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Affecting White Woman

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This article explores the imagining of the destabilization of heteronormative power relations in the performance I Love Black Men *(Halász 2011). The performance points to the potential of developing anti-racist white femininities through the white female body and its affective dimensions. This article explores how the racial category White Woman is made in a particular racializing stereotype that posits an elemental sexual attraction between white women and black men, and how this stereotype is subverted in the performance. It argues that* I Love Black Men *envisions a new public body for white woman, and for the potential of forming new, anti-racist relations.*

Introduction

This article considers the imagining of anti-racist white femininities in the performance *I Love Black Men,* which I developed in London in 2011 as part of a visual sociology research project. The research investigates the production of anti-racist white femininities through affect. The performance studio was staged to resemble a classroom; only the performer and I were present. I took the role of the instructor, remaining invisible throughout the video that records the performance. I developed the performance to address the invisibility of whiteness, the social construction of race through discourse, and the processes of racialization in representation, stereotyping, and cultural inscription. In my research, I employ the performance to challenge these models by insisting on the relevance of materiality and affective relationality in any theorization of the making of White Woman. In this article, I investigate the potential of developing anti-racist white femininities by directing attention to the affective dimensions of the white female body. I examine the imagining of the destabilization of heteronormative power relations in the performance, and its attempts to unsettle the grounds on which the racial category White Woman is made in a particular racializing stereotype that posits an elemental sexual attraction between white women and black men.

Before discussing the performance, I first briefly overview existing scholarship on the invisibility of whiteness. I then consider the stereotype as a representational practice and the trope of ideal white femininity. Finally, I suggest that through close attention to the affective dimensions of the white female body it is possible to recognize how "social discourses are enmeshed in lived experience" (Gunaratnam 2003, 7). Working through the performance, I show how affects surge to the surface of the body, reorientating its relations.

Invisibility of Whiteness

Current attention to whiteness is characterized by a critique of whiteness asserted as *invisible*, universal, and "the presumed norm" (Back and Solomos 2009, 607), as well as by an effort to fundamentally "*unmask* and *name*" whiteness (Knowles 2003, 175; original emphasis). A

central concern of "anxious whiteness," as Sara Ahmed termed it (2004a, 2), is how to de-centre, challenge, dismantle, and escape white race privilege while avoiding inadvertently re-centering and reifying the term and the underlying logics of white supremacy, thereby constructing whiteness as an essential and homogenous white identity and culture (Frankenberg 1997; Nakayama and Martin 1999; Knowles 2003; Haggis 2004; Alexander and Knowles 2005; Back and Solomos 2009).

Whiteness is considered a pervasive and universal condition that is effectively unseen and unmarked. White privilege and racial dominance by whites are socially and culturally embedded to the extent that whiteness has been naturalized. Consequently, there is widespread stress in the literature on the need of seeing and marking hitherto invisible whiteness to deconstruct it. Black scholars have however long argued that whiteness has only been invisible for whites (Fanon, 1967; hooks 1992; Gilroy 1993, Ahmed 2004a). In contrast to racialized minorities, whites have a choice of attending to or ignoring their whiteness (McIntosh 1992; Gallagher 1994). Richard Dyer explains:

> As long as race is something only applied to non-white people, as long as white people are not racially seen and named, they/we function as a human norm. Other people are raced, we are just people. (1997, 1)

The unmarked, invisible position of whiteness is made through the marking—racializing—of others, on which its transparency depends. The transparency of whiteness must be continuously asserted for it to function as the norm, which in turn contributes to its invisibility. The contours of whiteness as a racialized position works like the colour white, an absence of colour and all colours in itself—it is invisible and escapes characterisation because it is everything and universal (Dyer 1997). Hence the pledge of studies of whiteness is that to learn to see whiteness as a colour rather than an absence of colour is crucial to the marking of whiteness (Ahmed 2004a).

Working against the invisibility of whiteness, *I Love Black Men* firmly secures a place for whiteness in the racial palette. Whiteness cannot escape racialization as a colourless universal norm; it is palpable. The specificities of identity constitution and normalizing tendencies at work are made tangible in this piece through the appropriation of the use of the colour white that gains its meaning in relation to and against the black. The performance whitens the white woman; her whiteness is simultaneously asserted and undone; she is inescapably coloured in the racial hierarchy. Paraphrasing the term "post-black" art[1] referring to art about the black experience that attempts to dispel the notion that race matters, I termed my performance *post-white* to point to the fact that white artists have never been charged with the burden of representation and the label of "white art," with reconfiguring the construction of whiteness and the normality of it, or with the politics of looking at it. As an anti-racist project, the performance is working from inside the normative parameters of whiteness. Engaging with the question "but what are white people to do?" (Ahmed 2004a, 18), the performance imagines anti-racist white femininities "out of whiteness" (Ware and Back 2002): it envisions a refusal of the designated racial place of white womanhood and the privileges inherent in that relation. To avoid the pitfalls of returning to the white subject and re-centring white agency in any critical investigation of whiteness, and hence amounting to the "narcissism of a perpetual return" in the search for answers to the question she posed, Ahmed proposes a "double turn" (2004a, 19). This means a turn away from white subjects but in a way that retains a turn towards their role and responsibility in present and past histories of racism and thus an implication in what they

critique, but also (and here lies the double work of Ahmed's turn) towards others, and away from themselves. Following Ahmed and Les Back, for whom any critical examination of whiteness needs to start with "racism rather than whiteness" (Back 2010, 445, original emphasis), the performance works with a stereotype that continues to be the cause of much racial violence and suffering.[2] *I Love Black Men* is placed in histories of racism and anti-Black violence, and critically examines the construction of the trope of ideal white femininity through testing assumptions of racialized hyper-sexuality and sexual desire grounded in the fetishization of the black male body. It seeks to provide a direct way to speak out against objectification and categorization.

White Racial Stereotyping

I Love Black Men responds to racialized discourse and operates with stereotyping as a representational practice. It identifies the white female body as a site for exposing and challenging the heteronormative discourse that posits an elemental attraction of white women to black men. Importantly, the performance works with *white* racial stereotypes, with those stereotypes that have been formulated and practiced by white people with often fatal consequences.[3] The alleged sexual attraction between white women and black men that grounds much of the relationships in the "trope-ical family," as explained by Ruth Frankenberg (1997), is essentially a white construct. While acknowledging that there is no one true meaning (Hall 2013), *I Love Black Men* employs stereotyping as a representational practice that fixes meaning. As Stuart Hall explains, in the "racialized regime of representation," *stereotyped* means "reduced to a few essentials, fixed in Nature by a few, simplified characteristics" (2013, 237). In the words of bell hooks:

> Stereotypes, however inaccurate, are one form of representation. Like fictions, they are created to serve as substitutions, standing in for what is real. They are there not to tell it like it is but to invite and encourage pretense. They are a fantasy, a projection onto the Other that makes them less threatening. Stereotypes abound when there is distance. They are an invention, a pretense that one knows when the steps that would make real knowing possible cannot be taken or are not allowed. (1992, 170)

In the nature/culture binary, whites are placed at the superior position and have overcome nature through culture, whereas among blacks nature and culture are commensurate. In the history of racialization the status and position of inferior races became fixed and socio-cultural differences between populations were explained by behavioural practices and physical attributes of the body. The body became "the totemic object" and was effectively racialized in the attempt to explicate the social and the biological, nature, and culture (Green 1984, 31; quoted in Hall 2013, 233). Visible differences between bodies played a pivotal role in naturalizing racial difference and thus were at the centre of visual discourse and the production of racialized knowledge: "The representation of 'difference' through the body became the discursive site through which much of this 'racialized knowledge' was produced and circulated" (Green 1984, 31; quoted in Hall 2013, 233). *I Love Black Men* seeks to demonstrate how racialized knowledge and visual differences based on raced and gendered bodies "pass into our very being and becoming so that they appear as if they are natural and inevitable bodily markers" (Blackman 2008, 62). It works with visual discourse on racial and gender differences, and with their visual markers that are culturally inscribed on the "flesh," but it does not stop

there. It explores how the performance of any identity is deeply embedded in a sense of self, and allows for the deeper, intersubjective, affective processes to coalesce with the image of stereotyped white femininity on the surface of the white female body. This conflict between the visual, external, culturally inscribed surface and the affective inner sense of the self is at the heart of the performance. Central to the piece is way cultural inscription is "embodied and enacted at the level of the individual, subjective experiences of bodily affectivity" (Blackman 2008, 71). The conflict between embodied subjectivity and the social articulation of difference is brought sharply into focus: by employing a direct and clean black and white aesthetic, and by using repetition as a conceptual and artistic strategy, the performance enacts the ways in which "cultural injunctions and subject positions might be literally written into the flesh of the body" (Blackman 2008, 72).

Tropes of Representation of Ideal White Femininity

The piece works with "tropes of representation" (Hall 2013, 219), the interweaving of femininity and masculinity with race and sexuality. In its recoding of white femininities in the process of always being made and remade, *I Love Black Men* enters the racialized regime of representation. In the construction of "femaleness and maleness divided by race," Frankenberg composes a repertoire of images "in simple pairings," —tropes repetitive across time and space to the point of banality were they not so "devastating in their effects" (1997, 11). She suggests that the tropes of the "simple quartet," the members of the "unholy and unorthodox" family have been and are "coconstructed, always hierarchically so": White Man, White Woman, Man of Colour, and Woman of Colour (Frankenberg 1997, 11). Frankenberg demonstrates the complementarities and contrasts that give meaning to White Woman:

> White Woman is frail, vulnerable, delicate, sexually pure but at times easily led "astray." White Man is strong, dominant, arbiter of truth, and self-designated protector of white womankind, defender of the nation/territory (and here defense of the nation and its honor often also entails defending White Woman's racial chastity). Man of Color… is sexually rapacious, sometimes seductive, usually predatory, especially toward White Woman; it is he, in fact, from whom White Woman must be protected by White Man…. White Man as a savior would founder without White-Woman-who-must-be-saved. Similarly, without Man of Color as predator, White Man loses much of his sense of worth and purpose…. White Woman's ambiguous and ambivalent status in this family of tropes is striking: she is, on the one hand, accorded privileges and status by this race/gender positioning, and on the other hand, confined by it. In any case she is advantaged only conditionally on her acceptance of the terms of the contract. This includes especially her sexual practices, for the trope-ical family is strictly heterosexual and monoracial in its coupling. (Frankenberg 1997, 12)

The discursive of trope white femininity as essentially racialized and sexualized has proven to be particularly persistent across centuries and different locations and contexts (see Ware 1992), and underlies a range of political and ideological positions that continue to directly affect everyday, intersubjective affective encounters up until the present. This trope is useful: as the relational nature of the categories of race, gender, and sexuality becomes clear, it establishes an ideological relationship between all members of the trope-ical family. In this trope, white femininity is an "ideal, but also the most passive and dependent of femininities" that was produced in the eighteenth century through textual and visual technologies (Skeggs 1997, 99).

As Beverley Skeggs argues, "by the end of the nineteenth century femininity had become established as a (middle-) classed sign, a sign of a particular form of womanhood" that was "always coded as respectable" (Skeggs 1997, 99). This is the "particular form" of white, middle-class, "strictly heterosexual" femininity (Frankenberg 1997, 12) that I investigate in the performance. According to Skeggs, middle-class women could prove their femininity, their adherence to "ideal of the lady," and hence their respectability through appearance and conduct (1997, 99). She argues that "femininity requires the display of classed dispositions, of forms of conduct and behaviour," the display of a "divine composure" (Cixous 1980; quoted in Skeggs 1997, 100), which include the components of femininity as silent, static, invisible and composed" (Cixous 1980; quoted in Skeggs 1997, 100). According to Skeggs, the performance of this respectable white femininity was "never a given" for working-class black or white women, whose bodies were coded as sexual and thus distanced from the ideal. In what follows, I explore the affective embodiment of this discourse and the bodily submission of this ideal white heterosexual femininity in *I Love Black Men* to argue that certain performances of respectable white femininities can reach far beyond appearance and conduct, and engender the refusal of identification with this ideal through a fuller engagement of the body than the display of constructions of certain gender norms would require.

Existing research on white women that has emphasized the historical constructs of racial representation examines the construction of respectable, white femininity through this racist discourse of the sexually pure, vulnerable white woman and the fantasy of the predatory black man as an analytical tool (Hall 1992; Ware 1992; Frankenberg 1993; McClintock 1995; Dyer 1997; Harris 2000). Catherine Hall and Vron Ware both look at white femininity as a historically constructed concept, and discuss the familial racist discourse that ties female sexuality and femininity to ideologies of race and class in its historical context (Hall, 1992; Ware 1992). Ware argues that different types of dominance and power were legitimated by this ideology of white womanhood that affects everyone, particularly in the politics of crime and public order. She provides examples of racial imagery based on the "powerlessness and physical frailty" of white women that has often been combined with fear of the threatening black presence (1992, 5). She recounts a visual and linguistic vocabulary based on the stereotypic constructions of black masculinity as the aggressive "savage / monster / beast / fiend" versus the nonviolent and "helpless" white woman as the foremost victim of "unruly black criminals," and shows how this was used to evoke particular responses from the white public and influenced the wider social and political climate (Ware 1992, 7). Ware connects the activation of fear to these particular ideas and images of white female vulnerability, which could then be used to advance certain political agendas. Today's far-right politics and populist ideologies similarly play on this image, particularly within the context of asylum and migration. Frankenberg's research on white women includes real-life examples of white men who attempted to "save" these women from their black partners (1993, 81). The historically persistent image of the "threatening and attractive … big black male" from whom white women need protection also featured in the interviews that Bridget Byrne conducted with white women in London (Byrne 2006, 86). Mica Nava argues that white women were indeed allured by the presence of black men in Great Britain in the 1950s and 1960s, driven by an "attraction of otherness" (2007, 91). I would argue that these conceptualizations are characterized by a neglect of the experiences and the role of the white female body in shaping this discourse. With my performance work, I intended to work towards discovering and disentangling the affective dimensions of inhabiting or rejecting this discursive environment. I aim to demonstrate that we can learn more about the construction of white femininities—which in turn can help to refute

the ideological power of whiteness—if we uncover the affective entanglements and responses that arise from racial discourses and imagery.

I Love Black Men seeks to subvert the trope of the ideal white femininity. Attempts to subvert this discourse have been found in existing research on white women. Frankenberg has observed that the lived experience of the discourse was continually exceeded and interrupted in the lived experiences of the women interviewed (1993). She argues that inhabiting a discursive environment is not an individual choice, and that subverting it therefore requires collective action. Ware, too, writes about those "scattered examples of women" who challenged the discourse and defied the role of the helpless white woman, but who, in doing so, were "inviting scandal and loneliness" and "remain eccentric individuals at best" (1992, 42). She nonetheless adds that "an equally fruitful and revealing discourse emerge" when women challenge the expectations the discourse put on them and manage to live independent lives (Ware 1992, 42).

Destabilizing Heteronormative Power Relations

Whiteness has been argued to be relational, "as a process, not a 'thing,' as plural rather than singular in nature" (Frankenberg 1997, 1), which allows performances of white femininities and their affective entanglements to be studied as continuing mediations and negotiations of historically specific relations in time and space, which in turn affords the imagining and remaking of these power relations with a strong feminist and anti-racist take. Hillary Harris argues that "antiracist whiteness must perform new relations with the subjectivities, the ideologies, and the material legacies of those historical relations" (2000, 184). This emphasis on creating new relations out of historical ones is also at the centre of *I Love Black Men*, which imagines the formation of anti-racist white femininities through the body of White Woman.

The performance works with this relational approach to racial difference and the affects "enhanced and produced through the relations between the self and other" (Blackman 2008, 133). Although only White Woman is to be seen, the defining presence of all family members is felt. White Woman remains to be apprehended through her relations, and through breaking with those tropic constructs and predictable performances of relations that have defined her historically and are performed and made to work into the present. These relations and performative tropes that give meaning to and embody the essence of White Woman—her respectable purity, her reproductive imperatives, and her innocent, unquestioned monoracial heterosexuality, which Richard Dryer describes as "the cradle of whiteness" (1997, 140)—can, however, also serve her as means to resist white supremacist normalization and the naturalization of racist and heterosexist assumptions.

The White Woman in *I Love Black Men* attempts to reject the contract and its terms. The performance employs queer feminist struggle as a tool and strategy to disclose and repel the codes, practices, and ideologies that ensure the racial and sexual conformity of white womanhood in the service of institutions of white supremacy, and in the constitution of respectable, pure white femininity—forever loyal to exclusive and monogamous unions with White Man. *I Love Black Men* insists on the notion that racial, gender, and sexual identifications are intertwined and are reproduced in a web of relations, always mutually constitutive and never inseparable. Focusing on the sexual aspect of all relations, *I Love Black Men* seeks to unsettle inflicted means through which we relate to the world. Through simultaneously making visible the politics of race and sexuality, the performance envisions building family outside of traditional "trope-ical" models based on the reproduction of

hegemonic white heterosexuality. *I Love Black Men* has a potential to engage in critiques of historical relations and in the refiguring of the set of ideologies, structures, and practices that are institutionalized across multiple identifications, and an imperative to draw into scrutiny race and gender formations.

The performing naked white female body is the pivotal sight of the piece. The woman, almost identical to her naked body, could be perceived as an object of sexual desire. In making public her nakedness*, I Love Black Men* aims to render her body as visual subtext in the construction of sexual desire attached to the fetish of the black male. Her whiteness is made visible through her appropriation of the blackboard; her visible and invisible markings of her race, gender, and sexuality are at once skin-deep and hidden from sight. Her nakedness might suggest a woman taking pleasure in her own body, but as the performance evolves it becomes clear that it is taken away from her and turned into a sign of dis-possession; she is stripped of her own subjectivity. White Woman can be seen to be forced to patrol the definitional boundaries of the family, her race, and gendered heterosexuality that arguably draws her to Black Man. In this trope-ical construct, it is indispensable for White Man to establish and justify his power over Black Man, safeguarding vulnerable White Woman against a savage desire that she is argued to be unable to regulate. She seems unable to take control of her own subject position; she might be forever disciplined and controlled by White Man, who must be reaffirmed as the saviour of her, the family, and mankind:

> The primal fantasy of the big, black penis projects the fear of a threat not only to white womanhood, but to civilization itself, as the anxiety of miscegenation, eugenic pollution and racial degeneration is acted out through white male rituals of racial aggression—the historical lynching of black men in the United States routinely involved the literal castration of the Other's "strange fruit." (Mercer 1994, 185)

The performance strives to destabilize heteronormative complementarity between White Woman and White Man, beyond a simple rendering of a good/bad binary between the two. Perhaps she has done something wrong or has not done something that she is expected, obliged to do. Like a schoolgirl, she must be disciplined by repeatedly writing-out lines of text, an act that itself reflects the repetitive nature of stereotyping practices and the performative process constitutive of identity. Repetition is the central act of the performance: "The reiterative power of discourse" (Butler 1993, 2) that produces regulated models of being, which subjects are responsible for re-enacting and maintaining, is the backbone of the piece. The notion that whiteness is performative—that one has to act-out discursive conventions in order to become it—is made painfully simple to comprehend. The repetitive writing is a visual articulation of the workings of disciplinary power and normative cultural ideas that render regulatory images of black and white bodies effective tools in processes of racialization.

"I LOVE BLACK MEN"

Text, sight, and sound lie at the core of the performance. White Woman's image remains visible to the viewer, but her voice is not heard—only the sound of the chalk and the increasingly violent movement of her hand that makes the chalk shriek on the blackboard. The woman, a sight without a voice, is under constant surveillance by the authoritative instructor, an undefinable member of the trope-ical family, which establishes its power not only by making her write but also by freely observing her performance. Its authority increases as the woman

struggles under the burden of performing the act. In a setting designed to resemble a classroom, my performer, a naked white woman, holds a piece of white chalk and repeatedly writes a single sentence on a blackboard. Taking the role of the teacher, I instruct her to write the sentence "I LOVE BLACK MEN" on the blackboard. Written in the first person, this simple text makes her enact perceptions of her race, gender, and sexuality *inscribed* on her body—on the body of a white woman. Her whiteness and femininity—differences of race and gender—are reduced to the perception of visible differences of the white female body, the single most important means in producing beliefs and ideologies: "The Body, the most visible difference between men and women, the only one to offer a secure ground for those who seek the permanent, the feminine 'nature' and 'essence,' remains thereby the safest basis for racist and sexist ideologies" (Trinh 2010, 198). White women's bodies were constructed through an association with bodily limits, defined through its degrees of deviation from the white male body in the scientific thinking throughout the nineteenth century, a period when "rather than *finding* evidence of racial difference, science was actually *constructing* or even inventing the very idea of race itself" (Ahmed 2002, 50; original emphasis). The body, "bodily difference[,] and bodily hierarchy" were the foundational ideas behind the invention of race (Ibid: 50). In this ordering of bodies, white women's bodies were analogous to those of "lower races," which according to Ahmed "allowed woman as a group to be racialized, and the 'lower races' as a group to be feminized" (Ibid: 51). Although the body of the white woman was considered less evolved than that of the white man, as a result of her membership of the "higher races" her bodily limits could—unlike the bestiality and sexuality of the bodies of black women—be transcended through the rules of "virtue," "chastity," and "modesty" that protected and also hemmed her in (Ahmed 2002, 53).

Affects of the White Female Body

In *I Love Black Men*, the body of the white woman is left bare, with no protection, and without the shield of respectability (Skeggs 1997). Her body is marked as a site of racialization. The production of the racial body is performed as an affective process through multiple histories of stereotyping practices. The performance attempts to reproduce the silencing and ignoring of the "dynamic nature of the body" (Shilling 1993, 104) inherent in social constructionism, whereby the body is passively written upon, but fails: affects surge to the surface; the white female body is trembling under the flow of affects. I would argue that there is a complex relationality at work between corporeal-affective and cultural inscription practices. The performance of white femininity has an affective charge, induced by—but involving more than—visual discourse and racial regimes of representation.

The way in which the performer embodies received ideas about "ideal" white womanhood indicates how stereotypes are perpetuated and how they affect us at the very core of our own personality. Through the naked woman's repetitive writing on the blackboard, the sterile space of the staged classroom transforms first to a highly racialized and sexualized space, which then gradually blurs into a place where common-sense assumptions about the nature of identity and processes of identification are thrown into question. Stereotypes are made to come apart, and their assurances are gradually fading: fantasies of sexual desire and the myth of the sexualized black male that continue to haunt the collective imagination are re-viewed and unearthed. I contend, however, that there is more at play here than simply the intricate ways in which power shapes the body through discourse: the body of White Woman is not just a passive recipient of discourse or an "inert mass" (Shilling 1993, 80). The body is a process rather than a

substance; social and cultural practices and norms interact with the corporeal and physical in a dynamic relationality. The body of White Woman is neither a simple "inscriptive surface" (Grosz 1994, 23), nor pure biological matter: it is a fleshy materiality that is lived and experienced by subjects positioned within cultural norms, power structures, and restraints. Acknowledging the working of affects allows us to reckon with the interplay of political, social, cultural inscriptions, and constructs with the materiality of bodies, their felt orientations, and their lived relations to the world. I agree with Elizabeth Grosz that the external, visible experience of the white female body must be positioned in relation to the complex internal/external interconnection in order to avoid reducing it to its surface or to a blank page to be written upon. This "somatically felt body" (Blackman 2008, 30) is open to affect and to be affected, and is constantly changing as a result of this dynamic relationality of the inside and outside.

Furthermore, I would argue that the affects that surround White Woman are not arbitrary. Their nature and display is determined by the unfolding of the historical relations of the members of the trope-ical family, and by the power structures and systems of dominations of white patriarchy. The affective charge of heteronormative "ideal" white femininity does not belong to White Woman or to the performer performing White Woman: they belong instead to the public sphere constituted along the subjects appearing in the performance—White Woman, Black Man, and White Man. As Ahmed explains, emotions are profoundly intersubjective: emotion "is not simply something 'I' or 'we' have. Rather it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces and boundaries are made" (2004b, 10). At the end of the performance, nonetheless, the affective charge of white femininity seems to become internalized by the performer, herself a white woman. A complex act of embodied affective positioning is taking place: the transformation from a performer tasked to perform an act into a woman with her own histories, feelings, ideas and subjectivity.

"I LOVE"

The performer struggles with the affective charge of white femininity: in the process of writing the text, "I LOVE BLACK MEN" becomes smudged and broken until it reads "I LOVE MEN," or only "I LOVE." This could be read as the performer's intellectual and emotional struggle to comprehend the sentence and understand its implications, to the point when racial and sexual differences are exhausted, forcing us to ask what they actually entail. The only sound we hear at the end of the performance apart from the chalk on the board is the sigh of the performer. Maybe a sigh of exasperation, or an exhaustion of the process by which the discourse becomes internalized and thrown back again into the space. I would argue that through the sigh of affect the body takes back her place in the discourse—the body of the performer is not "a malleable entity that cannot speak back" (Blackman 2008, 16): its living texture and materiality has ripped off the body the inscriptive cover of discourse. A complex relationality between discourse and affect could be detected here: through the work of affects, the performance opens up the closure inherent in stereotyping, the last words of "I LOVE" written on the blackboard signaling a release from the fixing of boundaries and an invitation to include everything that previously did not belong.

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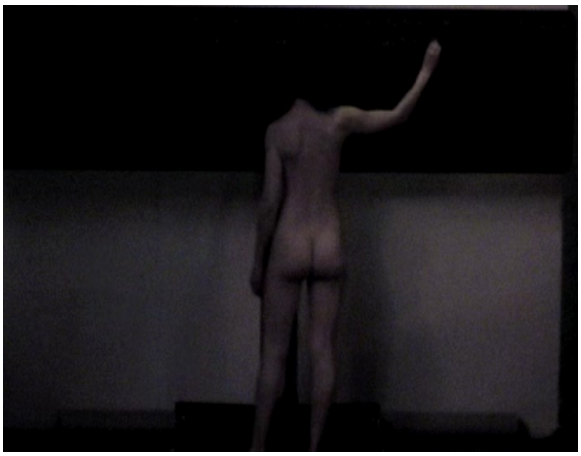
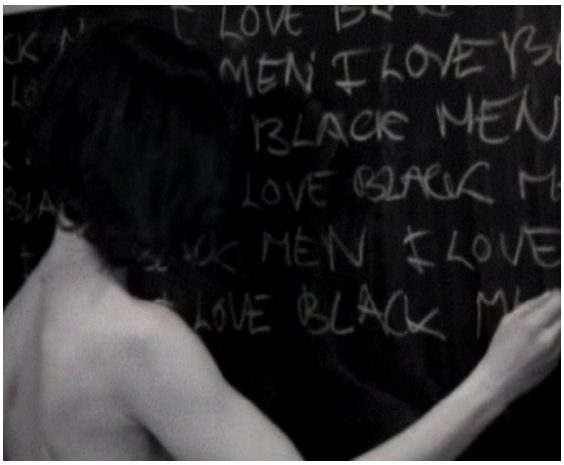
Conclusion

I developed *I Love Black Men* in order to examine a particular discourse on race and gender. This racialized discourse has had far-reaching ramifications not just for sexualizing the relationship between white women and men of colour, but in terms of white women's positioning with respect to power, her relations to white men and peoples of colour, and her ability to engage in the most violent and dangerous forms of insubordination. My analysis of the performance is guided by the contention that our understanding of white femininities can be expanded by considering the racialized white female body and its affects. More specifically, this article has focused on addressing the tensions between sociocultural norms and heteronormative conceptions of white femininities, and what is felt and experienced affectively when racialized norms and ideas that ensue from this specific racist discourse are directly applied.

I Love Black Men seeks to gradually dismantle the trope of the "family," to refuse the racial and sexual contract of white womanhood. The attachment of emotions and the embracing of love and desire of black males linked to ideal white femininity is pulled apart. The figure of the White Woman is hollowed out, her body a container made vacant but willing to be filled: the affect of whiteness seems to be left empty. The commitment to the continuing family project of heteronormative whiteness seems to have been broken, the reproduction of itself and its most pivotal trope, the White Man. *I Love Black Men* thus envisions both a new public body for white women and the potential of performing new, anti-racist relations.




LOVE


MEN I LOVE
BLACK MEN
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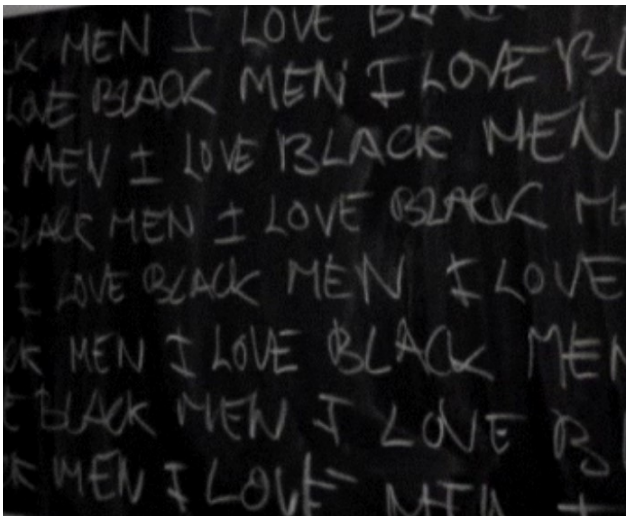

Notes

1. The term *post-black* was coined by Thelma Golden, curator of the Studio Museum in Harlem, in conversations with artist Glenn Ligon. Post-black generally denotes artists who refuse to be defined and apprehended through the identifier of "black artist" and static understandings of "black art" and "black culture" while entering into a dialogue about race and culture. As Golden explains, "saying a practice was post-black art was how Glenn would tell me that 'this is an artist who has moved several steps beyond having to work out their relationship to a particular set of issues'" (Barson and Gorschluter 2010, 78).

2. The last reported lynching was in 1981 (Wikipedia 2018).

3. Lorraine Hansberry writes on black stereotypes of whites: "Is it not 'known' in the ghetto that white people, as an entity, are 'dirty' (especially white women—who never seem to do their own cleaning); inherently 'cruel' (the cold, fierce roots of Europe; who else could put all those people into ovens *scientifically*); 'smart' (you really have to hand it to the m.f.'s), and anything *but* cold and passionless (because look who has had to live with little else than their passions in the guise of love and hatred all these centuries)? And so on" (Quoted in hooks 1992, 170).

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