). Remaining, then, is a confrontation with the contemporary regime of the aesthetic of transparency on something like its own ground: a turn away, an overhearing in moonlight.

The image Rankine chose to feature on the cover of *Citizen* is a work of art, David Hammon's *In the Hood* (1993). The installation comprises simply the hood from a gray hoodie, affixed to a wall. Remediated by Rankine from its original context, it now inevitably refers to the 2012 death of Trayvon Martin, a young man wearing a hoodie, whose murder by a 'neighborhood watch' volunteer resulted in many American celebrities and politicians donning hoodies in protest themselves. But what is a 'hoodie', in the context of Rankine's work, and in the context of the aesthetics of transparency in which and through which she is writing? Given a certain cruel optimism about the stakes of contemporary visibility, the hoodie represents a compromise position, a truce. On the one hand, of course, it covers: it creates opacity and even a kind of 'recess'. On the other hand, via the aesthetics of transparency, that very opacity attracts attention and renders the wearer hypervisible.

The 'recess', the 'turn away', the 'overheard', the 'hoodie': *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* and *Citizen* trace what we might best understand as what Malcolm Bull has termed a 'coming into hiding' (Bull 1999). For Bull, hiding is not becoming less knowable, less present: that would be invisibility, absence, silence. On the contrary:

[S]omething fully known going into hiding involves becoming less knowable ... so for something unknown, hiding involves becoming more knowable ... In other words, being hidden does not involve going into hiding, but coming into hiding. (Bull 1999, p. 26)

For the contemporary citizen, rendered all but transparent within spaces of surveillance, 'Emancipation [can be] experienced as a coming into hiding' (Bull 1999, p. 255). From this point of view, what we are looking at in Rankine's delicate approach to the aesthetics of transparency is not a move 'backwards' from a politics of visibility on the one hand, or from a poetics of the encounter on the other hand, but instead a movement that she would like us to regard as future oriented: if a failure, a failure forward.

The same obtains in Rankine's understanding of the experience of citizenship, which has been enjoying a kind of sustained theoretical renaissance. In 1992 Chantal Mouffe had already declared that:

A radicalization of the modern democratic tradition ... can be achieved through an immanent critique, by employing the symbolic resources of that very tradition. ... There is a consensus on the left that we should revive the idea of *citizenship*. (Mouffe 1992, p. 1,3)

For Étienne Balibar, similarly, one does not hope to introduce ideas from outside the domain of democracy; instead one must work to constantly redefine citizenship, without any hope of producing another, superior concept (Balibar 2015, p. 124-5). What is notable about these theoretical figurations is their resemblance to the kind of 'truce' described by Rankine, both in *Citizen* and in interviews. She is at once chastened and sanguine:

[I go] back to this idea of connection, community, and citizenship. You want to belong, you want to be here. In interactions with others you're constantly waiting to see that they recognize that you're a human being. ... The truce is that. You forgive all of these moments because you're constantly waiting for the moment when you will be *seen*. As an equal. As just another person. As another *first* person. There's a letting go that comes with it. I don't know about

forgiving, but it's an 'I'm still here'. And it's not just because I have nowhere else to go. It's because I believe in the possibility. I believe in the possibility of another way of being. Let's make other kinds of mistakes; let's be flawed differently. (Rankine 2014b)

Until the advent of the first person, the flaw Rankine has chosen is lyric apostrophe. She has designated the situation of the citizen under surveillance, and in particular the situation of the highly visible who yet remain strangely invisible, at the level of genre. Much of the response to Rankine's work has focused on how it speaks to the recent Black Lives Matter movement, and the way that Rankine explores the intimate and affective dimensions of living in a racist society that constantly trumpets its triumph over racism. But Rankine's work also points at a longer history and a wider scope of experiences in which, as she writes, 'Everything shaded everything darkened everything shadowed // is the stripped is the struck—' (Rankine 2014a, p. 146). That conjunction of paradoxes denotes the contemporary aesthetics of transparency that now appears to be emerging across multiple domains. It is Rankine's particular contribution to show how that aesthetics at once emerges from, and threatens, a democracy founded on the principle of equal citizenship, and it is her particular insight that lyric form can still conjoin, and perhaps even contain, these tensions.

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