Relationality, Affect and the Wound of Race: A Conversation on an Artistic Intervention into Global Colonial Whiteness

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Abstract

This article takes the form of a conversation concerning the latest iterations of our ongoing artistic interventions into Whiteness[1] as global coloniality and bodily enacted discomfort. We created two interconnected video installations—You Are Invited *(Halász and Hunter 2023) and* Disobedient Bodies: Disobedience in Five Acts *(Halász and Hunter 2025)*—*which we have presented over the past two years in various White institutional spaces across the USA, South Africa, Mexico, and South Korea[2]. This conversation captures our thinking as it has developed in the making of the artworks and in a constant exchange with participants in the installations. Engaging with extended reflections of one participant who experienced the video installation* You are Invited *in the USA, we consider why we are invested in confronting global colonial Whiteness as white makers and how we grapple through our own ongoing investments in Whiteness as we seek to challenge it through our artistic practice. As an entry point into our discussion, we consider our use of the African American writer James Baldwin's 1953[3] essay "Stranger in the Village" in the artwork's staging of a confrontation with the collective wound of race. We start here because critically analysing this use from the point of view of installation participants tells us something about the way Whiteness works through the tensions between representational and affective registers. If heeded, this tension can assist the move towards racialised accountability with care in artmaking. Where this tension is not heeded, it risks reproducing the same old White story.*

We present our conversation with the essay film Disobedient Bodies: Disobedience in Five Acts*, which we encourage you to watch in full here before you read what follows in this*

[1] We use capital letters for Whiteness and Blackness to refer to systems of politics and power and to distinguish from people who are racialised white, black, brown etc. where we use the lower case.

[2] The 2025 IVSA annual conference exhibition *Absolute Disorder* at the University of Suwon (Seoul, South Korea); the 2024 IVSA annual conference at the Universidad Veracruzana (Xalapa, Mexico); the 2023 Critical Making & Justice exhibition at The Pratt Institute (New York City, USA); the 2023 *Gender, Work & Organization* annual conference at Stellenbosch University (Stellenbosch, South Africa).

[3] Originally published in 1953 in Harper's Magazine, then in 1955 in Baldwin's collection *Notes of a Native Son*, the version we use is from Baldwin's final 1985 self-collected works, *The Price of the Ticket*.

paper. We also present screenshots of the video and photos of the installations in the text where they help guide the reader to a particular part of the film under discussion.

We begin this piece with a short introduction overviewing the two video installations and the theoretical underpinnings. We then outline the conversational methodology we employ in this piece. We note how this conversational form relates to our theoretical approach along with the rationale for including a long excerpt from an interview with an installation participant as part of this conversation. The main body of the paper consists of the conversation about the making and experiencing of the installations.

Introduction

Our two video installations which we discuss here are entitled *You Are Invited* (2023) and *Disobedient Bodies: Disobedience in Five Acts* (2025). Both combine video with installation art, into which the viewer physically enters and thus produces the work with their corporeal presence and embodied situatedness (Bishop 2005; Halász 2017, 2019, 2023). The respective videos of the two pieces are integrated into an arranged environment, using a single screen projection, objects, and a carefully laid table as a central space for participants to gather. The installations work with the affective embodied relationality of race within our current global coloniality (Hunter and van der Westhuizen 2021a). The aim of both is to explore the (im)possibility of disrupting Whiteness through the practice of collective gathering and the situatedness of the knowing bodies of creators and participants. Working together as two cis hetero white women from a feminist decolonial abolitionist identified point of view we are investigating the (im)possibilities of being Otherwise in the global colonial Northwest.

In the first of the two works, *You Are Invited*, participants get together around a lavishly set dinner table using materials from the local environment to sit, eat, and watch a four-minute video projected large onto the wall before them. The video features a split screen, with a different story unfolding on each side. On the left-hand side, the video blends the life and death of two white women: Alice Harris Kester, an anti-racist preacher's wife active during the civil rights movement in the American South, and the British Queen Elizabeth II, who died in 2022. Excerpts of oral history interviews with Kester's husband Howard Kester and daughter Nancy Kester Neale are displayed in subtitles and interwoven with images of the procession and the coffin of Elizabeth II, and with multiple film footages evoking the subtitled words and the reported inability of Kester to keep her food down when eating at the same table as African Americans (Yancy 2008, 2017). On the right-hand side of the split screen, the video features images of white children playing in the snowy mountains of Switzerland. The soundtrack of the video combines a funeral score with a child's voice reading excerpts from the American writer James Baldwin's 1953 essay "Stranger in the Village", in which he reflects as a Black man

on the racial politics of America from the vantage point of his stay in the mountain village of Leukerbad, Switzerland.

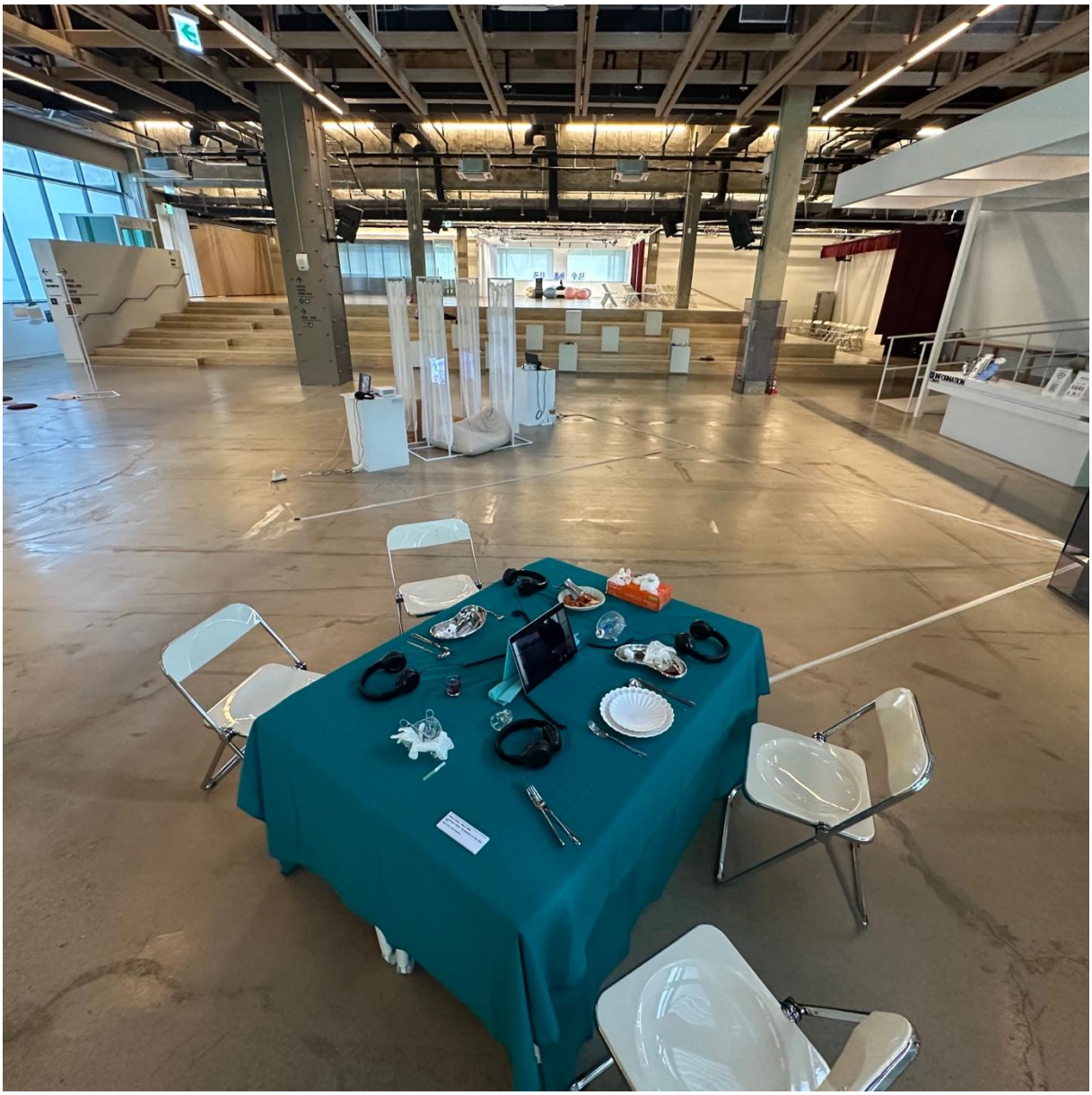
You Are Invited, *Gender, Work and Organization* journal annual conference, Stellenbosch University, South Africa, July 2023

You Are Invited, Critical Making & Social Justice exhibition, The Pratt Institute, New York, USA, June 2023

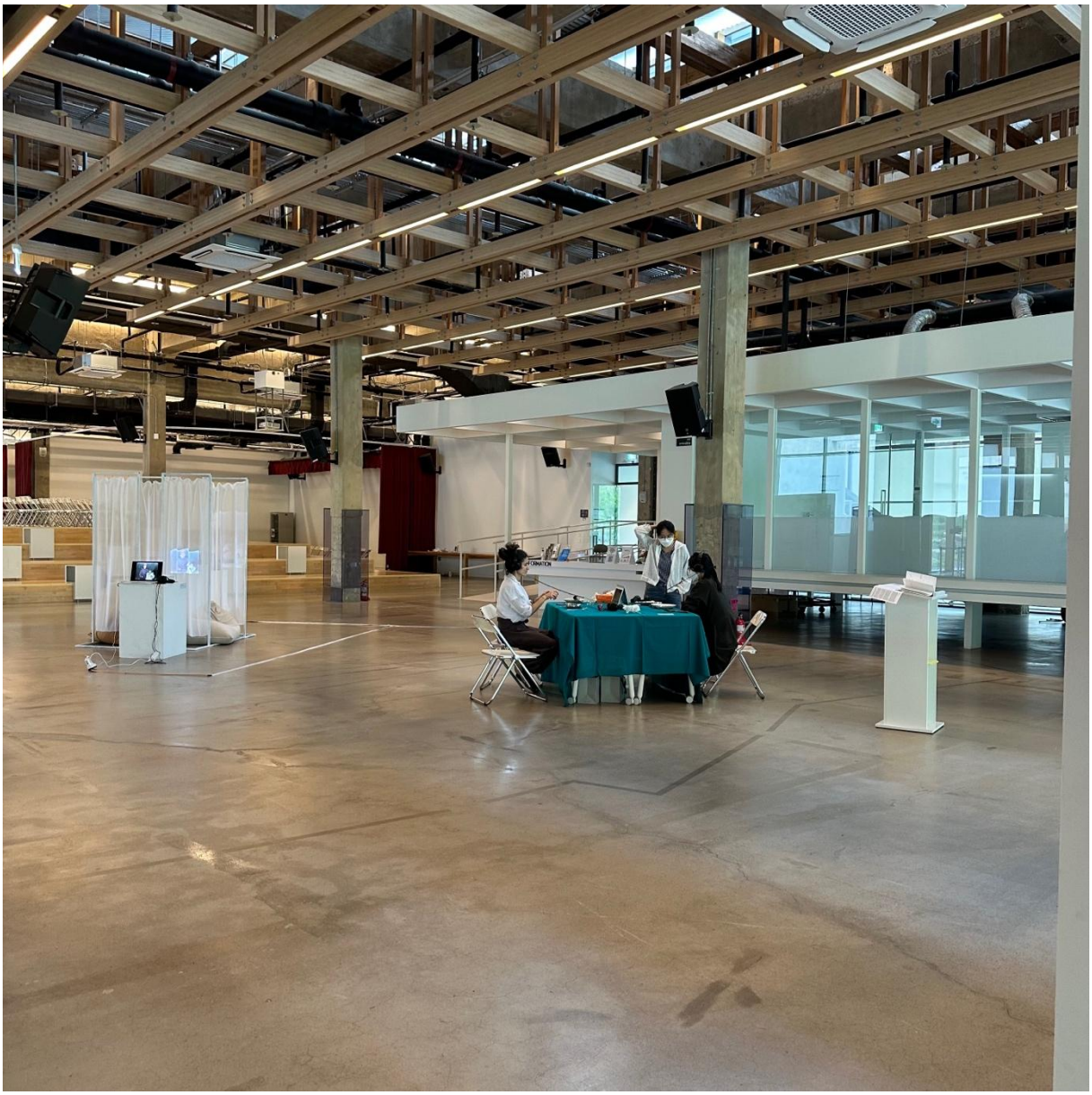
You Are Invited, International Visual Sociology Association annual conference, Xalapa, Mexico, June 2024

Disobedient Bodies: Disobedience in Five Acts is a synthesis of our artistic process and of the participant engagements with *You Are Invited* in the USA, South Africa and Mexico. The video in this piece is just over ten minutes. It is organized into the five acts of 'Cares', 'Investments', 'Interests', 'Expectations' and 'Stakes'. Staged as an installation, we invited participants once again to gather around a table to watch a video. This time we set the table ambiguously, with an operating sheet as a tablecloth and a mix of medical instruments, dining utensils (some from previous installations, some newly acquired locally in Suwon, Seoul) and local food. This video includes the full four-minute piece of *You Are Invited*, presented within the act of 'Investments'. The other acts present our working process and thinking along with some reflections from the participants. The final act 'Stakes' uses ultrasound footages and an AI voice narrating the medical report of a USA based immigrant woman's heart condition.

Disobedient Bodies: Disobedience in Five Acts, Absolute Disorder exhibition, Suwon, South Korea, June 2025



Disobedient Bodies: Disobedience in Five Acts, Absolute Disorder exhibition, Suwon, South Korea, June 2025



Disobedient Bodies: Disobedience in Five Acts, Absolute Disorder exhibition, Suwon, South Korea, June 2025

Coming from the point of view that race is a relational event produced through the gathering of material, affective and discursive practices, the artworks aim to explore the role of the human subject in the reproduction of a system of coloniality built on the violent production of race. They do so from a position that disrupts familiar binary narratives of racist intent and violence, individual blame and culpability through an engagement with the body as the site of the relational emergence of race. This engagement with the body is a means to disrupt the normative representational framing of race whilst recognizing the way that the history of coloniality "quite literally lives in our bodies, our cells, and the expression of our genes" (Menakem 2021: ix). As Arun Saldanha puts it, "race is a cultural difference with biology as its material" (2021: 33). Both artworks investigate bodily reproduction and resistance to racialized and gendered norms within cis

heteropatriarchal global colonial whiteness as lived institutional enactments and categorical identifications (Hunter 2010, 2015a, 2015b, 2021). The artworks consider the question of how intersecting global colonial power dynamics of race and gender can be affectively interrupted through the artistic process of creating and participating in the affective bodily intensity of discomfort and the practice of disobedience. To provoke an engagement with the participants' implication in the entangled relationship between the personal and the structural, the artistic interventions work with bodily knowing and conceptualizations of Whiteness as lived through institutionalized power, class, gender sexuality and White skin privilege, White repulsion, White anti-racism and empathy. The artworks also address the role of affective knowledge and relationality in moving us towards political solidarity and racial justice.

This attention to Whiteness recognizes the specific nature of our current global coloniality as White (Hunter and van der Westhuizen 2021a; Hunter 2021). Within this, Whiteness operates onto-epistemically as the systemic form of human ordering of life and bodies codifying those on its 'inside' through behaviors, attitudes and practices emergent through interaction with others in their bodies. Whiteness is not an ordering of supposedly pre-existing human difference. It *creates the idea of human difference,* the human as distinct, rational, a self-mastering and knowing being; a being whose mind has control over its body, and therefore the ability and right to control the bodies of others (in their own supposed interests) and the world in its entirety (DuBois 1920). As such this current global coloniality positions one and all hierarchically and differentially either in a particular relationality within Whiteness (as the standard humanness), as in the cis heteropatriarchal intersectional patterning of the (white) family of Man (McClintock 1995); or as with its excluded Others, outside of it (Wynter 2003). Whiteness is therefore not principally consciously thought out but practiced through the taking up of material and symbolic positions within an already racialized system of visuality (Seshadri-Crooks 2000; Yancy 2017; Mirzoeff 2023). This happens through the body. The "daily gestures, unspoken scripts, and comments, which gradually introduce a fear of black and brown bodies" are "not installed painlessly"; "they produce damage in flesh, thoughts, nervous system". "They have weight" (Bailey 2021: xvii; see also Liebert 2021).

This onto-epistemic starting point for Whiteness as affectively ordered material-symbolic system experienced in the body is important because the artworks we are discussing are not intended to be a call to white people specifically. The implication of our take on Whiteness is that *there are no such people to be called*. Instead, the works are an invitation for all installation participants, however they are positioned within the system of Whiteness, to explore their implication in its production via their participation in the artwork. We work with the understanding that there are fundamental differences to the experiences of differentially racialized people within this system of global coloniality. This differentialization works through the Manichean polarization of White and Black. This

polarization sets up a fundamental dependency relation between people who are racially coded as white and black in the systemic favor of those codified as white: powerful white doer, vulnerable and insufficient black done-to; and that the implication of this power dependency is the asymmetric distribution of material and symbolic inequality; and therefore ultimately the asymmetric distribution of (White) life and (Black) death. Whiteness depends on this fundamental Black/White dualism to produce its ontological mythology of the human subject. That is, a human subject that is an individual singular self-sufficient person, knowable, measurable, self-identically real, a locus for power, agency and the ability to own and control. A human subject which is fundamental to shoring up the project of European colonization (Moreton-Robinson 2015) and expressed and sustained in contemporary coloniality through the ongoing subjective "desire for whiteness" (sic) (Seshadri-Crooks 2000).

This means that everyone within the system is racialised to be predisposed to the desire for Whiteness. However, it is also this Black/White dualism that puts white people in the invidious position of being *either* violent aggressor *or* benevolent savior. It hides the dynamic interdependency of racialized positions where white people's aggression is what produces the grounds for their benevolence. The problem of coloniality is not therefore white people or even Whiteness per se, but the violent nature of the dualistic relationality through which racialized people are positioned; through which they are made and through which they relate. Addressing the nature and quality of this relationality is the key to disrupting Whiteness as an orientation to colonial imperial power. Interrogating this relationality means challenging the mythological singularity of subjectivity, agency, knowledge and power which is associated with being fully human, and which is codified aspirationally through Whiteness. It is in this way that the subjective desire for Whiteness is therefore linked to the desire to overcome violence through the assumption of subjective singularity and the potential for self-understanding as an anchoring for moral certainty – and following this, the ability to be accountable for oneself and therefore for others. This version of individual accountability becomes the basis for the assumption and attitude of White innocence – the ability of white people to be innocent.

Whiteness obscures human interdependence through the epistemological imposition of separation and related representational objectification. Our installation seeks to challenge the ordering supremacy of Whiteness through engaging affective embodied relationality which brings with it disruptive multiplicity and uncertainty in knowing. This relational approach means that we can be explicit about the fact that none of us are innocent in the production of race and that it is the taking up of material and symbolic positions in relationship with one another within an already racialized visual schema which (re)produces Whiteness as an orientation to power and agency. Disrupting

Whiteness can only happen in relational practice, ontologically, because representationally the epistemological rules are already established through coloniality.

From an approach privileging an understanding of ontological relationality, we can face into the stark reality of Whiteness as fundamentally dehumanising, violent and deathly, without succumbing to the insidious lies of the Black/White epistemic binary, such that there is no opportunity for solidarity across racialised positionings[4]. The aim is not to clean-up Whiteness for the benefit of White people. It is to end it, for the benefit of all, but in the knowledge that this end of Whiteness will not be without discomfort, loss and pain. These are losses that, if taken on board, will cause white people pain in the service of healing. Resmaa Menakem calls this sort of pain 'clean pain'. The pain you experience

> [w]hen you know, exactly, what you need to say or do; when you really, really don't want to say or do it; and when you do it anyway. It's also the pain you experience when you have no idea what to do; when you're scared or worried about what might happen; and when you step forward into the unknown anyway, with honesty and vulnerability. (Menakem 2020: 19)

This is distinct from 'dirty pain', which is the pain of:

> [a]voidance, blame, and denial. When people respond from their most wounded parts, become cruel or violent, or physically or emotionally run away, they experience dirty pain. They also create more of it for themselves and others. (Menakem 2020: 20)

Conversing through Whiteness

Creating and then writing as two similarly normatively positioned cis hetero white women speaking out of the global colonial Northwest requires special attention to issues of accountability and responsibility for the harms of living in a global coloniality which claims to benefit us.[5] This is because our own desires for Whiteness always risk

[4] This issue of solidarity across racialised positionings has always been vexed. Our approach to it is one of the key differences between our position and recently popularised academic strands of American-derived Afropessimism which also begin from the foundational nature of the Black/White binary, but from the starting point of Slavery in the United States. However, we agree with a range of Black and indigenous feminists (see Wekker 2021 for some of the range; see also Chapter 2 of Moreton-Robinson 2015) who have critiqued the conflation of this binary with a reductive assumption as to the impossibility of anti-racist solidarity across racialised difference. See also note 11.

[5] We are not suggesting that this normativity is essential or straightforward in terms of our positioning in power in terms of class, ethnicity and other experiences of global coloniality. Katalin is an ethnic white Hungarian with settled status granted to EU citizens residing in the UK after Brexit – on her shifting non/belonging of being always in and out of place in both the UK and Hungary see Halász 2024, 2025. For Shona's normatively complicatedly colonially produced mixed Irish, Scotts, Welsh postwar upwardly mobile inheritance see Hunter 2015b. But, in terms of the installation and our arts practice, as makers, and

reproducing the racialized contempt we are seeking to interrupt (see Hunter 2015b, 2021). This risk is heightened through our role as academics and makers. Against this risk, presenting our work conversationally enables us to directly address our role in the harm of global colonial Whiteness through our artmaking in a way which undercuts claims to white innocence and mastery which are the hallmark of conventional forms of academic writing. Consistent with our onto-epistemic position on Whiteness, the conversational format allows more dynamic, relationally explicit and transparent expression, which shows a grappling in and through Whiteness in collaborative action. Conversational representation provides greater transparency about the many invisible voices, connections, thinkers and ideas that make-up this artistic event of the installation, not in one direction, towards sameness, but in multiple, often contradictory ways, in tension. It therefore enables us to get nearer to representing how the installations happen in and through our 'being with Others', not in the abstract, but in practice, in dialogue – where this 'being with' is not romanticized through assumptions of sameness, reciprocity or do-gooding. This 'being with' is *in tension* and this tension is a product of bringing into proximity the multiple relations of power and vulnerability producing the artworks. In keeping with our artworks, we therefore use our conversation to highlight this tension. This is because we use this conversation to represent some of the usually smoothed over aspects of creative practice and to be explicit about the multiple challenges to Whiteness in our practice, rather than in theory. We use this conversation format to start from participants' challenges to our Whiteness as the makers of the piece. This challenge to our Whiteness from participants is one aspect of the disobedience that we refer to in our video essay. But we add a much stronger emphasis on the challenge to our White innocence through our conversation presented here.

In terms of our method for writing this piece, the conversation we represent here follows in the tradition of a wealth of decolonial feminist critical-race effort to represent differently through collaborative forms of analysis, feedback and writing to expose and/or shift the normative dynamics of power which (re)produce race and White supremacy (Siklodi et al. 2024). The text making up our conversation as presented here comes out of years of multiple conversations and reflections between us as makers, friends and colleagues, and crucially our more recent conversations with the many installation participants. This includes participants' writings in our visitors' book, recorded and unrecorded conversations at the installation sites and feedback generously offered in other ways like follow-up emails, instant messages and then also the breakfast conversations with friends, family and peers with whom we shared the films at the heart of the artworks. We include one of these installation participants in our conversation here as an interlocuter in our dialogue. We do this in the spirit of an 'imagined dialogue' first developed by Yasmin Gunaratnam in her research with service staff and users in English

our institutional positioning as academics, we have a significant amount of intersectionally White cultural and economic capital.

hospice settings (2001). Imagined dialogues disrupt the normative representational power of race by co-locating data from different interviews to highlight multiplicity of meaning which is made available through juxtaposing the views of those most often excluded from the conversation. For us, this speculative form of engagement with the conversational format presents possibilities for illuminating the tensions between representational and affective racialisation in the artworks.

The inclusion of the participant in imagined dialogue also enables us to represent the iterative nature of our making and to accentuate the agency and generosity of participants in this. Here we show one sort of analytic possibility afforded to us through the 'attentive listening' to installation participants with direct experience of racialised harm in the development of our analysis (Swan 2017). We practice such an attentiveness by including extended commentary taken directly from one of the interviews conducted by Shona at the installation sites. Our choice as to which participant to include is purposeful rather than representative[6] . We include 'Brown Bearded Man'[7] here because they risked offering an important challenge to our White innocence through highlighting the way our (White) making intersects with racialized domination. Our aim in engaging with this participant here is to exemplify how researchers and makers can listen attentively to participants "as if people matter" (Siklodie et al. 2024; Koomen 2021) to develop a criticality with care in making. Such a criticality with care involves actively resisting falling into the superficial narcissistic forms of self-criticality evident in saviourism or the consumptive dynamics of White empathy, whilst recognizing the fundamental impossibility of W/white innocence from within our current global coloniality, because of the dyadic nature of the racializing visual schema we are all in. By all, we mean makers, participants, interlocuters and (you as) readers. The distinction between White narcissism and the sort of white self-criticality we are talking about here is complex and varied. The work of George Yancy with his range of interlocuters across multiple volumes (Yancy 2012, 2015, 2017, 2023) provides a sense of the range and complexity of the ways in which white self-criticality is limited because of a resistance to remaining in the onto-epistemic crisis which occurs on the realisation of one's implication in a system of power and violence. Like Alison Bailey (2021), Rachel Jane Liebert (2021) and Resmaa Menakem (2020), Yancy's idea of un-suturing involves not only being open to being wounded or hurt and to incurring losses, "but it is also to cultivate the practice of remaining with the opened wound itself, of tarrying with the pain of the opening itself, the incision, as it were" (Yancy 2015: xvii). The complexity of this practice of un-suturing, where we seek to challenge the psychic and material

[6] It is important to be clear that in this instance we are not seeking to use these interviews for the purposes of extractive interpretation of participants' pre-existing meanings within texts to develop an analysis of the words and positions of the participants; to discover them (see Rutazibwa 2024; Minh-ha 1989; Tuhiwai-Smith 2021). We are engaging these people as experiencers and witnesses to the artworks. They are not giving us a view on a piece, they are telling us how they are produced through the piece.

[7] This is the way this interviewee chose to refer to themselves in response to the initial question posed to installation participants to position themselves and their experience of the installation.

serviceability of black people for the purposes of Whiteness, is the main thread in our conversation.

Attentive Harm to the Collective Wound

Shona: I have interviewed participants at three locations, in NYC, Mexico and Korea.[8] One of the most often commented-on aspects in both installations across locations is the impactful nature of the young child's narration of excerpts from James Baldwin's "Stranger in the Village" which accompanies image and audio footage of children playing in the snow. "Stranger in the Village" was written during Baldwin's stay in the small Swiss village of Leukerbad. It presents the reader with an evocative reflection on his experiences of racism there and in America. The footage of children at play in the snow is evocative of the Swiss Alps, inspired by the artwork *Children's Game #33* filmed in Engelberg, Switzerland by the Belgian artist Francis Alÿs.[9]

You Are Invited, double-screen video, 4 mins

As two cis hetero white women makers, the logic for us was to center a powerful black intellectual figure levying a critique of Whiteness from a Black perspective. As I remember

[8] The total number of interviews to date is 18. They were all undertaken at the installation sites, with one exception. 16 involved individual participants. 2 involved pairs of participants. They were all undertaken in English, except for one in Xalapa, conducted in Spanish and English. All were audio recorded, and ethical information was outlined to participants prior to interview (Leeds Beckett ethics application reference 11436, Brunel University ethics application reference 37415-LR-Jun/2022-40036-1).
[9] Part of the *Children's Games* series which can be found at https://francisalys.com/category/childrens-games/.

it, there were lots of things that drew us to using Baldwin's work and "Stranger in the Village" in particular. Baldwin was very much in my mind because I had been reconnecting with his work for my MA teaching on Whiteness as part of the broader project of reorienting the critical study of Whiteness through Black radical and decolonial perspectives (Boucher and Matias 2021; Hunter et al. 2010; Hunter and van der Westhuizen 2021b; Matias 2022; Nayak 2007). This involves a reorienting away from describing racism to highlighting and interrogating the violent limits of the liberal humanist system of global coloniality from the point of view of those harmed by racism. The aim is to expose the material, symbolic and affective mechanisms institutionalizing white innocence (Wekker 2016). This essay is one of the many associated with the resurgent popular interest in Baldwin and his work in the context of the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement.[10] Like many others we were drawn to the importance of Baldwin as a Black intellectual who situates the intimate experience of racist dispossession as fundamental to the functioning of our contemporary global coloniality along a Black/White binary – but from a position which resists essentialising narratives about the impossibility of anti-racist solidarity across racialised difference. Baldwin's work and this essay in particular turns on the role of intimacies and bodily proximities as mechanisms of mutual intersecting dehumanisation – as a collective form of harm, a collective wound – which diminishes all, including those racialised as white. However, in line with our own feminist abolitionist identified point of view, it does so from the point of view of Black empowerment[11].

[10] Examples of this popular resurgence includes Teju Cole's (2014) "Black Body: Rereading Jame's Baldwin's 'Stranger in the Village'", Ta-Nehisi Coates' (2017), *Between the World and Me*, Raoul Peck's (2014) film *I am Not Your Negro*. The 2015 establishment of the *James Baldwin Review* (see Joyce et al. 2015) is evidence of the surge in academic interest.

[11] The resurgence in academic interest in Baldwin can be read as part of the rise of Black Studies in the academy. As we note earlier (see note 4) Afropessimism is an important strand in this recent development. Because of our similar insistence on the foundational nature of the Black/White binary to our contemporary global coloniality it is worth noting the distinction in our position and some of the newer iterations of this important strand of thinking. In a highly critical review of recent developments in Afropessimism Gloria Wekker (2021) lambasts the tendency of some of the key proponents (see Wilderson 2008; also, Sexton 2008) to conflate the great variety of thinking in Black Studies and to ignore the importance of rich internationalist traditions of Black feminist thought within this conflation. Her critique turns on the essentialist tendencies in Afropessimism as rooted in "its […] unshakable and irreconcilable division of the world" (2021: 91) which leaves no room for building solidarity across Black/White or within Blackness. Whilst the resurgence in interest in Baldwin can be read in terms of the rise in Black Studies, he is not an uncontroversial figure in this context, or historically in the context of Black radical political traditions, having been critiqued for both overplaying and underplaying issues of separatism, essentialism and the possibility of cross-racial solidarity. Some of this ambivalence could be read into the comments of our participant interlocuter 'Brown Bearded Man'. But we agree with Menand (2025) whose view is that Baldwin did not believe in reform and that nothing less than a 'total social reckoning', a revolution of the collective mind and the nation, is necessary to addressing racism. See also Drabinski in Norman 2015. Our use of Baldwin is in the spirit of engagement with radical anti-essentialist Black anti-racist feminist traditions such as that exemplified through Wekker's critique and the others we draw on here, such as Moreton-Robinson 2015; McKittrick 2021; Tuhiwai-Smith 1999; Wekker 2016; Wynter 2003. We do not seek to minimise the difficulties, as our analysis shows there are plenty, but to work them.

For Jesmyn Ward, "Baldwin was so brutally honest. His prose frank and elegant in turn" (2016: 7). Baldwin "invokes a painful irony about white self-perception and white subjective relationality to historicity and to history. In the racist contexts that Baldwin lives in, whites can imagine themselves as human origin and as neutral subjects of history, the present and futurity, while they imagine black people as a-historical, specific, caught in the past and always behind" (Pinto et al. 2020: 183). For Noémi Michel, "Baldwin leads us to understand how racialization and self-exoneration go hand-in-hand" (in Pinto et al. 2020: 188). On the essay "Stranger in the Village" specifically, Teju Cole captures Baldwin's capacity for conveying racism's deep contradictions and absurdities reflecting on Switzerland and America in bemusement and sorrow respectively: "Baldwin is alert to the absurdity of being a writer from New York who is considered in some way inferior by Swiss villagers, many of whom have never travelled" (Cole 2014). In his analysis of race in America, Baldwin "is not at all bemused. He is angry and prophetic, writing with a hard clarity and carried along by a precipitous eloquence" (Cole 2014). It is this radically realist humanist complexity, the simultaneous absurdity and mendacity of symbolic and material violence that we were interested in capturing in our use of Baldwin. Other aspects we were concerned to capture include cultural tropes around black bodies and a direct critique of White innocence and White empathy, with the final words of this essay conveying what we understand to be an important statement of onto-epistemic resistance to Whiteness. The video of *You Are Invited* ends at this point capturing our abolitionist intent in making the piece: "This world is white no longer, and it will never be white again" (Baldwin 1985: 101).

In our conversations about the making, I remember us being very deliberate about having a strong contrast to the fast-cut, busy and sometimes visually disgusting action in the story of the Queen and Kester, with all the vomiting and spiders, and something which was aesthetically pleasing as well as more physically restful for those experiencing the installation. This difference in pace and the anchoring from Baldwin's narrative was important to developing a space for participants' attentiveness in the context where their discomfort has been activated. Conceptually this narrative is used to produce a sustained critique of White innocence (Wekker 2016), substantively and stylistically by the child's voice. I think we achieved this, and almost all the participants I interviewed across each installation site commented on this aspect. They commented on the double-edged poignancy of being a child brought up in White supremacy and of Baldwin's experience of racism as a black person being reviled, consumed and rejected and the explicitness and strong impact of the abolitionist message [12]. However, at the same time I think there were aspects of our attention which were being framed through our Whiteness in the way we engage Baldwin's narrative as a mechanism to critique White innocence. I have referred

[12] Lwando Scott's paper at the panel discussion on the installation at the 2023 *Gender, Work & Organization* conference in Stellenbosch, South Africa also focused on the role of the figure of the child in the reproduction of White innocence and the importance of childhood to White futurity.

to this elsewhere as having my "whiteness on the front foot" (Hunter 2015b: 49). Similarly, here I think our investments in Whiteness frame our critical intentionality such that it becomes very difficult to be Otherwise relationally through participating in the installation. This was brought home to me quite forcefully by 'Brown Bearded Man', one of the participants in our first manifestation of the installation in New York at The Pratt Institute. At this point, 'Brown Bearded Man', I want to bring you into our conversation to share your experience of the installation.

Brown Bearded Man[13]: Sure, yeah. I sometimes describe myself as a brown bearded man. Um, an immigrant on stolen land in the Northeastern USA [I am also one of your fellow artist makers exhibiting here at the Pratt]. Um, so, from that point of view: I walked in and there was this kind of set, dinner table, um, which reminded me a little bit of very, um, I don't know, like Downton Abbey[14] aesthetics or like this very sort of posh upper-class kind of set-up, um, with like multiple forks and knives. I generally feel very out of place in these places. And so, a lot of the talking, the James Baldwin audio felt quite relevant. I was like, yeah, I feel out of place because this is not like designed for me. Um, and usually in these situations, the way I hold my knife or fork, there's like proper ways to do it. I usually never know the proper ways. At this point, I'm like, there was a time maybe in my teenage years or earlier when I was very conscious of this fact of the proper way to do things and like not wanting to mess it up because it would be embarrassing or it would be, um, I would be told off or something like that. But also, because I come from India with its couple of hundred years of British colonialism and now through pop culture and neocolonialism of the proper way to do things. I have never liked any of it. And not wanting to adhere to those kinds of proper ways of doing things because they're also rooted in a lot of punitive ways of punishing for not doing things the right way. So, I don't know. I thought I felt like a little out of place sitting there. But right now, I also feel a lot more confident in my ways of being and moving through the world. After understanding all the legacies of colonialism and the violence with which the rules, the proper rules are imposed. And so, yeah, I thought, actually, the juxtaposition of the audio felt very relevant because he also felt very out of place when he's talking about it. Um, I guess I was a little bit confused about who was reading the text. Was it a little child? Um, it sounded like a child that was reading. Um, yeah. Yeah, that was some of my initial impressions.

Shona: Thank you. So, that was some of what you were feeling. Did you *think* about it differently?

[13] This conversation between Brown Bearded Man and Shona is a composite, cut for meaning; where information from later or earlier parts of the discussion is included here to enhance the reader's understanding of context, this is added in square brackets.

[14] A globally franchised popular and highly commercially successful British historical drama set between 1912 and 1926 during the height of nineteenth century Imperialism which has been widely criticised for its "plastic social history" nostalgia as "misleading whitewash" (Toynbee 2014).

Brown Bearded Man: Um, I think my bodily feeling was one of a mixture of discomfort and being in there, the aesthetics of the space triggered like a bodily response of I don't belong here. But at the same time, in thinking about it, I'm at a conference and it's an art installation. So, in that sense, I do belong here. It was that kind of play between, uh, I don't belong here, and I do belong here, a bodily visceral reaction of I don't belong here, and I'm going to mess something up, and a little bit of that kind of, uh, what am I allowed to do or not allowed to do? But then also the kind of freedom that art provides of, yeah, I'm actually allowed to do anything. And it was also good to see my colleague eating the cherries and I was like, oh yeah, I can also eat the cherry.

Shona: And so, did you eat?

Brown Bearded Man: I did, yeah. I don't particularly like cherries, but I thought it was a little bit of a transgressive act. I don't think it was transgressive in an art sense. But it was transgressive in a propriety sense of it. Eating with your hands also.

Shona: Yeah. Cool. So; the other question is, do you want to ask me anything about the artwork? To answer your first question about the child, the child is a white child, it's a girl, young girl. Do you want to ask more about that?

Brown Bearded Man: Yeah, I guess, uh, another related question, I guess is, why this text?

Shona: Yea, so we used Baldwin because he provides a Black man's critique of Whiteness. His critical gaze, I guess. One of the things we were interested in doing was disrupting the logic of Whiteness through using images that project Whiteness, but through the critical commentary, the intellectual critical commentary of a Black man. Shifting the power, creating contradiction and juxtaposition. So, there was stuff there around, um, how we engage in Whiteness, um, as white people, as people who are racialized as white and who kind of recognize that and so identify with that, not in a positive sense, but, thinking about, how do we provoke and create change? And how do we think about the relationality of Whiteness as a colonial formation, rather than only a lived identification? And how do we get into the power critique of that when some of what we're doing [in the film] is disrupting, um, the idea that Whiteness is about, um, the visuals, the [outer] body, so about the skin. So, disrupting the idea that racialization is about skin and attempting a re-historicizing in terms of the relations of coloniality and racial capitalism. A little bit later we brought in George Yancy's work which led us to further investigating his references to the historic figure of Alice Kester. So, I guess the, the Baldwin and the Yancy, um, critiques were a starting point for, um, doing something that appeared to be one thing about Whiteness, but was actually driven by the critique of somebody who was positioned marginally in relation to Whiteness as a form of domination.

Brown Bearded Man: Yeah. I mean, this is something I noticed in the installation as well, is that even in trying to, I guess, interrogate or critique Whiteness. It's still very much

centering Whiteness. Um, which is just the same old story in a lot of ways. Uh, like, even in the art world, it's usually people who can speak in English, and who are racially coded as White, who are able to get the grants, and have the resources, and even the sort of cultural capital and connections and confidence to posit themselves as artists or, um, yeah. So, it just felt like there is a continuation of that.

Shona: A repetition rather than a resistance to that?

Brown Bearded Man: Yeah; and also, I guess like having a white child in a sense steal Baldwin's voice. It, uh, makes me uncomfortable. Watching, like, the kids playing in the snow. Um, yeah, I wrote in the feedback book that I felt a little bit bitter about it. I think bitterness was a feeling. Because there was also, like, the Queen video, I think. Like, when the Queen died. There's just like a lot of centering of Whiteness with this, even like, I guess, the two texts that you mentioned are depictions of Whiteness. And it's good, I think, in some sense that there is this sort of need for reflection, or self-reflection for artists to kind of think about what it means. But then, this kind of work is also funded and researched by English institutions with a lot of legacies. And that money comes from somewhere and it's continuing to go towards similar centering. Um, like, I don't know if Baldwin's estate, for example, is seeing any of this. So how might it be done differently? […] Um. Yeah. And I guess like some of this feedback, I, I thought I should sort of give the feedback. And this is our first time making some kind of art and I think feedback is a crucial part. I'm really glad you're asking people for it also. The critique of institutions; for example, Pratt is this, elite institution. Um, but what I experienced so far with them, at least in like installing the show has not been great. Um, maybe because we don't know how to talk with them as, uh, sort of outsiders we feel kind of alienated and don't know what we're allowed to ask for. And what we do ask for it seems they're not necessarily able to give us. But generally, I think there's, the institution of Whiteness, the institution of coloniality, and both these intersect in violence. And, um, even in inviting people to go and sit in there. For me, it was like, yeah, the feeling of not feeling accepted or for people staring at you and feeling like some kind of object of intrigue, it is a commonplace experience.

Shona: That you don't need, basically.

Brown Bearded Man: Yeah. It's kind of like, uh, how do you say it? I think the institutional mixes of this, like with the Queen's funeral, with the voice of a white child, being in the U.S. and within an elite academic institution with a lot of security apparatuses surrounding it, like guards to swipe in everywhere, one-way gates to go out, the infrastructure, institutional infrastructure of exclusion. I felt like, yeah, this is kind of a combination of that. And, um, I've like watched two Baldwin documentaries, I think. And I've read some of his work and it's like good critiques. He's an amazing writer. But at this point I'm just exhausted talking about Whiteness.

Shona: Um, so. In your view, would there be any value of framing this for white people? People who identify as white?

Brown Bearded Man: I was thinking that already of maybe being a little more mindful of who you shepherded into the space. But obviously if other people want to go in, they should be able to go in. Yeah, so also the kind of audience that you want. But that will also bias things differently. Just a continuation of White perspectives. And honestly, I feel like the self-flagellation hurts more than it helps in my experience. Of the people that I've interacted with the self-flagellation part of it is quite toxic of the guilt and the shame sometimes they see as the work. And it stops there. It's kind of a paralyzing place.[15]

Shona: Yes. Thanks so much for your critical engagement and your commitment and generosity in coming back to speak to me and to share your experiences when they are so exhausting and full of hurt. Immediately my White fantasy bubble is burst open. What I mean by this is that for me the first thing I am faced with as I am listening to you is the personal impact *for you* as a 'brown bearded man' of what Palacios and Sheehi (2020) call the "curative relation of mastery and servitude that is inextricably contained with and by the ontology of whiteness [sic]". This is a relation whereby an aesthetics of hailing and identification reaffirms the Manichean affective structure of White innocence. For me you are pointing out the obvious problem of our artmaking activating discomfort in the context of a racialized system for those already disproportionately affected by this harm. Where your experience of participating in 'the same old story' meets my aspiration to produce something Otherwise. In this instant where I am being engaged by you, for me the artwork is a failure because of its role in reproducing this 'same old' harm for you. In this instant our concern to show Whiteness as systemic violence is clearly a failure to imagine from your point of view as someone grappling through the impact of that violence every day to do your artistic work. What I imagine as an opportunity for revelling against Whiteness implies a basic feeling of safety which I have, but you don't in this context.

I remember now how I felt 'the weight of my whiteness' (Bailey 2021) very early in our conversation at the Pratt Institute. Dismayed at my idiocy and full of sorrow for my part in creating that space for the reproduction of that 'same old' harm for you. White aggression as the grounds for White redemption (see Hunter 2021)[16]. It would be easy to stay there. But what I want to do is to really listen to and unpack what you mean by this 'same old story' so it can be used as an opportunity for learning and reflecting on artmaking practice. Whilst what you feedback to us here can be understood as a comment on a White narcissism (and there is clearly a heavy dose of that, always present for people

[15] This is the end of the interview extract.

[16] This use of self-citation emphasises precisely the way in which Whiteness ambushes, regardless of critical intentionality, longevity and depth of public and private grappling. Writing and researching Whiteness are no inoculation here, in fact they can hinder as a form of problematic cleaning up Whiteness (see Ahmed 2004; Hunter and van der Westhuizen 2021a).

racialised as White) what you say also helps us to think about the importance of the proliferation of Blackness as a methodology against Whiteness. If we think about what we were attempting to do with the installation and the film especially, we were attempting to link up institutions, the monarchy, civil rights, medicine, the family, the church, the state migration apparatus with White violence. But this was always from the inside. By which I mean from the interest of White people.

There is a clear epistemological divide between us. My hope for the practice of the gathering and the acceptance of the invitation was to enable a disruptive relation to the White space of the table and for a gathering that works against Whiteness; for a coming together to revel or maybe mourn in the death of Whiteness. There is some of this in what you are saying about the transgression of eating. Other participants, black, brown and white, had fun with this, especially in the Mexico installation where they described eating and talking over the film. But the overriding sense for you was a reminder of intimidation, punishment and the experience of objectification as 'some kind of object of intrigue'. For us, Baldwin provides a strong, Black-led critique of Whiteness. However, you experience the way we use this artistically, by having a child reading Baldwin's words, as consumption and theft. There is evidence of our basic failure for us to step outside of the victim/oppressor binary in the way you experience the installation and the way that is observable in the way that we framed it. This recognition of the failure to disrupt the curative relation of mastery and servitude is part of what is at the heart of the production of the film essay *Disobedient Bodies: Disobedience in Five Acts*, and which is communicated directly in act four, 'Expectations'.

Our use of Baldwin's work is in part about taking care not to use 'controlling images' (Hill Collins 1990), what you have talked about, Katalin, as 'black bodies under pressure', in our piece. However, for me our caution not to use such images in the film privileges the representational dynamics of race which occlude the many ways that racialised violences are reproduced. Our attention to this also fails to see the continuity in the way that violence is used as academic currency (and, as we are talking here, artistic currency) because "oppression is the jumping off point for how we attend to black life. Even when we are theorizing resistance, violence is often the starting point. It is as though blackness can only ever be a site of violation" (McKittrick 2021: 8). So, what I am saying is that we don't need to visualize racial violence directly to activate the racialized visual schema which positions us all through the victim/oppressor binary and which continues to position black people at the mercy of those who are white. In fact, the point is that we do not need to represent violence in order to reproduce it. The thing that makes me really sad, but that I guess also spurs me on in doing this work of grappling through Whiteness, is the way that this experience of failure resonates with the so many other times I have failed in resisting the White centering of this binary dynamic, and the so many times I am

reminded of the harmfulness of this way of relating through Whiteness. In teaching, in research, as a family member and a friend and acquaintance.

I want to turn to you now, Katalin: Can you tell us more about this aspect of our work from your point of view?

Act four 'Expectations', still from *Disobedient Bodies: Disobedience in Five Acts*, video, 10 minutes 25 seconds

Katalin: The question of consumption and the ethics of working with and through the various articulations of Black pain – be it in published written words or depicted in art works – have been an ongoing question in my work. Reflecting on these questions with our participants reminded me of the significant backlashes that several white artists faced for their depiction of black subjects; they provoked heated debates about representation and the right to portray black suffering or identity. Think of the controversy surrounding Brett Murray's painting *The Spear*, which depicts South African President Jacob Zuma in a provocative manner, which generated a fierce debate not only for its political critique but also for the artist's racial identity and his use of black subjects or material in his work. The artwork was criticized for 'dehumanising' black people and perpetuating racialised tropes, with concerns raised over the permission of a white artist to engage with black bodies and narratives in this manner.[17] This mirrors criticisms of other artworks,

[17] See https://www.sundaystandard.info/a-presidentocos-genitals-and-a-spear-that-divided-a-nation/, https://www.synapses.co.za/zumas-spear-egalitarian-antiracism/,

including Nola Hatterman's work, a Dutch painter whose career was devoted to painting black subjects in Suriname.[18] Hatterman's work was both celebrated for resisting exoticization and critiqued for her position of power as a white artist in a formerly colonized nation. Her legacy continues to provoke discussion, especially around her role in interpreting Surinamese identity and training new generations of artists. Or the Portuguese artist Vasco Araújo, who was criticized for the exhibition of photographs and sculptures engaging with colonial imagery, especially regarding the racialised display and exoticization of black bodies in European museums and galleries. His work has provoked responses for centering colonial histories from a White perspective, sometimes overshadowing Black voices.[19]

When I was writing up my PhD (which was an arts-based intervention into the production of anti-racist white womanhood), a major controversy erupted at the 2017 Whitney Biennale in New York. The debate centred on Dana Schutz's *Open Casket* (2016)[20], a painting of Emmett Till, the black teenager lynched in Mississippi in 1955[21]. Based on funeral photographs published by Till's mother, Mamie Till-Mobley, to "let the world see what I have seen" (Berger 2017)[22], Schutz's work sparked protests. "The subject matter is not Schutz's", wrote Hannah Black, a Black identified British born artist, in an open letter to the curators which was signed by another thirty artists, calling not only for the removal of the painting, but for its destruction (in Petty 2017). For Hannah Black and her supporters, Schutz's piece epitomized racial insensitivity and profit-driven exploitation of Black pain. Schutz explained she painted Till in response to police killings of unarmed black men in 2016 and the rise of Black Lives Matter, aligning the work with

https://idebate.net/this-house-believes-that-the-spear-should-have-remained-on-public-display~b1176/, https://www.academia.edu/7735590/The_Case_of_the_Spear.

[18] See https://elephant.art/gaze-white-women-artists-black-subjects-alice-neel-suriname-nola-hatterman-charlotte-jansen-12032020/.

[19] See https://mediadiversified.org/2016/11/20/white-skin-black-masks-on-the-decolonial-desire-of-vasco-araujo/.

[20] Dana Schutz (American, b. 1976) is an important contemporary painter. Her work frequently depicts figures participating in violent or creative activities, or in impossible or contradictory situations. Some of her paintings involve elaborate narratives, such as a race of beings that eat themselves (self-eaters), or a figure named Frank who is the last man on earth. "I'm never interested in the painting being a mirror to culture", Schutz explains. "I think that's really boring. What I'm interested in is painting as an affective space. The place where the hierarchies of the world can be rearranged within the space of a painting." Available at: http://www.artnet.com/artists/dana-schutz/biography.

[21] Art historian Maurice Berger lists the events that led to the murder of Emmett Till in August 1955 in Mississippi: "The teenager, from Chicago, was said to have either flirted with or whistled at a white woman in a store. Three days later, the woman's husband and his half-brother abducted him in the middle of the night. They brutally beat him, shot him in the head, and shoved his body in the Tallahatchie River. The killers' trial was a sham. An all-white, male jury acquitted both men of kidnapping and murder. In 2007, the woman in the centre of the case, Carolyn Bryant Donham, recanted her original testimony in an interview with the historian Timothy Tyson, admitting that Mr. Till never made advances toward her" (2017).

[22] "No mainstream magazine or newspaper would publish the photograph, deeming its graphic imagery inappropriate", claims Maurice Berger (2017). The photographs were published in Black magazines: in the *Jet*, *The American Negro: A Magazine of Protest*, and *The Chicago Defender*. At the time, the publication of the photographs incited many African American men and women – the 'Emmett Till Generation' of Black activists – to catalyse the civil rights movement.

the Biennale's broader engagement with racial violence. In her essay about the "multicultural melodrama" around the Schutz's painting, artist Coco Fusco[23] argues that the fact that Schutz was inclined to paint Emmett Till's open casket shows the success of the Black Lives Matter movement. Fusco asserts that, "though six decades apart, the circulation of images from these tragedies serves the same function – and sadly signals how little American society and race relations have changed" (2017). In addition to Hannah Black missing out on anti-racist art produced by white artists, Fusco also heavily criticizes the "totalizing manner" in which she treats artists and audiences along racial lines in her open letter and her presuming "an ability to speak for all black people" (2017).

What I believe these discussions are missing is the Whiteness of the art world, its institutions and decision-making processes. Whiteness, as a systematic exclusionary force, determines who is granted space and visibility to exhibit work – exactly as you point out, Brown Bearded Man. Schutz, along with other white artists, have been granted both, whilst black artists who have been raising similar issues for some time continue to be side-lined, ignored or even erased. A UK example of this side-lining of black artists is the fact that since its inception in 1987, Lubaina Himid is the first black woman artist to be awarded the Turner Prize in 2017.

As Claudia Rankine explains, the reception of an artwork should not hinge on the race of the artist, but rather on their "positioning in relation to the material" (in Sayej 2017). She emphasizes that anyone embedded within a culture can engage with it artistically, but how that engagement is perceived depends on the artist's relationship to the subject matter. In this context, Rankine critiques the lack of accountability in White representations of Black suffering, arguing that until white Americans confront their own complicity in that suffering and reflect it honestly in representation, the cycle of harm will persist. This is exemplified by the controversy surrounding Dana Schutz's painting, which, Rankine notes, opened a much-needed conversation about the cultural vacuum around addressing black pain. In our video works, we were deliberate in avoiding depictions of black bodies under pressure, instead rendering white bodies – through images of vomiting and distress – to critique the consumption of Black suffering and expose the performative nature of White empathy. The imagery we used – ranging from the visceral violence of the throwing-up white body to colonial spectacles surrounding the death of Elizabeth II and Charles and Camilla celebrating the British Empire – intentionally displaces the focus of the critique on the accountability for Black pain and on the suffering of the collective harm of Whiteness as a relation of violence we are all always already

[23] Coco Fusco is a Cuban American interdisciplinary artist writer and curator based in New York whose work has been widely exhibited and published internationally. She is a recipient of many awards nationally and internationally including most recently a 2023 Free Speech Defender Award from the National Coalition Against Censorship, a 2021 American Academy of Arts and Letters Art Award, a 2021 Latinx Artist Fellowship, a 2021 Anonymous Was a Woman award. See for more information https://www.cocofusco.com/.

entangled in. I found it very troubling that many self-identified white participants questioned the absence of black bodies in our videos, which I understood as a way of placing themselves out of this relation.

Shona: For me, this common debate you are outlining for us functions on an epistemological logic that we are attempting to work outside of. Following a decolonial line, what we are seeking to do is to destabilize the ontological logic of individual ownership which underpins the narrative representational mode of race which enables this White distancing you are talking about here, Katalin. We are also seeking to disrupt the way this White distancing is sustained through the dynamics of White looking by engaging the body in practice. We do this through facilitating a gathering around a different sort of spectacle to watch: white bodies under pressure. By spectacularising Whiteness under pressure we are seeking to create a different way into gathering around the spectacle of race than is usually enabled in White spaces where black bodies are under pressure. We are attempting to come from an entirely different ontological position. This alternative ontological position recognises the power of relationality in practice, in the sense of putting bodies together in a challenge to the usual distancing through the Black/White binary. What is questioned in this debate you are outlining is the issue of which bodies under pressure, under what circumstances, who should act and who should account. However, posed in these ways, the debate turns on a White way of looking rooted in the idea that the visual schema is representative of reality, rather than (re)productive of reality beyond the individual body. From our perspective, the issue is not one of missing out or not missing out a point of view; it is not an issue of inclusion and ownership of a collective narrative. What is at stake is the issue of focus and prioritization in the first place and following on from this the assumptions about self-possession which underpin the assumed ability and right to prioritize in the first place. From this perspective, another way to think about the exclusion of visual images of black bodies in our piece is in terms of the exclusion of depictions of Black agency from the audiovisual material. Here, I don't mean Black agency for Whiteness in the sense of depicting active resistance to the master/slave dynamic demanded in Whiteness, but Black agency *for its own sake* outside of Whiteness. Methodologically speaking, this is the epistemic Blackness that is required for decolonizing. It is not an epistemological logic which is confined to people racialised as black or brown, but it is a mode of thinking and being that is driven through positioning and identity but positioning in relation to the colonial "we" not in an essentialising identarian sense (Rutazibwa 2024). Clearly, those racialised as White in our current coloniality are closer to that colonial "we". For me, this shift in epistemological logic is the biggest issue in decolonising which is so often missed by white people, and which implies a particular set of in-practice challenges for people racialised as white which cannot be overcome through attention to their own thoughts and intentions. And I think this is how I feel we remain within our Whiteness in the making.

This last point about Black agency for its own sake is something that working in South Africa as a visiting scholar at the Centre for Visual Identities in Art and Design (VIAD) at the University of Johannesburg[24] taught me in a very practical way. The concerns and priorities of Whiteness are just not of interest or priority within that South African context. By this I don't mean that the afterlives of colonisation and the profound inequalities of Whiteness are not of a concern in that space. Nor that there is no critique of Whiteness. Some of the most innovative and vital theorising on Whiteness has emanated from the South African context. The range of work in the *Routledge Handbook of Critical Studies in Whiteness* that I recently edited with Christi van der Westhuizen gives some sense of the range and scope of this work, as well as work from across the global South. However, this body of Southern work and your comments, Brown Bearded Man (as someone coming from the global Southern context to cut into the global Northern centric nature of this debate we are having here and of the works engaged through our installation), remind us that there are other ways to do together to amplify and redistribute resources which are not imaginable through the White frame. Disputing Whiteness feels urgent to people racialized as White, where the recognition of their own dehumanisation or their role in the dehumanisation of others comes into play. This is in one sense as it should be. However, this dismantling of Whiteness does not have the same urgency for people who are racialised as black and brown. Indeed, it is a distraction from the problem at hand, which is the promotion and proliferation of life, through the promotion of Black life. I think this is what you are asking us to think more carefully about, Brown Bearded colleague. What is needed to decolonise is the proliferation of Blackness and black being not as an exclusionary mechanism, but as a way of focusing our attention on the issue of life and death *in general* (see again Rutazibwa 2023). This is what I take Tuck and Wang (2012) to mean when they say that decolonisation is not a metaphor and must not be deferred. We cannot defer decolonising action until Whiteness is defeated, so to speak. The aim must be to proliferate Blackness *as the method of dissipating Whiteness*. So, I am wondering how we could have juxtaposed images and themes differently in our installation to have brought in black bodies in joyful and disinterested being and how this would have exposed something important about the interconnectedness of White violence/vulnerability and the power of Black disinterest which might have produced an Otherwise.

For you, Katalin, then how does artistic practice take us somewhere Otherwise and how is it precisely for you that our artwork responds to and enables this?

Katalin: Artistic practice takes us somewhere Otherwise through the collective act of what Lola Olufemi calls an "experiment in imagining Otherwise" (2021): a shared insistence that even in failure, the wound and the violence cannot be the whole story. Over

[24] See https://viad.co.za/ for more about VIAD. Shona held visiting positions at VIAD as Research Associate December 2014-February 2016 and then as Visiting Associate Professor February 2015-February 2018.

the past three years, our sustained process of making, sharing, and reflecting has revealed deeper layers of intensity, not just in our thinking but in our bodies, producing a collective condition of "being with" that both sustains and is sustained by the artworks. As makers and respondents, we remain present with the weight of systematically oppressive Whiteness – its violence and its persisting wound – without retreating from responsibility, accountability, and discomfort. To go somewhere Otherwise cannot mean an escape beyond Whiteness (indeed, as you are suggesting, Shona, and you are telling us, Brown Bearded Man, it may be impossible). For me, it means carving out a refusal of the given by insisting on holding open the imagining of a world freed of violence, an imagining born from the tension of uncovering new potentialities amid fracture. If the artworks carry a promise, it is in cultivating what George Yancy names "the practice of remaining with the opened wound itself" (2015: xvii): sustaining a presence with the incision, the pain, and also the openings it makes possible. This practice shapes how we configured each element – the selected film footages, the subtitled words of the Kesters', the symbolism of the spider, the funeral soundtrack and the AI voice, Baldwin's essay, the ultrasound footages of the migrant woman's opened heart, Elizabeth II's casket – the layering of voices, images, and sounds. By placing these fragments into physical and affective proximity, we sought to generate spaces where participants might lose their bearings in the body, undergo disruption, and experience vulnerability at a visceral level. In such openings – discomfort, tension, suspension – there emerges the potential for relating Otherwise. For me, then, the Otherwise cannot remain in discourse or representation alone. It must be lived in the body. As Olufemi reminds us, collective imagining must be "felt, heard, touched, tasted" (2021: 34). It is precisely there – in the embodied process of tarrying with what wounds us – that our artwork responds and begins to point toward somewhere Otherwise.

Shona, you said that for you the other thing that really stood out and stayed with you is how we can never get out of the dynamics of power implied by the invitation. This is also what another participant in Mexico pointed out – the spatial and affective proximity to power in the installation.

Shona: I think this relates again to this issue of epistemology and power as an assumption of ownership which is rooted in the relations of separation and objectification and the driving of priorities according to Whiteness. I think we are dealing with the same issue that Palacios and Sheehi are grappling with, the one of how to "move beyond universalized racialized subjectivities without discounting the multiplicities and differences of embodiment that escape the hegemony of the way presentation, visuality, and relationality to the art object is mediated by an epistemology of coloniality and whiteness [sic]" (2020: 292). Like them, we are attempting to work with the "productive tension that results by identifying the hegemony of racialised visuality and the material and ontological experiences that escape it" (Palacios and Sheehi 2020: 292). This is where the installation aspect of our work becomes important because this is an embodied

relational participation, in situ, it is 'fleshy', in Palacios and Sheehi's terms. And it is in the fleshiness that the unevenness of power surfaces so clearly to visibilise in performances of white innocence and witnessing. The participant you are mentioning in Mexico described enacting a particular sort of Black refusal from his position as a Black African American man. In his words:

> I didn't know that the table at first was the place to sit. Um, and I felt comfortable just standing because I didn't know how long I was going to be there. And then when I acknowledged that, ok, ok, this is the place. And then I thought (and I had already gathered some of the context) um, and I thought, wow, okay, my black body is not participating in this proximity of this table, which dinner tables are, you know, close friends, family, the whole nine yards. Um, so I just kind of thought all about that and then I saw the flyer[25]. That's when I came and said are you, is this yours? Let me kind of put my experience in here. And I like the table aspect of what you're putting together because I feel like, that table is a statement in terms of proximity. And even the issues that you and your collaborator are toiling with, or trying to agitate, or whatever the case might be, it's like, that invitation, even in the title, it's like again for me the proximity is really, really important. Toni Morrison says it best to me: 'Black is always a source of power'. I can't ever break it down or see something where that's not true.

I think these comments highlight the sort of disobedience we were hoping for through the spectacularising of white bodies under pressure. That is, a disobedience to the hierarchically binary *either* victims *or* oppressors, subjects *or* objects, White *or* Black definitions of being which are available to us in epistemological Whiteness. These comments exemplify Sylvia Wynter's 'deciphering practice' as this is understood by Katherine McKittrick, "which is a reading practice that takes into account multiple social realities and differential psycho-affective fields while also exposing the intense weight of our governing system of knowledge" in order to imagine and enact "an aesthetics of black life outside the intense weight of racism" (McKittrick 2021: 9). This African American participant is highlighting the non-innocence of our invitation and an important refusal which can be read as an example of the Otherwise Olufemi talks about. However, I think it is instructive to consider the differences between this experience and the one you are highlighting, Brown Bearded Man, which is quite opposite. This difference suggests the importance of understanding Northern and Southern perspectives and some of the problems of installation as a practice of proximity which assumes safety. Black Swiss Feminist Noémi Michel (2020) criticises the way in which liberal-democratic representational politics promotes proximity between subjects who are in contention through "face to face and synchronous co-presence" (2020: 21) because of the way this model depoliticises the violent realities of face to face, body to body meetings. For them, the proximity of physical presence can serve the reproduction of power because of what

[25] This is a reference to the artist statement provided at each installation site. In the Mexico installation iteration, this was presented as a flyer laid at each table place setting like restaurant menus.

it demands from black and brown participants and the way it depletes and consumes "energetic resistance". Being in presence with Whiteness depletes those marginalised through it. Being put into consistent resistance is part of the depletion of Black life which can work against the thriving of anti-racist energies. Our invitation potentially mitigates against a strategy of 'safe spatio-temporal distancing' that may be necessary for those who are harmed.

The point regarding Wynter, McKittrick and the feminist decolonial relational way of working we are employing is that proximity cannot be denied, but it is not a proximity in mind, but one in flesh – "as if people matter" (Siklodi et al. 2024: 146). The issue is that the dynamics of power are never at work in the abstract, any discomfort is always produced in situ. So, for you, Brown Bearded Man, what I was hearing is not that you are lost or Otherwise in the installation. There was no opacity, mystery or destabilisation in the experience of the artwork for you. That you were part of the 'same old story' of Whiteness. And this is at the heart of the issue for me and one of the reasons that Baldwin is important for me because he understands the impossibility of the outside and the viscerality of fear and its role in violence. The dynamics of the instigating agent/s are important for understanding the ability to invite as fundamental to Whiteness as a lived expression of colonial imperial gesture. The point about Whiteness is that it always frames an invitation, this invitation assumes ownership. From this point of view, another way of thinking about the debates around Schutz's *Open Casket* (and for me we must always think both, and never one or other) is in terms of the way that flesh can be a disrupter.

By way of a conclusion of sorts to our discussion, what do we make of the installation in the light of these experiences thus far? For me, there is something important about purpose and locatedness that I think has probably always been in tension since we began working together which revolves around our respective trajectories into this work that impacts aims and purpose. I think this was very often in tension for me when working in VIAD and with other artists throughout my career. What is the purpose of the provocations we are making? What do we imagine we are articulating and for whom? Who is expert in the production? Who is learning? Maybe one of the biggest successes of our artworks is as methodological provocation for ourselves and for other artists to really seek to explore the role of our work in the production of dirty and clean pain as these are understood by Menakem (2020). For me, following Menakem, dirty pain is a mode of collective articulating which may or may not be about clarifying, but it will always be about generating energy collectively. So, aspects of the work that can detract and sap energy along the same unevenly racialised distributions become especially important to reflect on. The question is how we make change alongside each other as part of a proliferation of critique. I think the relationality of the curations and the Whiteness of the locations we have installed in thus far mean that there are important reflections to be had

on the strategic multiplicity we are inviting alongside and as part of a proliferation of Blackness.

What is the purpose of art for you as an artist, Katalin?

Katalin: Simply put, artmaking is a way of knowing and relating for me. If I were to name its purpose, it would be to access forms of knowledge that unfold in and through the body. Whiteness, too, is in the body and knowable through it. Artmaking, then, can allow us to explore how Whiteness emanates from and is lived in bodies. I understand artmaking not as the production of isolated works, but as part of a broader practice of embodiment. It is a response to the grappling with the limits of knowing, perceiving, and relating. For me, it is a continuous process of searching, investigating, encountering, and sometimes discovering always collectively, through the dense relations formed between humans, and between human and nonhuman actors. It is shaped by force, excess, vitality, and the tensions between multiple elements — tensions that our installations have sought to provoke and to hold open.

Shona: So, I think this is where we end then for now. But I think it is a call for a more connected way of doing this work, where there is accountability in the sense of: what are we prepared to lose? What will we risk and how do we deal with our losses? For me, this is what is becoming more and more obviously at stake in the current global contexts where White supremacy's death-wish feels so close to ending us all.

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