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# **A Visual Sociology of White Woman**

## **Investigating and Creating Affective Performances of Anti-Racist White Femininities**

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Sociology  
Goldsmiths College  
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Thesis submitted for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

2019

## Declaration of Authorship

I Katalin Halász hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed:

Date:

## Abstract

*White affect* is a new sociological concept which I develop for studying whiteness. The approach I take in this thesis insists that the affective experiences of bodies are central in the making of whiteness. I deconstruct existing conceptualizations that frame whiteness as an unmarked norm. To better understand whiteness as a racial category, I shift the lens to analyze whiteness as a product of intercorporeal and intersubjective affective performances of 'race' and gender. By investigating the affects that entangle the white female body, we can begin to understand the embodied meaning-making processes of anti-racist white femininities which, in turn, allow us to also comprehend the very production of the figure of 'white woman'.

This thesis investigates white femininities in two anti-racist contexts, and is based on a combination of semi-structured interviewing with artistic research methods. I explore the production of anti-racist white femininities in the life histories of eleven women who have been active in anti-racist and feminist movements in Europe, and in four anti-racist performances that I created and staged: *I Love Black Men* (UK, 2011), *Cruising Black Women* (Germany, 2013), *The Blush Machine* (Bolivia, 2013) and *The Chamber of White* (Denmark, 2014). By combining the interviews with the creation of performative situations I am able to study the affects of the visually and viscerally present white female body. The performance of an artful live sociology, which is at the centre of this thesis, expands the field of Visual Sociology.

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## List of performance documentation on the attached USB (see back cover)

### **I Love Black Men**

video documentation 3: 51 mins.

### **The Blush Machine**

video 3: 30 mins.

Santa Cruz blushing faces 5: 02 mins.

### **The Chamber of White**

Video documentation of The Performance Sense Laboratory 7: 49 mins

Video 4: 09 mins.

Please note that there is no video documentation of **Cruising Black Women**, as it was based on a photograph of a performance by Adrian Piper. I recreated this photograph (see Chapter 4, p. 158).

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Thank you to my beloved family, to my mother and my two little brothers, Sebi and Zsiga. I love you dearly. Köszönöm édes anyukám. This thesis is dedicated to you and to the ones we've lost.

And to the two who have come into my life to make it a whole, Viktor and Szaffi.

## Prologue

*I know the anger that lies inside of me like I know the beat of my heart and the taste of my spit. It is easier to be angry than to hurt. Anger is what I do best. It is easier to be furious than to be yearning. Easier to crucify myself in you than to take on the threatening universe of whiteness by admitting that we are worth wanting each other.*

Audre Lorde: *Sister Outsider* (1984: 153)  
quoted in *The Chamber of White* (2014)



*Figure 1. The Blush Machine (2013)*

## Introduction

This thesis investigates how affect produces anti-racist white femininities. I develop the concept of *white affect*—a new sociological approach for studying how whiteness is a product of complex embodied meaning-making processes. The approach taken here does not critique 'race' as a social construction, but rather, unpacks some of the affective processes by which it is made. Positioning itself within studies on whiteness, the thesis deconstructs existing conceptualizations that frame whiteness as an unmarked norm. To better understand whiteness as a racial category, I shift the lens to analyze whiteness as a product of intercorporeal and intersubjective affective performances of 'race' and gender, expounding our understanding of the fleshy materiality of embodied experiences.

This thesis reflects on the lived experiences of (eleven) activist white women based in various European countries to explore how anti-racist white femininities are produced as affective performances of 'race' and gender. In addition to these interviews, I created four performative situations, in order to more closely examine the role that affect has in producing or undoing the figure of 'white woman'. By developing different performative spaces or situations, my goal was to enable participants to feel and access meanings, which are typically left unspoken, through an affective register. This presents the methodological innovation of the thesis.

This research takes a feminist perspective by exploring the interviewees' gender-specific life histories, and by reflecting on the experiences of their female bodies. The anti-racist approach of the thesis can be situated in its concern with histories of racism, and how these have enabled the formation of the historical figure of 'white woman'. I investigate the interviewees' engagement with European anti-racist movements, their motivations and experiences, and the potential of white female bodies to produce anti-racist white femininities in real and constructed performative situations. This research is driven by a quest to find out how whiteness works as a form of racial privilege and what the affects of whiteness mean for those bodies that are recognized as white, as black, or otherwise non-white<sup>1</sup> in intersubjective encounters.

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<sup>1</sup> Acknowledging the political aspects of choosing the terms to describe people and populations I am referring to in this thesis, I have chosen to follow Richard Dyer (1997) in using the term 'non-white'. Whereas there is an inherent shortcoming in this phrase in that it suggests a deficiency when compared to

The thesis makes an original contribution to knowledge in three ways. Firstly, by engaging with theories of affect to rethink anti-racist white femininities *as products of affective performances of 'race' and gender*, it provides an analysis of 'race'-making that takes seriously embodied meaning-making processes. This analysis enables an understanding of the embodied nature of racializing and gendering discourses and embodied subjectivity. Secondly, by researching the making of whiteness, it asserts the significance of 'race' and its intersections with gender in the Sociology of the Body. Thirdly, through my creation of four performances, this thesis expands the field of Visual Sociology: it reckons with affects and the full array of the senses—going beyond the visual—and performs a live sociology which enacts the affective dimensions of the social. This thesis thus makes original contributions to anti-racist practice, scholarship, and art.

### **Affect in Making Whiteness**

The approach that I develop in this thesis understands affect as being one of the “socially produced, heterogeneous and dynamic processes of being and becoming” (Gunaratnam 2003: 3). In social constructionism, these processes are argued to produce 'race' against essentialist models (see also Brah 1996; Gilroy 1998; Omi and Winant 1994). This thesis is concerned with how social discourses and power relations affect individuals and, in turn, how individuals give meaning to, shape, and reject discursive categories through their affective investments in them. The argument that I develop does not close off social discourses from embodied experience, however (see Brah et al. 1999; Wuthnow 2002; Hemmings 2002 in Gunaratnam 2003). Rather, following Yasmin Gunaratnam (2003), I demonstrate how social discourses and lived experiences—always fragmentary, complex and contradictory—are mutually constitutive. I do so by developing an analytical framework that recognizes that social discourses are not outside of embodied experience.

This research contends with the material encounter of bodies, their engagement or disengagement with each other and with racial and gender discourses through their

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'white', I prefer to use 'non-white' rather than 'people of colour', for the latter is mostly used in the USA and this research is based and focused on Europe. Dyer states that we need to recognize 'white' as a colour in racial schemas, and 'people of colour' would suggest that some people have colour and whites do not (1997). Further, wherever I use Black in capital letters I refer to the political term popularised in the 1980s by anti-racist movements to include people of African, Asian and Caribbean descent.



affective capacities and practices. My conceptualization of white affect does not include an ontology of 'race' or whiteness. The focus of the research is not to provide an answer to what 'race'/whiteness is, but on *how* it is made, on processes of racialization. In this sense, the approach I take is close to that of Robert Miles, who argues against using 'race' as an analytical concept that engenders its reification as a “natural division” (1993: 48). In a move against reifying whiteness as an autonomous thing in itself, the analytical task for this research is to investigate how certain human relationships are interpreted and determined by ideas of 'race' and gender, and how these, in turn, create the figure of 'white woman'. A key focus of this research is to explore which specific discursive and corporeal processes take part in the formation of social relationships around this figure, and “the specific conditions which make this form of distinction socially pertinent, historically active” (Hall 1980: 338, quoted in Miles 1993: 44). My approach to understanding the production of anti-racist white femininities involves an exploration of the dynamic interrelationship of social discourses and the lived, embodied experience of 'race' and gender in moments of affective intercorporeal encounters.

I understand affect not as a thing, but as an event, a happening, as a process of life and vitality that circulates and passes between bodies (Blackman 2012; O'Sullivan 2001). Throughout this thesis I use affect to mean the capacity to affect and be affected, as a movement and circulation between one experiential state of the body to another. And, by extension, I use emotion to refer to those affective registers that can be interpreted, have a name and are socially displayed by this name (e.g. shame). I refer to feeling as embodied sensations, as a reference to the senses (e.g. hearing, touching). This differentiation between feeling, emotion and affect corresponds with a number of sources I have included (Massumi 2004; Shouse 2005). I am interested in the affective capacities of bodies to affect and to be affected, to be in affective circulation, and in *what affect does*, how it mediates the relationship between “the psychic and the social, and between the individual and the collective” (Ahmed 2004b: 119). It has been argued that the power of affect lies in the fact that it is transmittable, that it circulates (Ahmed 2004; Brennan 2004; Shouse 2005; Wetherell 2012). Following the philosophies of Gilles Deleuze, Baruch Spinoza, Alfred North Whitehead and Henri Bergson much recent literature on affect has emphasized it primarily as the process of 'becoming' as a result of moments of impact and change in the body (Massumi 2004). This line of argument prefers to focus on the 'potential' and 'virtual', instead of already formed

objects such as social identities and institutions, and celebrates affect as a realm beyond discourse, language, words, texts, representation and consciousness (Massumi 1996). Because my purpose with this research is to explore embodied meaning-making and the interconnections of the discursive and affective realms, this line of thinking about affect is of little use. Rather, I am employing the concept of 'affective practice' by Margaret Wetherell (2012). Affective practice has proven to be the most productive specifically for how it connects cognitive and corporeal processes in the production of embodied meaning:

An affective practice is a figuration where bodily possibilities and routines become recruited or entangled together with meaning-making and with other social and material figurations. It is an organic complex in which all the parts relationally constitute each other (2012: 19).

'Affective practice' composes together bodies with meaning-making and with the discursive and the semiotic. It focuses on the emotional as it takes shape in concrete activities and social practices. As Wetherell argues, this practice-based approach allows for extending new thinking about activity, flow, assemblage and relationality by asking how people are moved and move others in the context of particular 'affective performances', 'affective scenes' and 'affective events' (2012: 3). Affective practice recognises that affect can be held intersubjectively across a few or many participants and can flow across a scene, a site or an institution (2012: 13). This is important for this study on anti-racist white femininities as it allows a fresh look at the question of how whiteness is made by asking how affect moves from one body to another. Rejecting notions of affective circulation as 'suggestion', 'contagion', 'social influence' or 'chemical entrainment' suggested in the term 'transmission' (2012: 144), Wetherell argues that affect is not generated randomly or universally (2012: 142-143). Affect is communicated between people of shared social identification, and this makes actions and affect intelligible to those taking part in a social practice. The concept of affective practice thus allows for connecting affect and meanings attached to whiteness at a cognitive level and for analysing affect as a social action, which is how this thesis employs it:

Affective practice is something that can be encountered as a pre-existing given – and at that point it may feel as though we are entering a 'zone' or an 'atmosphere' – but it is also something that is actively created and needs work to sustain. The circulation of affect inevitably brings us back, therefore, to those key questions about where affect is located, the permeability of bodies and minds, and to the analysis of affect as social action (2012: 142).

In thinking whiteness in terms of bodies and their affective capacities I am also drawing on materialist approaches to 'race'. Thus, in order to understand how whiteness comes into being, it is not sufficient to study it at the level of representations and the racial schemas to which bodies adhere and are given value; rather, it is also necessary to examine the levels of material practices in everyday situations in which 'race' emerges as an event (Saldanha 2007) – and, as this thesis argues, as an 'affective event'.

### **Anti-Racist White Femininities**

“Do 'white women' exist?” asks Helen (Charles) alluding to the naturalization of whiteness (1992: 31). The accounts of the eleven women I interviewed, all of whom identify as white and as women, make the answer to this question not as obvious or straightforward as one might think. This research explores how they become and are made to be 'white woman': “to spotlight something which is ever-present, and yet appears to be always out of focus” in (Charles) words (1992: 31). Whether or not 'white woman' exists depends on inhabiting a whiteness that is silent and invisible, a place of unquestioned privilege out of which all other 'races' are categorized, or a whiteness that is politicized and however problematically, tries to deal with its own position in systems of power. All the women who participated in this research have been active in anti-racist movements in Europe. In one way or another, and in varying depth, they all have reflected on the meanings of 'white woman'. Much of their own processes of working through the formation of their subjectivities come from their involvement in anti-racism, and from their ability as white women to connect 'race' and histories of racism. Hence the focus of this research is on anti-racist white femininities, wherein I examine

whiteness through its own efforts to work “out of whiteness” (Ware and Back 2002).

In this thesis I do not think of the production of whiteness apart from other social formations, but in its interconnectedness, co-constitution and articulation with gender, and to some extent to class, as all of the women I interviewed accept, some more willingly than others, being middle class as an economic and cultural identity for themselves. The mutual constitution of 'race' with other social differences is fundamental to the concept of relationality, which I use in order to “refer to the epistemological break with thinking of 'race' [...] as unitary, hermetically sealed, homogenous categories of difference” (Gunaratnam 2003: 20) and to disrupt the majority/minority binary that characterizes much of the existing research on whiteness.

Throughout this thesis, I always make use of the plural ‘femininities’ in order to acknowledge that there cannot be a singular claim on white femininity or on anti-racist white femininity, and which serves as an indication of the dense diversity of meanings and experiences in contemporary Europe. In relation to the danger inherent in using racial categories to reify and fix 'race', and thus reproducing essentialism, stereotyping and racism in social research, I draw on Gunaratnam's approach to understand whiteness not as an entity in which individuals are 'born into', 'inhabit' and then 'bring to life in the social world', but rather, I acknowledge it “as dynamic and emergent processes of being and becoming” (2003: 19). My argument is that conceiving whiteness as white affect and analyzing affective practices in intersubjective encounters enable recognition of the multiple elements at play in the making of 'race', the simultaneous fixing of racial codes and representations alongside or in contradiction to the dynamic intensities of bodies that adhere to, reject or unsettle discursive constructs.

I follow Donna Haraway (1998) and the tenets of radical reflexivity in feminist research by making explicit how the participants of this study and myself as the researcher are socially situated. The when and where of the research is contemporary Europe. I, myself a white middle-class woman, worked in anti-racism professionally for over a decade, in London and in Brussels advocating for the rights of racial, ethnic and religious minorities and migrants on behalf of a European-wide network of anti-racists organizations. The research grew out of this work, out of my affective experiences and relations living in a white female body and my politics of working with and against my

whiteness. I can recall a clearly distinguishable moment in the formation of this research. Freshly recruited as a policy officer at a large European anti-racist umbrella organisation in Brussels I was confronted with a question by a black member: 'What can a white woman from the North know about racism?' Whenever I think of this question the affects of that moment revisit me. The blush is less intense now that it was 10 years ago, but my stomach still gets very tense. I was surprised and ashamed in equal measures: being from the Eastern part of Europe, I never thought of myself as being from 'the North'. Having lived in the UK before moving to Brussels I did not feel I was other than an Eastern European migrant woman. But in that 'affective event' I was made a white woman from the North. I understood that I was much more than my own personal biography, in the encounter with that black man I was everything that 'white woman' represents.

This research project—the written thesis and the artworks and exhibitions that emerged from the research—reflect my desire to produce anti-racist interventions at multiple sites and locations. The thesis explores the possibilities of performing anti-racist whiteness through and upon white female bodies. The ways in which I refer to anti-racism throughout this thesis refer to a broad, inclusive term that encompasses both small, everyday practices and large, formal anti-racist campaigns and organizations that challenge racist attitudes and acts at various levels of the social world.

The field of studying whiteness is characterised by multiple aims and political visions, including radical determinations of abolishing white supremacy and all racial categories (Gilroy 2000a; Ware and Back 2002) and opposing visions of a cacophony of “thousand tiny races” (Saldanha 2006: 21). From within this field, my research starts with an investigation of the making of white femininities, of examining processes of racialization and gendering. This quest is driven by an impulse to disrupt existing racial frameworks by proposing white affect as a vital force capable of not only producing but also dissolving whiteness, understood here as a relational construct. This research collects various situations which are motivated by anti-racist thinking and acting premised not on identity and a bridging of difference and sameness, but on the more visceral ways in which bodies relate to each other.

Whiteness has been understood as white supremacy, defined as “a set of beliefs, ideologies, and power structures rooted in the notion of natural, inherited, God-given superiority; a discourse produced and maintained in historically and geopolitically specific forms” (Ware and Back 2002: 5). Whiteness is also as a system of privilege, of 'unearned' systematic advantages gained by dominant groups (McIntosh 1988). Peggy McIntosh famously lists 46 items that give her advantages over people of colour. She conceptualises white privilege as a 'knapsack' full of things she can do like moving into an area she can afford to. She also lists the things she does not have to do, like act as a representative of her 'race' (1988). These systemic advantages are an essential part of a racially hierarchal society maintained by a tacit contract: “All whites are beneficiaries of the Contract, though some whites are not signatories to it” (Mills 1997: 11). In Mill's analysis this means that there is a benefit in being racialized as white, but white privilege is not distributed equally. George Lipsitz determines that “the possessive investment in whiteness” manifests in that “white supremacy is usually less a matter of direct, referential, and snarling contempt than a system for protecting the privileges of whites” (1998: vii). These analyses of whiteness as privilege, power, supremacy, along with those that posit whiteness as universal and invisible normative presence (Dyer 1997; Ahmed 2004c) have informed my theorization of whiteness as affect. Indeed, working with affective practice as a conceptual tool, it became possible to explore how the concepts of white supremacy, privilege, power and universality and their personal interpretations and experiences are entangled with bodily intensities that are performed affectively in intersubjective and intercorporeal social encounters. Through my focus on affective movements as processes that connect and produce relations between those present in the social action, I analyzed whiteness inherently as a relational construct (Parish 1997; Frankenberg 1997; Gunaratnam 2003). Furthermore, understanding whiteness in more affective terms as a denial of fundamental human connection and relatedness between people racialized as different (Ware and Back 2002) allowed the research to seek out those affective registers through which a 'fundamental human connection' could be established as a prime anti-racist foundation, on the basis of which the work of dissolving white supremacy and privilege could begin.

## The Figure of White Woman and White Female Bodies

As a visual sociology project, this research produces an artful and performative live sociology (Back and Puwar 2012). It combines semi-structured interviews with the creation of performative situations as a means of studying the affects of the visually and viscerally present white female body. The methods I use allow me to analyze the specific intersubjective and intercorporeal interactions and affective movements of often unremarkable encounters. I suggest that the concept of white affect allows for an in-depth exploration of the particularities and textures of lived experience that are often lost or homogenized by universalizing theories of whiteness. The accounts that I present of European<sup>2</sup> activist women widen the debate on whiteness that is otherwise dominated by an overwhelmingly US and UK literature.

Real and imagined anti-racist femininities are what link the different methods and parts of this thesis. Although the four performances that I developed and staged were perceived by various audiences<sup>3</sup> as artworks, the methodological concerns behind their creation were not to produce artworks as such, but rather, to use art as a research method, and thereby render these performances as a means through which to uncover information. Of particular concern are those registers of body experience that cannot easily be seen, and “which might be variously described as non-cognitive, trans-subjective, non-conscious, non-representational” (Blackman 2012: 4). It has been argued that affect is difficult to study and capture via conventional methodological approaches (Blackman 2012).

Together with the four performances that form part of the thesis, I produced seven artworks and two exhibitions in the course of this research. All projects have been informative in my thinking, both on the research question and the methodological design. Moreover, these projects informed the themes and questions I asked in the interviews, and in turn, I employed the affects produced during the first three interviews as integral elements of the last art piece of the research (‘The Chamber of White’, see Chapter 5). This ‘messiness’ of the process was imperative in experimenting with ideas, concepts and methods in producing this thesis. Out of the seven artworks I selected four

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<sup>2</sup> For the list of countries where the interviewees are based please see Appendix 1.

<sup>3</sup> For more detail on where the performances were shown and on the audiences please see Chapter 2.

performances to be part of the final thesis, because these four pieces put the figure of ‘white woman’ at their centre. The other artworks also explore the affects of whiteness, but without a clear gender dimension. I discuss these additional art projects and exhibitions in Chapter 2, with a detailed description of their central themes and the ways in which they helped to facilitate my thinking. My foundation diploma in fine art from Camberwell College of Arts equipped me with the skills to produce art projects, and more importantly, with the freedom to experiment with concepts and materials, settings and designs. I include here a chronological table with the different stages of the research as a biography of how the research evolved.

Title	Location	Date
Jane and Atinuke	London, UK	Feb 2011
Untitled	London, UK	March 2011
I Love Black Men	London, UK	June 2011
Freeing Up Shame	Miguel Pereira, Brazil	March 2012
The Blush Machine	Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia	May 2013
Visualising Affect exhibition	London, UK	July 2013
Cruising Black Women	Berlin, Germany	Aug 2013
The Future of Art is Urban exhibition	London, UK	May 2014
Interviews with Natalie, Rosemary and Amanda	London, UK	June 2014
The Chamber of White	Roskilde, Denmark	July 2014
Interviews with Annabelle, Barbara, Carmen, Dorothy, Emily, Helen, Jessica, Molly	Online	Aug – Oct 2014

*Figure 2. The chronology of the research*

The installations, videos, performances and exhibitions – the different social encounters that I initiated before the interviews – addressed the themes of the visual and affective registers of whiteness, the roles of white and non-white bodies and their affective practices in subjectivity formation and in constructing the identity category of ‘white woman’. These art projects served as important stages in the research as a whole and



directly informed my engagement with the interviewees: the questions I asked, the topics we discussed and my attentiveness to the affective registers of not only the life stories the women shared with me but also of the interview situations. The interviews allowed me to uncover the affective practices around the figure of 'white woman' that the respondents had all been confronted with one way or another, and the performances directly contrasted this representational trope with the experiences of actual white female bodies to release and study their affects.

Throughout the thesis, whenever I use 'white woman', 'white man', 'black man' and 'black woman' in single quotation marks I am referring to these representative tropes (Frankenberg 1997, see Chapter 4). My interest is to explore the embodiment of 'white woman', bodily materialities of a particular racialized and gendered social convention with a specific focus on its affects. My practice is informed not only by theories of gender, 'race', embodiment, and affect, and by difficult feelings around the lived experience of 'race' and gender, but I also want to *produce* those difficult feelings as a research method.

Through the creation of performative situations that were staged as performances in various settings, it becomes possible to study not only how the visual works in 'race'-making, but also to engage the body as a whole entity along with the full array of the senses. I analyze bodies and their affects in order to understand their role in the production of anti-racist white femininities and in the formation of subjectivity as "lived and felt in the flesh" (Young 2005: 7).

## **Outline of the Thesis**

The thesis is composed of two elements: this written text and four performances (the documentation of the live events is presented on a USB). The written text is organized in three parts, all of which attempt to analyze the role of bodies in the making of whiteness.

Part I outlines the theoretical and methodological framework of the research and consists of a literature review (*Chapter 1*) as well as a methodological chapter (*Chapter 2*). Part II, the interviews, and Part III, the performances, are linked through their

investigations of performative manifestations of anti-racist white femininities, starting with the lived experiences of white women and then proceeding to the performances. 'White woman' emerges as a real (*Chapter 3*), historical (*Chapter 4*), and affective (*Chapter 5*) figure. Each field of investigation provides a lens through which to view affects of anti-racist white femininities as embodied meaning-making processes.

In *Chapter 1, The Critique of Whiteness*, I present existing research on whiteness, which was first critically addressed by black scholars. I examine debates in a literature that is haunted by fears of reifying whiteness as a form of racial privilege and power. I then review the different directions offered in the literature to produce anti-racist work. My argument is that the literature on whiteness has been dominated by a concern with examining it as a universal norm and as an invisible colour in racial visual schemas and has, as a result, paid less attention to how the white body itself participates in the making of whiteness. Drawing on affect theory and on feminist scholarship which uses materialist conceptualizations of difference that repositions bodies in social theory, I introduce the concept of white affect in order to argue for the analysis of affective practices in the making of whiteness.

*Chapter 2, Towards an Artful and Performative Live Sociology*, presents a critical reflection on devising a methodological strategy that incorporates semi-structured interviews with artistic research methods. I discuss feminist interviewing and elaborate on my proposition of an artful and performative live sociology. I briefly address the issues I investigate in all of the artworks and exhibitions which I developed in this project and elaborate on how this research produces an anti-racist practice. The chapter closes with a discussion on reflexivity and ethics.

Part II is based on empirical research which uses semi-structured interviews about the lived experiences of European activist white women (*Chapter 3*).

*Chapter 3, "This See-through Skin"*, captures the lived experiences of power, privilege, and the problem of forming a white racial identity in some of the life histories that the interviewees shared with me. It discusses how respondents understand their whiteness and the formation of their anti-racist white femininities. I suggest that, through affective practices, people call on sets of discourses and concepts alongside embodied ways of

knowing which are then mobilized in social contexts in the making of anti-racist white femininities.

Part III (*Chapters 4 and 5*) discusses the four performances *I Love Black Men* (the UK, 2011), *Cruising Black Women* (Germany, 2013), *The Blush Machine* (Bolivia, 2013) and *The Chamber of White* (Denmark, 2014).

In *Chapter 4, The Racialized White Female Body and its Affects*, I argue for the relevance of materiality and affective relationality in the making of anti-racist white femininities. From my performances *Cruising Black Women* and *I Love Black Men*, I suggest how racializing discourses are embodied affectively. Both performances work with a white stereotype that posits an elemental sexual attraction between 'white woman' and 'black man'.

In *Chapter 5, The Performance of White Affect*, I explore embodied subjectivity and test the concept of white affect. The performances that form this chapter are *The Blush Machine* and *The Chamber of White*. Both investigate how affects constitute white female subjectivities and explore the movements of white affect. Through these performances, I suggest the importance of analyzing the other senses in 'race'-making and argue for a fuller engagement with affective and sensory experiences of bodies.

In the *Conclusions: White Affect* I return to the findings of the research and identify the limits of my theoretical approach and areas for further research. I make links to contemporary debates on whiteness based on a recent example of a white woman entering into the discussion through an artwork. I explore how the heated debate around 'Open Casket', a painting by Dana Schutz exhibited at the 2017 Whitney Biennale opened up questions on racial representation and the positions from which to speak about racism, power and privilege. I close by discussing the politics of this research and its vision of affective whiteness.

# Part I. Researching Performances of Anti-Racist White Femininities

## Chapter 1. The Critique of Whiteness

*One change in direction that would be really cool would be the production of a discourse on race that interrogates whiteness.*

*bell hooks, 1990: 54*

*One of the signs of the times is that we really don't know what "white" is.*

*Kobena Mercer, 1991: 205*

In this chapter, I analyze existing research on whiteness. I argue that the white body and its corporeal and affective experiences require further attention. Before discussing the theoretical starting points for my critique of prevailing conceptualizations of whiteness, I offer a brief overview of how black scholars have addressed whiteness, and of the many dilemmas and fears of reifying whiteness as a form of racial privilege and power that haunts existing research on whiteness. The literature reviewed here also offers ways in which scholarship can endeavour to produce anti-racist work; these lay the foundations of the theoretical routes that I pursue in this research. I review the concept of invisibility of whiteness, a central theme that runs across the literature that defines it as the unnamed—invisible—norm and the colourless colour in the racial palette. In the second part of the chapter, I put forward the concept of white affect. I argue for the need to analyze affective practices in the making of whiteness by drawing on feminist materialist conceptualizations of difference that repositioned bodies in social theory and on affect theory.

### The Study of Whiteness

This thesis investigates the affective dimensions of the performative enactment of anti-racist white femininities and, in doing so, develops a gendered perspective on the making of whiteness. I thus enter a field of study that is defined by as many dilemmas as it provides significant research into the meaning and politics of whiteness. Today a

central concern of the scholarship on whiteness—referred to variously (and problematically) as 'critical white studies', 'whiteness studies' or 'critical studies on whiteness'—is how to de-centre, challenge, dismantle, and escape white privilege while avoiding inadvertently re-centering and reifying the term and the underlying logics of white supremacy, and simultaneously constructing whiteness as an essential and homogenous white identity and culture (Frankenberg 1997; Nakayama and Krizek 1999; Knowles 2003; Haggis 2004; Alexander and Knowles 2005; Back and Solomos 2009). However haunted by fears and anxieties, the proliferation of the whiteness question from the early key works—in feminist historiography and ethnography (Ware 1992; hooks 1992; and Frankenberg 1993); radical history (Roediger 1991); and film studies (Dyer 1998; 1997)—demonstrates its currency in critical thinking about 'race' and racism.

### **The Black Critique of Whiteness**

Exploring whiteness and making explicit the previously unquestioned sources of power has been raised by intellectuals of colour for some time. The particular entry point for my research has come from the critique of black feminists towards white feminists (Carby 1982). The historical importance of studying whiteness as a problem worth investigating can be seen in contemporary references to the work of W. E. B. Du Bois, who claimed a “singularly clairvoyant” knowledge of the “souls of white folk” and commenced discussions on the white worker (Du Bois in Back and Solomos 2009: 606). Well known is Frantz Fanon's account of the wounded forms of consciousness experienced by people of colour forced to live under white domination in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). James Baldwin declared that “This world is white no longer, and it will never be white again” (1984: 175). It is also common in any discussion of whiteness to refer to the words of bell hooks on the need to turn attention to the whiteness question—as this chapter does, too—and to Toni Morrison's project to “avert the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial subject” in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992: 90). This was one of the first books, alongside David R. Roediger's *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (1991), to use the word whiteness in the title.

The irreducible connection between whiteness and racial dominance and violence was made explicit by black scholars who remind us that whiteness has been and still is experienced as terror by people of colour (hooks 1992; Gilroy 1993; Bhabha 1998). The ubiquity of racial violence, the suffering and witnessing of terror, from the slave trade to lynching and contemporary profiling and mass incarcerations, seem to be inevitable components in the construction of whiteness. It has been argued that it was black struggle and the politics of black self-assertion against white oppression that made whites white in the first place (Knowles 2003). The political agency of black struggle worked as a motor in the transformation of unexamined white superiority into a critical appraisal of the advantages of whiteness: “If blackness was produced by oppression then whiteness was produced by culpability for racial oppression” (Knowles 2003: 177).

### **The Development of Scholarship on Whiteness**

Since the 1990s there has been a dramatic increase in scholarship that insists whiteness is a problem that demands an explanation of its origins, persistence, and construction. Scholars mentioned and discussed in detail below carry this tradition. Whiteness is commonly located and named in these studies as a privileged central position, decisively shaped by its proximity to the exercise of power (Roediger 2002). In the “critical rush to whiteness” different research agendas, categorizations, and approaches have emerged (Hill 1997: 3). Mirroring feminist periodization, Mike Hill identified two “waves” of white critique (1997: 2). The “recent historical fiction” that is whiteness is addressed for its invisibility and impermanence by the first wave and includes key works by film scholar Richard Dyer (1997: 2). The second wave is delineated by “the epistemological stickiness and ontological wiggling immanent in whiteness”, a conflict where whiteness is singled out for critique and claimed but avoided at the same time—the only choice left for those who critique whiteness and yet are also “identifiably white” (1997: 3).

Ruth Frankenberg divides work on whiteness into four different, albeit overlapping and interconnected areas: (1) historical studies, the most developed area that maps out the “salience of whiteness to the formation of nationhood, class, and empire” (1997: 2) and thus contributes to the “much larger body of historical work on racism and other racialized and/or colonized subjects” (1997: 2); (2) sociological and cultural studies, which “examine the place of whiteness in the contemporary body politic in Europe and

the United States” (1997: 2), and, similar to the first area, assert race as central in social formation; (3) those who study the performance of whiteness by subjects “whether in daily life, in film, in literature, or in the academic corpus” (1997: 3); and finally, (4) those which examine “racism in movements for social change”, amongst which feminist work stands out as “one site of highly developed work in the area” as well as related work on “white supremacist identity and political movement ideology” (1997: 3). I locate my research in the third area of study, through its central concern of how anti-racist white femininities are performed. As Frankenberg argues, the stakes in such research are twofold, exposing whiteness “masquerading as universal” and examining whiteness made normal and natural through rationalized and legitimized systems of white dominance (1997: 3).

### **Undoing the Whiteness of Whiteness Studies**

Simultaneous to the rapid growth in scholarship on whiteness, which has made claims that whites also carry and act on racial identities, the study of whiteness has been regarded as “something of a mixed blessing” (Back 2010: 444). The whiteness of whiteness studies, and indeed the turning of whiteness studies itself into a field and whiteness into an object of study and thus, its development into an “essential something” has been sharply scrutinized since the 1990s (Fine et al. 1997: xi). Dyer, for example, writes that, “My blood runs cold at the thought that talking about whiteness could lead to the development of something called 'White Studies'” (1997: 10).

Sara Ahmed expresses the same critique, placing it in a series of anxieties that, according to her, the scholarship on whiteness are haunted by, and the origins of which can be found in the dreadful prospect of what whiteness studies “could be” (2004c). “Anxious whiteness”, as Ahmed terms it, fears its own reproduction as a fetishized cut-off from histories of circulation and production, its narcissism sustained by an elevation of whiteness into a social and bodily ideal and a discourse of love, by its egoism, privilege, and, fundamentally, by fears of the function and status of this anti-racism. The self-reflexive turn of whiteness studies is the focus of her critique, that is, different declarative speech acts that do nothing more than contribute to the self-constitution of whiteness studies and thus are “unhappy performatives” (2004c). For Ahmed 'the critical' in the examination of whiteness is hardly more than a depository of anxieties, which cannot guarantee the challenging of institutionalized norms and relations of

power and stands in academic discourse to differentiate between the 'good' progressive as opposed to the 'bad' conservative. She argues that anti-racism is not performative, and white privilege is reproduced rather than disavowed by putting whiteness into speech and different forms of declarations, be it in academic texts of social critique or public culture<sup>4</sup>.

“But what are white people to do?” (Ahmed 2004c) is a question that fundamentally points to the bottom-line query of whether white anti-racism is possible, and what would be the conditions for that possibility. Even if the critical study of whiteness cannot adequately answer these questions, it offers ways and directions for achieving potential responses. In order to avoid the pitfalls of returning to the white subject and re-centring white agency and hence, creating the “narcissism of a perpetual return” in the search for answers, Ahmed proposes a “double turn” (2004c) which seeks to extend the self-reflexivity of whiteness studies in a way that is commensurable with her own critique. This 'double turn' means a turn away from white subjects but in a way that retains a turn towards their role and responsibility in the present and past histories of racism. But, and here comes the double work of Ahmed's turn: the role and responsibility towards others, and away from themselves. Always in a masterfully crafted and complicated set of arguments, Ahmed prescribes this 'double turn' as necessary albeit insufficient ground “upon which the work of exposing racism might provide the conditions for another kind of work” (2004c). As she states, “we don't know, as yet, what such conditions might be”, but there is much in her challenging critique that was central as my research unfolded and to which I repeatedly returned. One crucial test is to move the analytical eye of critical whiteness away from itself and towards others, and to not allow it to rest 'narcissistically' on the white subject who is disconnected from the dynamics of the social and cultural arena and enclosed in the micro worlds of self-narratives.

Echoed across the literature is Ahmed's argument that the task of whiteness studies, even in its critical form, “should not be about re-describing the white subject as anti-racist, or constitute itself as a form of anti-racism, or even as providing the conditions of

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<sup>4</sup>Ahmed uses performative in J. L. Austin's sense as referring to a particular class of speech. An utterance is performative when it does what it says: “the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action” (Austin 1975: 6).



anti-racism” (2004c). The “white race traitor” should refuse to act, think, and be white in the American New Abolitionist school's agenda of “abolishing whiteness from within” (Ignatiev and Garvey 1996; Roediger 1991). The white race traitor, however, is arguably doomed to failure as its existence is always already imagined by an equation with black people (Wiegman 2003). This equation returns us to Ahmed's perpetually self-centred white subject, whose anti-racist agency is premised on the marginality of black subjects and blackness. Robyn Wiegman argues instead for a political project predicated on the recognition that even the radical traditions which generate modern knowledge formations are implicated in the “histories and inequalities of racial asymmetries and oppressions” (2003: 150). These ongoing historical processes thus set the stage for the social construction of white racial identities and ideologies—the objects of study in whiteness studies—to go beyond simply rendering whiteness particular, and instead engage with “the ways that being particular will not divest whiteness of its universal epistemological power” (2003: 150). Further, Wiegman points out that scholars positioned as white and who attempt to be subversive, converge rather than undermine hegemonic liberal whiteness; their critique of whiteness per se does not necessarily dislodge their privileged speaking position. Neither does the critical intellectual endeavour described as the whiteness studies of the 1990s repudiate universal epistemological power since “the epistemological status of white scholars as the authorized agents of institutional knowledge” is rarely questioned by studies of whiteness (2003: 250).

This rejection of non-complicity in white race privilege in Wiegman's argument is the trajectory Jane Haggis charts in her search for the potentiality of the concept of whiteness to name the racialised nature of power and privilege—“including that of the (white) sociologist and her structures of knowing”—in a way that divests those “who inhabit 'white' locations” of “a moral haven of non-complicity” (2004). Haggis argues that the racist/anti-racist binary also provides a “cosy sociological space” where 'race' privilege is easily elided (2004). This binary echoes Ahmed's “learned whites”, the subject who knows about racism and therefore can claim a privileged white identity (2004c). Haggis explains that the explicitly anti-racist stance of much of the sociology of 'race' stems from a moral space by social analysts who assume the role of moral arbitrators (2004). The project of Haggis, who is working in the Australian context, is analogous to my own European one: exploring the potentials and extending the limits of

a critical sociology of whiteness beyond the assumed anti-racist gaze of the researcher, and simultaneously building a praxis of awareness of complicity in white privilege that seeks to avoid simplistic racist/anti-racist positionings.

There are some indications in the existing literature on how to approach this task. In Ghassan Hage's critique of anti-racist sociology, the radical professional operates in a new internationalism based on non-Eurocentric universals (1995). After reviewing the directions offered in the discourse of post-race imaginings and its implications in the Australian context, Haggis arrives at a vision of "together in difference" which entails a "togetherness based on the recognition of incommensurability" between indigenous and white Australians (2004). Further, she identifies the work of the "traitorous' sociologist of race and whiteness" as "revising our universals to reveal their limits, acknowledging the partial situatedness of our knowledge making and its products, and refusing the seductions of slipping into indigeneity to avoid the discomforts of being within whiteness" (2004).

New Abolitionism also offers productive orientations (Gilroy 2000b; Ware and Back 2002). Employing post-colonial theory and British cultural studies, the New Abolitionist project broadens "an attack on the very notion of race and the obstinate resilience of racial identities" (Ware and Back 2002: x). Casting away local rigidities of white identities and concerns of white privilege, and starting with the expressive urban popular culture produced by the Black Atlantic's creative agencies, Gilroy draws a utopian vision of "planetary humanism" that "abolishes" raciology and "camp thinking" (2000b: 16). In a new "strategic universalism", which is defined as an "assertively cosmopolitan point of view", a vision is projected onto a broad canvas whereby "what it means to be human" is freed from the constraints of bodily existence (2000b:16). Being in the world is actively induced with an abstract sense of human similarity and empathy that is capable of generating and informing a cosmopolitan politics of progressive democratic alliances against all forms of racism and fascism. Hybridity, entanglement, and mixing are the basis of an imagining of identity which is divorced from the binary rigidities of genealogy and place.

Ware and Back espouse this vision (2002). In their un-coloured space of hybridity, in the essentialism-free zone where plural and cosmopolitan identities and cultures are mixed

up, whiteness purportedly collapses. As opposed to the American abolitionists that Wiegman critiques, here both black and white subjects are accorded subversive and resistant agency. In this vision of sameness, where difference is transcended, white anti-racist subjects do not earn their possibility in the presupposed marginality of blackness. This allows us to evade the problem of privileging agency for the white traitor, as highlighted by Weigman. Ware and Back collect examples of such mixing of the New Abolitionism project to demonstrate the traditions of resistance accessible for the abolitionist to draw upon. New Abolitionism, Ware and Back state, “means moving inexorably toward a place that lies beyond the homelands of colour and the ghastly structures of 'thinking white'” (2002: 9).

Of importance to my research specifically is this kind of repeated return to the criticisms on whiteness studies and different responses given by the critical examination of whiteness, and to consider what a project implicated in studying whiteness might achieve. To review critical whiteness as a practice that is necessarily invested in anti-racism is essential for the utopian vision of my project as one in which being in the world might be based on human connection and relatedness. I strive to avoid producing work that reifies whiteness. In the following section, I review directions in the literature that I drew upon in developing an anti-racist practice that examines whiteness as it has been placed in histories of racism rather than as an object in itself singled out for study.

### **Directions for Developing an Anti-Racist Practice on Whiteness**

In developing my anti-racist project, I draw on the works of Sara Ahmed (2004c) and Les Back (2010) in particular. As shown in this brief overview of the various genealogies of whiteness studies, each of the authors discussed above have a different starting point. For Ahmed, it is always the work of black feminists, and the direct political address of the work of Audre Lorde in particular that directs her approach, rather than representations of whiteness or the experience of whiteness by white people as made accessible by white academics like Frankenberg and Dyer (1993; 1997).

For Back too, any critical examination of whiteness needs to start with “*racism* rather than whiteness” (2010: 445, original emphasis). Back argues against starting analytical and political work from the vantage point of “whiteness studies” as a distinct area of

study, and against contending the possibility of “a sense of white selfhood without white supremacy” (2010: 445). He suggests an analytical framework that conceives of whiteness not as an identity, but “as a mode of regulating action, thought and understanding”, a “powerful force affecting the choreography of life” (2010: 446). Back is sceptical about race traitor positions because of their general assumption that whiteness can be eliminated, and social transformation achieved by an act of will, as if these actions take place on a stage where “the materiality of flesh is coded within a gallery of racial types” (2010: 446). He identifies a potential within studies of whiteness that is concerned with the “rhythms of life and the relationship to others” and which regards whiteness as a “structure and choreography of action” (2010: 447). He enlists John Hartigan's work in *Detroit* (1999) as an example of understanding “the dramaturgy of racism, that is, the patterns of action, iteration, and unfolding within particular contexts that always involve an interplay between the local, national or even global events” (2010: 448). Erving Goffman's interactive sociology (1959; 1971) alongside more recent writings on 'race', identity, and performativity by Vikki Bell (1999), Bridget Byrne (2006) and Sanjay Sharma (2006) also form part of this 'potential' in Back's approach. I locate my research in this line of works and way of thinking about whiteness. While I retain a focus on the body, I do so without renewed attention to phenotype within the embodiment of race and thus, I do not give “biological race thinking legitimacy” (Back 2010: 448). I follow Back's lead in exploring the “ways in which the body as a material amongst other materials features within the dramaturgy of racism” (2010: 446).

I carefully navigate my project away from a self-absorbed and anxious “racial vanity” (Back 2010: 445). I firmly place it in the context of racism and in the “black critique of how whiteness works as a form of racial privilege, as well as the effects of that privilege on the bodies of those who are recognized as black” (Ahmed 2004c). In particular, I want to direct attention to those bodies who are recognized as white and female. In the next section I turn to one of the widely debated themes of the critique of whiteness which is also a central concern in my research: the making of invisible whiteness visible through the very corporeality and affects of the white body. I thus argue for a reckoning with the materiality of bodies beyond social inscription models.

## White Invisibility

Current attention of scholars is characterized by a critique of whiteness which is asserted as invisible, universal, and as “the presumed norm” (Roediger in Back and Solomos 2009: 607). Efforts are thus being made by researchers to fundamentally “*unmask and name*” it (Knowles 2003: 175; original emphasis). The invisibility of whiteness is explicated firstly through disembodied concepts of a “mythical norm” (Ahmed 2004c), power and privilege. Whiteness is considered in the literature as a pervasive and universal condition and thus is argued by scholars to be unseen and unmarked. Secondly, when theorists discuss the body in relation to invisibility, it is mostly the colour white and visual representations that they are concerned with, alongside racialized seeing which is argued to lie at the heart of racializing processes. Consequently, there is widespread stress in the literature on the need to see and mark hitherto invisible whiteness in order to deconstruct it. Black scholars have however long argued that whiteness has only been invisible for whites. In response to this, I will briefly overview the elements of the invisibility of whiteness. I then turn my attention to the white body and its affects so that I may lay the foundation for arguing for the need to engage with corporeality beyond only the visual in making whiteness and in the formation of embodied subjectivities.

## Whiteness as Invisible Norm

A recurrent finding in the literature is the fact that because of the normative nature of whiteness, which is typically regarded as a standard, as a “racial yardstick” (Gallagher 1994: 167) by which other people are measured, white people as the privileged group do not consciously think about the effect that being white has on their everyday lives or on others', and they do not consider their whiteness as a salient aspect of their identity per se (Allen 1993; Frankenberg 1993; Hardiman 1994; Hurtado and Stewart 1997; McIntosh 1988; Martin et al. 1996; Miller 1992; Nakayama and Krizek 1995). Whites, therefore, just 'are'. White privilege and racial dominance by whites are socially and culturally embedded to the extent that whiteness has become naturalized. As the racial norm, whites have a choice of attending to or ignoring their whiteness (McIntosh 1988; Gallagher 1994). Dyer expresses this by arguing that “other people are races, we are just people”: as long as 'race' is not applied to whites, only to others, they “function as the norm” (1997: 1). Ahmed makes the same argument, by directing attention towards the

effects of the production of whiteness, which works “by assigning race to others: to study whiteness, as a racialised position, is hence already to contest its dominance, how it functions as a 'mythical norm'” (2004c). 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, it has been argued, is what contributes to its invisibility.

### **White as an Invisible Colour**

Furthermore, it is argued that, as a racialized position, the contours of whiteness work as the colour white. White is seen as an absence of colour and all colours in itself—it is invisible and escapes characterization because it is everything and universal (Dyer 1997). Hence studies of whiteness pledge that in order to learn to see whiteness as a colour rather than as an absence of colour it is crucial to undertake the marking of whiteness (Ahmed 2004c). In discussing white as a colour or, rather, as a non-colour in the racial hierarchy, Dyer claims that “black is always marked as a colour (as the term coloured egregiously acknowledges) and is always particularizing: whereas white is not anything really, not an identity, not a particularizing quality” (1988: 45). The universality of whiteness resides in its already defined position as everything, as all colours and as no-colour: colour is what other people have.

### **Racialized Seeing**

The discussion of white as a non-colour in racial visual schemas is closely related to racialized seeing in 'race' making. It has been argued that in modern societies 'race' is a particular way of seeing and designating identity and categorising difference: “Racist culture has been one of the central ways modern social subjects make sense of and express themselves about the worlds they inhabit and invent” (Goldberg 1993: 9; quoted in Byrne 2006: 21). According to Dyer, racial imagery and representations organize the modern world. In this view, the field of vision is a crucial realm for structuring and enforcing race (Wallace 1993) and thus, hierarchies of power. As Back argues:

Race as a visual regime of power has regulated and governed social and cultural life. Culture is understood as adhering to already defined racial bodies. [...] In short, being white is doing

whiteness. The doing of whiteness involved the interplay between visual categorical judgements that are made within the blink of an eye on the stages of social life (2010: 446).

Whiteness seems to emerge as invisible in some ways and hyper-visible in others. Scholars have long advocated for the need to address the invisibility of whiteness for it to be made visible, explicit, 'unfrozen' to undermine its position of power (Frankenberg 1997; Dyer 1997; Knowles 2003; Martin et al. 1996; Nakayama and Krizek 1999; Wander et al 1999). Arguably, exposing—seeing—the invisibility of whiteness helps to understand white domination and privilege, and the ways in which it is constantly reproduced “as the unmarked mark of the human” (Ahmed 2004c). Seeing the invisibility of whiteness is argued to also aid in undermining and displacing its centrality (Frankenberg 1997; Wander et al. 1999; Nakayama and Krizek 1999). As Dyer states: “Whites must be seen to be white, yet whiteness consists in invisible properties, and whiteness as power is maintained by being unseen” (1997: 45).

Black feminists have however ardently asserted that black people are invisible for white people (hooks 1992) and that “*whiteness is only invisible to those who inhabit it*” (Ahmed 2004c; my emphasis). Ahmed asks whether the call to see white people “as being white” maintains and reifies the invisibility of whiteness, whether it is not only “an exercise in white seeing” which excludes others from view (2004c). hooks makes the same argument, drawing attention to the fact that communities of colour frequently see and name whiteness clearly and critically, and often with terror, as mentioned above (1992). Black people have never needed to 'learn to see' whiteness. On the contrary, they have seized white presence with terror and utter fear as suggested above. hooks has also identified that the disbelief that there is a black gaze on whiteness is itself racism, a symptom of the intertwined assumptions of black inferiority and white superiority (1992).

## **White Bodies**

Invisibility and the emphasis on seeing whiteness in these approaches refer to actual bodily practices as the processes by which white power are named and marked. The

white body can become an inscriptive surface. With this research, I intend to place the white female body in its corporeality at the centre of theorizing the making of whiteness and, in doing so, to address its invisibility. It has been argued that the body has taken “an uncomfortable and ambiguous position” in the study of 'race', even more than in gender studies (Alexander and Knowles 2005: 12). The acknowledgement of the material and physical presence and the lived effects of racialization stop at fears of reifying 'race' as a biological reality. This dilemma has been partly resolved by scholars who theorize 'race' as socially constructed, relational and socially located (Brah 1996; Lewis 2000; Radhakrishnan 1996 in Gunaratnam 2003) and who place racial bodies in historical context and processes of representation, as well as in specific sites, e.g. employment or racial violence (Alexander and Knowles 2005).

Claire Alexander and Caroline Knowles point to the “enigma” of the “corporeality of the racialised body” (2005: 12). They argue that “comparatively little work has been done on either the embodied nature of racialised discourse or on the embodied subjectivity of racialised individuals or groups” besides treating them as objects/subjects of control who are constructed through power (2005: 12). Importantly for my research, they emphasize that these works focus on the externality of the racialized body and the control of racial difference. They make the point that “the boundaries of the body—particularly the skin—also form the site at which external constructions meet and intersect with internal processes of identity formation” (2005: 13). This intersection is the site of my research, the crossing of the visible body and external constructions with the internal, affective, and sensory entity, where desires and thoughts coalesce to make sense of being in the world as racialized and gendered subjects.

Analyzing processes of racialization through white bodies is inherently different from doing so on black bodies. Dyer explains the 'ambiguous' position of white bodies in racializing processes by stating that, “white people are something else that is realised in and yet is not reducible to the corporeal, or racial” (1997: 14). In his understanding, white people are made visible not through their bodies but by questions of power relations, and so white people are not reducible to their bodies in the same way as black people are. The white body presents a paradox in Ahmed's critique of the central



declaration of whiteness: “I/We must be seen” (2004c). As she argues, there must be bodies which are in fact white, but the power of whiteness lies in that we only see them as bodies, not as white bodies. In this research, I examine real live and created situations in which affective practices whiten white bodies and through which, I investigate racializing processes that in turn effectively make whiteness visible through the very corporeality of white, black or other non-white bodies. Before addressing the roles of bodies in the making of whiteness, I will briefly discuss performance and performativity theory as I employ it in my research.

### **Performances of Performative Whiteness**

To understand how the white body participates in producing whiteness, I use performativity theory by Judith Butler (1993). My interest lies primarily in performance as an aspect of lived experience and identities as an effect of performance. Knowles argues that performance is one of the social processes that makes whiteness, and she draws attention to “bodies and their posture, movement, attitudes, and habits” (2003: 184). I am using the concept of bodily performance by Goffman (1963) as a means through which to negotiate gendered stereotypes attached to “posture, movement and habits” (Knowles 2003: 184) in the performance of social roles.<sup>5</sup> My main concern, however, is with the performativity of identity and “the affects implied in identification with subject positions” (Bell 1999:1). As such I don't assume the identity of the individual to pre-exist before the enactment of rehearsed acts but work with the performative as developed by Butler.<sup>6</sup> In her understanding, before the act, there is no immanent self to be presented or disguised to an audience. Gender is constructed and achieved through continuous and compulsive citation of norms and reiteration of discourses.<sup>7</sup>

For Butler, the body is discursively constructed, and the material body and the subject are not experienced prior to or outside of discourse. Through performativity, subjects repeatedly re-enact not voluntary and self-conscious acts, but practices that reinforce

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<sup>5</sup> In particular in the performances *I Love Black Men* and *Cruising Black Women* (see *Chapter 4*).

<sup>6</sup> The term 'performative' was coined by J. L. Austin in 1975 and developed further most influentially by Butler in relation to gender identity as an issue of interiority (Alcoff 2006).

<sup>7</sup> “Gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed [...]. There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender [...] gender is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' which are said to be its results” (Butler 1993: 24-5).

sets of regulatory norms and the discourses through which they are constructed: performativity is “not the act by which a subject brings into being what she/he names, but rather, as that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains” (Butler 1993: 2). These regulatory schemas, in turn, achieve their power through citations: “The norm of sex takes hold to the extent to which it is 'cited' as such a norm, but it also derives its power through the citations that it compels” (1993: 134). Performative acts invoke conventions, illusions, and fictions that are deeply ingrained in discourses and social structures and are *inscribed in the body* via sanctions and regulations, and so create a sense of commonality (Butler 1988; my emphasis).

Theories of performance and performativity underpin the primacy of the body in theorizing about society and understanding subjectivity. Goffman's performance and Butler's performativity refer to some of the dynamics through which subjects try to fit into different social domains by managing their bodies in relation to social discourses and conventions. I work with an analytical framework that takes the body as a corporeal phenomenon seriously, while also allowing for incorporation of how social discourses and power relations have shaped it. In the following section, I discuss the conceptual framework I am using to investigate those situations when white and non-white bodies engage with each other.

## Sociology of the Body and Affect

The sociology of the body and corporeal feminism have directly addressed the crucial role of bodies in social and cultural theory. They are the scholarly home for this thesis, which is aiming to push these agendas forward and to add to scholarship that makes bodies<sup>8</sup> matter – which “thinks through the body”, to borrow Lisa Blackman's term<sup>9</sup> – in theorizing the self and the social (2008: 3). I briefly discuss Cartesian dualism<sup>10</sup> and the concept of the socially inscribed body before turning to the kind of body this research

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<sup>8</sup> The body is now commonly referred to in plural as 'bodies', because it is viewed not as a singular, bounded entity or substance (see Blackman 2008; Greco and Fraser 2005).

<sup>9</sup> What this entails according to Lisa Blackman is the following: “we need to be aware both of the bodily basis of thought and the cognitive component of bodily processes and vica versa. We also need to move beyond thinking of bodies as substances, as special kinds of *thing* or entities, to explore bodies as sites of potentiality, process and practice” (2008: 5, emphasis original).

<sup>10</sup> “Dualism is the belief that there are two mutually exclusive types of 'thing', physical and mental, body and mind, that compose the universe in general and subjectivity in particular” (Grosz 1994: vii).

works with based on concepts developed in materialist conceptualizations of difference. Finally, I discuss the turn to affect, its different conceptualizations and how I employ it in this research.

Arguably it is now commonplace to start any analysis of the body with a negative reference to Cartesian dualism (Fraser and Greco 2005). I want to start my thinking about bodies here too, at the “radicalised” distinction between mind and body attributed to René Descartes (Fraser and Greco 2005: 6).<sup>11</sup> The Cartesian dualism that privileged the mind over body, thought and meaning over material and corporeality, has influenced and preoccupied thinking and ideas about the nature of knowledge and the nature of bodies for centuries. This dualism has also informed subsequent binaries which rely on separation and are organized hierarchically, such as nature and culture, inside and outside, individual and the social.<sup>12</sup> In the hierarchy of these binaries, women, ethnic minorities, the working classes, people with different sexual orientations are placed in inferior positions. What has been termed by Blackman as “the problem of dualism” (2008: 4) has led to the marginalization of the role of the body in theories of subjectivity (Grosz 1994). By focusing on cognition, the body has been reduced to mere matter with no relevance to processes of thought.

The contrasting between the body as a fixed and involuntary set of physical processes that has to be restrained and the mind as will, subject to voluntary control and cultural influence, has resulted in a dominant cultural inscription paradigm. In this sociological tradition, cultural or social processes are inscribed and manifested in the apparently automatic thoughts, actions and habits of subjects. Cultural inscription is “the mode through which we become subjects” (Blackman 2008: 22). The body is “a malleable entity that cannot speak back”<sup>13</sup>: cultural influence, ideology, and power shape the body through the mind (Blackman 2008: 22; 16). Bodily matters are understood as the

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<sup>11</sup>Fraser and Greco point out that the Cartesian dualism should be addressed with caution and note that it might be in fact a 'Cartesian Legend' (2005: 6).

<sup>12</sup>Grosz adds an infinitive range to this list: “The mind/body relation is frequently correlated with the distinctions between reason and passion, sense and sensibility, outside and inside, self and other, depth and surface, reality and appearance, mechanism and vitalism, transcendence and immanence, temporality and spatiality, psychology and physiology, form and matter, and so on”(1994: 3).

<sup>13</sup> This formulation refers to bodily agency that enables the body to resist, “to speak back or refuse those positions it is invited to inhabit” (Blackman 2008: 63).

products of social structures and ideological processes. Cultural symbols, codes, signs and signifying and discursive practices constitute the self, which in turn leads to social/discourse determinism. Importantly, social constructionism is sought to overcome the mind/body split and essentialism<sup>14</sup> by arguing that the subject is symbolically constructed through social processes, interaction with others and the social world, rather than biologically determined.

The question for this research is what kind of body do I want to pull back into social theory and how do I think against dualisms when working with the white female body in conceptualizing anti-racist white femininities? As shown above, the socially inscribed body is “shaped, constrained and even invented by society” (Shilling 1993: 70). Power shapes the body through discourse, and the body is a passive recipient, an “inert mass”, to use a standard phrase used by body scholars (Shilling 1993: 80; Woodward 1997: 79 in Blackman 2008: 28). The socially inscribed body has not overcome the Cartesian mind-body dualism, on the contrary:

Once the body is contained within modern disciplinary powers, it is the mind, which takes over as the location for discursive power. Consequently, the body tends to become inert mass, controlled by discourses centred on the mind (which is treated as if abstracted from an active human body). This ignores the idea of disciplinary power as 'lived practices' which do not simply mark themselves on people's thoughts, but permeate, shape and seek to control their sensuous and sensory experiences (Woodward 1997: 79 in Blackman 2008: 28).

Social constructionism has also dominated feminist work on the politics of the female body in the 1970s and 1980s. Conceptualising gender as socially constructed has been central to second wave feminist works, which defined the sex/gender division in terms of the separation of nature/body and culture. This uncritical adoption of the mind/body dualism concerns feminists who have begun to rethink the relationship between the

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<sup>14</sup> “Essentialism is classically defined as a belief in true essence – that which is most irreducible, unchanging and therefore constitutive of a given person or thing.” (Fuss 1990: 2).

social markings of difference and embodied subjectivity. Concepts to “rematerialize the body in culture” (Blackman 2008: 74) have been developed to understand it as a process rather than substance. The emergent corporeal turn in feminism addresses the problem of materiality.<sup>15</sup> New thinking is emerging on how the body, as “a blank surface ready to be inscribed” (Brook 1999: 11 quoted in Blackman 2008: 73), can be disposed of, expanded. This has led to the development of a more complex understanding of how social and discursive practices and cultural norms transform the body. Further to this, there has been a growing awareness of the need for feminist thinking to grapple with a more complex understanding of self-formation beyond the sexual difference that early second-wave feminism was concerned with, and to address raced, classed and other differences that profoundly shape subjectivity.

Elizabeth Grosz tackled head on the legacy of Cartesian dualism in feminism's uncritical adoption of masculinist philosophy's somatophobia (1994). Her work is crucial for this thesis as she has repositioned bodies in social theory in a way that is not based on separation but connection and interaction. She argues that the equation of women with irrationality and the “frail, imperfect, unruly, and unreliable” body and thus, with the inability to produce knowledge stems from patriarchal ideology and oppression (1994: 13). Against reproducing this ideology by devaluing or side-lining the body and female corporeality, she sets up a conceptual apparatus that acknowledges the sexual and racial specificity of bodies and subjectivities and the markers of corporeal difference: “Bodies are always irreducibly sexually specific, necessarily interlocked with racial, cultural and class particularities” (1994: 19). By theorizing a “field” of other kinds than “white, youthful, able, male” bodies and subjectivities, the materiality of bodies and their complex “interlocking” with the social can be comprehended in a way that is not simply an intersection of sex, race, and class, “but by way of mutual constitution” (1994: 20). Importantly, “the body is not opposed to culture ... it is itself a cultural, *the* cultural, product” (1994: 23, emphasis original). But in Grosz's re-conceptualization of the body, which follows an extensive overview of works in philosophy, psychoanalysis, neurology, social and feminist theory, the “psychical and social dimensions” are indeed interacting. There is a complex relationality between the materiality of bodies and their “social,

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<sup>15</sup>Here I am not referring to new materialism, as defined by the collection *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency and Politics* (2010) edited by Coole, D. and Frost, S. Durham: Duke University Press.

political, cultural and geographical inscriptions, production, or constitution”: the field of non-ideal types of bodies are neither pure biological matter nor simple “inscriptive surface” (1994: 23, 139). They are fleshy materiality that is lived and experienced by subjects positioned within cultural norms, power structures, and restraints, and thus are as much “soma” as they are “psyche”, equally inside and outside, like the Möbius strip she uses as a metaphor.

This repositioning of bodies in theory is crucial to the endeavours of this thesis, particularly concerning the reframing of ‘body image’ Grosz provides through her critique of psychoanalysis. As further discussed below, breaking down these dualisms is vital to understanding bodies beyond the limiting focus of external surface or appearance that disregards the delicate interplay of other factors. As the interface through which subjects encounter, are encountered and interact with the world around them, what is externally visible on the body is an element of corporeal experience that must be acknowledged. But, unless positioned in relation to the complex inside/outside interconnection suggested by Grosz, this outside risks merely reducing bodies to their surface.

A further question related to the kind of body I want to work with is how to think beyond the interaction between the biological and social, inside and outside through a conceptual framework that is, at the same time, guarded against reductionism of any kind, be that essentialism or social/discursive determinism? How to think beyond the body as a passive mass that is written upon and at its best constrains the ways in which the social world influences the individual but is never active, living, and able to react back and respond? I am seeking a framework that avoids reproducing the separation between the biological and cultural body. Feminism has been criticized for the conceptualisation of the biological body as politically and materially static and impenetrable, and the cultural body as changeable and transformative even if only on its surface (Wilson 1998; Kirby 1997 in Fraser and Greco 2005).

I want to argue for an embodied perspective of subject formation. One that expands the concept of social influence and does not work with the interaction of pre-existing and separate entities but applies a relational view between nature and culture, self and social, and provides an analysis of the complexity of this relationality. Therefore, I frame my

thinking on the body in a tradition that seeks to overcome the mind-body dualism (Blackman 2008). I employ the “somatically felt body” (Sheets-Johnston 1992: 3) to challenge the Cartesian mass body through its permeability to the outside, and to put the disconnection between the inside and outside into question. As Blackman puts it: this *thinking and feeling body* “is one that is never singular and never bounded so that we clearly know where we end, and another begins” (2008: 10). Further, she suggests that:

The somatically felt body has aliveness or vitality that is literally felt or sensed but cannot necessarily be articulated, reduced to physiological processes or to the effect of social structures (2008: 30).

The somatically felt body permeates the boundaries between nature and culture, inside and outside, and inextricably connects body and mind, and the individual to the social. Refusing to accept the uncritical use of the concept of social influence, in my analysis gendered and racialized bodies are permeable, opened to affect and to being affected. Starting with the presumption that mind and body are inseparably connected, and that thinking is an embodied process where non-conscious perception, sensation, and affectivity play a crucial role, I place an emphasis not only on external social and cultural influence on the body but on the relationality of the outside and the inside. The bodies I work with are thinking, feeling, pulsing, connecting, affecting, living: continuously entering into relation with themselves and other bodies and with the social world, and continually changing as a result of this relation. Subject formation in this framework is an inherently embodied process. In this embodied perspective that employs the somatically felt body and its affects, “the body and mind are simultaneously engaged, and that similarly reason and passion, intelligence and feeling, are employed together” and are viewed as complex relational processes (Hardt 2007: xi).

My focus of analysis is this relation that bridges across these divides: the ways in which the cultural inscription of bodily differences of 'race' and gender have become embodied in often habitual ways, and “pass into our very being and becoming” (Blackman 2008: 58), through focussing on their affective dimensions and entanglements. My analysis takes shape in the context of what has been termed “the affective turn” (Berlant 1997), which, following the work of 1980s feminist theorists such as Audre Lorde (1984),

Elizabeth Spleman (1990), and Catherine Lutz (1988), who were interested in women's emotional lives and labours, in the last two decades has been defined by an emerging interest in “emotions, feelings, and affect (and their differences)” as “objects of scholarly interest” (Cvetkovich 2012: 133). Affects point towards the capacity of the body to think and feel, and are processes that connect: they are being passed between subjects, self and other, and through these connections and relations sustain our sense of subjectivity:

The concept of affect [...] refers to a realm of feeling that is not self-contained and separate but rather enhanced and produced through the relations between the self and other (Blackman 2008: 52).

Some scholars see in the turn to affects a call for re-centring the body as a definitive break with discursive, structural, linguistic and textual analysis (Massumi 1995). Others consider the affective turn as an extension of the “discursive turn”, which challenged the scientific superiority of “detached reason” and “objective observation” over the emotional and subjective, paving the way for a “resurgence of empirical and theoretical interest in emotions” (Greco and Stenner 2008: 5). I align with this latter approach, and rather than placing corporeality, embodiment and affect in opposition to discourse and the social construction of the concepts of 'race' and gender, I examine their interrelations, and investigate how the material, the affective, the discursive and the structural are mutually co-constitutive.

## White Affect

In developing the concept of white affect my interest is to understand the making of anti-racist white femininities through their affective dimensions—and not to posit another theory or definition to affect, which has already been variously defined by different theorists.<sup>16</sup> Affect theory can broadly be channelled into two approaches that are commonly traced back to the publication in the same year of both Eve Sedgwick and Adam Frank's *Shame in the Cybernetic Fold* (1995) and Brian Massumi's *The Autonomy of*

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<sup>16</sup> Affects can be more generally described as the capacity of bodies to affect and be affected by others, the “processes that produce bodies as always open to others, human and non-human, and as unfinished rather than stable entities” (Blackman and Cromby 2007: 6).



*Affect* (1995). Studies following Sedgwick and Silvan Tomkins (1962, 1963) psychobiology of differential affects tend to presume the innate, evolutionary function of affects which are also clearly identifiable. Studies drawing from Massumi and Gilles Deleuze's (1987) Spinozist exploration of the possibilities of embodied becoming tend to consider affects as aspects of the immanence of bodies and worlds in constant flux. These explanatory frameworks offer useful insights, particularly on the dynamic and mobile character of affect that point to processes of vitality that pass and circulate between bodies, but I contend that social sense-making, cognition, meaning, interpretation and social and cultural context cannot be omitted when theorizing whiteness and anti-racist white femininities, which both approaches by-pass. In Tomkins' approach affects are produced as reflex-like, automatic corporeal responses and human subjects are driven by "discrete affects which were innate states hard-wired into the brain" rather than by the dynamics of sociality and subjectivity (Blackman 2012: 18). The discrete sets of Tomkins' eight 'basic affects' and the later works of Paul Ekman and Antonio Damasio that are framed under the umbrella term of 'basic emotions thesis' with lists of emotions ranging from 17 to eight or six have been criticised for their framing of emotions as innate and universal across culture (Wetherell 2012). The analysis of anti-racist white femininities that I am developing in this thesis insists on the embeddedness of the somatic and affective experiences in everyday routines, situations and sense-making processes of social life. Thus the kind of universal and fixed patterns assumed by the basic emotions thesis is of little use for my purposes. In fact, as my research has unfolded, the messiness of affects in the flow of everyday life became increasingly clear. Separating distinct affects as the units of analysis may have seemed methodologically promising but the highly context-specific and muddled mix of affective states I have encountered soon directed the research away from settling on basic chunks of clearly identifiable affects.<sup>17</sup>

In works following Massumi's theory, a half-second delay between affect and cognition

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<sup>17</sup> The research has started by focusing on shame, that amongst diverse emotions and affects, such as anger, hate, fear, paranoia, envy, and love, stands out as a topic that Tomkins treated with particular interest and which most authors have addressed, in particular in relation to feminist theory (Sedgwick 1995; Ahmed 2004; Probyn 2005). Shame has been investigated in this research as an affect that is argued to sharpen the sense of what one is, where the question of identity arises most originally and relationally, while at the same time aims toward sociability: "Shame is the affect that mantles the threshold between introversion and extroversion, between absorption and theatricality, between performativity – and performativity" (Sedgwick, 1995: 210). See my *Freeing Up Shame* performance staged in Brazil, 2012.

grant affect its potential autonomy from meaning and interpretation (Massumi 1995, Thrift 2008). In this framework, affective processes do not require a subject. Moreover, once a human subject registers the force of affect and is experienced as emotion or feeling, its potential is closed down and blocked. The debate over whether affects can be distinguished from emotions is still ongoing (see Ngai 2004) and inextricably linked to the discussion about the role of the psyche and cognition in the circulation of affect. It is not my intention to entering into this debate, but while I uphold the claim that affect and emotion can be considered as separate (but closely linked) phenomena, I also concur with those theorists who suggest that affects work in a fundamentally embodied way but don't occur within a purely corporeal realm sealed off from consciousness. In this view, affects are implicated in both the corporeal and the cognitive simultaneously (Williams 1977, Wetherell 2012). In Massumi's characterization of affect as pre-cognitive intensities of the body, the autonomous responses of the body are registered as affects and are temporally detached from cognitive thought and meaning. Ruth Leys has directly challenged this model for its biological reductionism in "having succumb[ed] to a false dichotomy between mind and matter" (2011: 457). Other critiques such as Clare Hemming's have pointed to the risk in Massumi's model of a disconnection between meaning and affect, and between ideology and the body (2012). Hemming argues that this disconnect might lead to "a relative indifference to the role of ideas and beliefs in politics in favour of an 'ontological' concern with people's corporeal-affective experiences of the political images and representations that surround them" (Hemmings 2005: 668, quoted in Blackman 2012: 17). Despite the exciting promise of this model in drawing attention to process, becoming, movement, and the capacities of bodies to affect and to be affected, it disregards a crucial aspect of my research. As shown above, it is argued that white bodies are made visible through power, ideologies, and norms (Dyer 1997). I contend that white domination and privilege cannot be examined without exploring power structures, ideologies and their affects on bodies. Thus, I aim to consider how affects work in conjunction with other factors such as the ideological positioning of bodies within norms and power structures (Ahmed 2004c; Blackman 2011).

In analysing anti-racist white femininities as affective performances, the framework I work with understands affects as mobile, continual flow and circulation of intensities

experienced corporeally. Affects are also a node through which modes of sociality and how these are situated and connected can be examined, in a way that neither side-lines cognition nor the material body. In Wetherell's words: "Affect is about sense and sensibility" (2012: 13). While affect has opened theorizing to a range of social agents, my focus is on the human, and on processes of embodied subjectivity and meaning-making in the circulation of affect. I aim to address the body that is "not physically or visually limited by their external surface, and in fact can be seen as emerging through relational engagement with other bodies, social norms, ideas and pressures" (Chalklin 2012: 73).

For this thesis, the model of 'affective practice' developed by Wetherell has particularly useful. Affective practice allows for an analysis of the embodiment of affect, of how it is embedded in situated practice, patterned, ordered and circulated. It enables thinking the individual through 'relational capacity' and interconnectedness. Wetherell explains affective practice as:

In affective practice, bits of the body (e.g. facial muscles, thalamic-amygdala pathways in the brain, heart rate, regions of the prefrontal cortex, sweat glands, etc.) get patterned together with feelings and thoughts, interaction patterns and relationships, narratives and interpretative repertoires, social relations, personal histories, and ways of life. (2012: 13-14).

In developing my argument on attending to the complexity of corporeal processes that take part in making whiteness and proposing white affect as a conceptual tool, I am drawing on recent scholarship that works with affect in theorizing racial difference (Muñoz 2000; Saldanha 2007). My approach to work with the concept of affective practice is different to that of José Esteban Muñoz, who follows Raymond Williams's 'structure of feeling' (1977) in order describe how race and ethnicity can be understood as 'affective difference'. Muñoz explains 'affective difference' as "the ways in which various historically coherent groups 'feel' differently and navigate the material world on a different emotional register" (2000: 70). I concur with Muñoz' contestation that instead

of identity politics affect theory might be a better way of examining identifications and affiliations between ethnic and racialized groups, and that “the performance of whiteness primarily transpires on an affective register”. Yet, I am not interested in finding out what “feeling white” “in a normative life world” means (2000: 68). On the contrary, I would argue against any project invested in finding out how whites feel about “an official 'national affect that is aligned with a hegemonic class” (2000: 68). The focus of Muñoz's work was indeed not on whiteness, but on ethnic and racial minorities. He conceptualized “feeling brown” as the burden and possibility of feeling inappropriate, as an embodied way of being that marks out and homogenises all people of colour in terms of their affective excess (2000: 68).

The work of Arun Saldanha on whiteness is closer to my project (2007). In Saldanha's materialist critique of social constructionism, 'race' emerges “as an event, not how it is known through discourse and in people's minds” (2007: 8). As a geographer, he is interested in the materiality of spaces and bodies. He doesn't “ground his thought in negativity and representation” (2007: 10). Saldanha approaches 'race' through the concept of viscosity, which, as he claims, “allows for a fundamentally spatial way of imagining race, as opposed to collapsing it into a disembodied and mental contraption” that he argues is done in much theory (2007: 10). I am using his conceptualisation of 'race' as an event, something that emerges in embodied encounters and constantly negotiated, made and remade in daily life through material practices at the level of bodies. I am interested in investigating the affective nature of racializing discourses: in how the body takes part in the construction of meaning. As such, the approach I am taking does not separate the body from meaning-making and does not imply that a material realm exists beyond social construction. Saldanha's approach has been criticized for indicating that “representations are themselves immaterial, floating free of the bodies that created them, meaning without substance” (Kobayashi 2009: 505; see also Gunaratnam 2003). This thesis aims to investigate and expand on what we know about the very acts of construction, not only “the symbolic result” (Kobayashi 2009: 505), but about the affective processes in the performance of meaning which cannot be separated from the bodies that produce it.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have begun a process of critically reviewing the role of the white body and its affective dimensions in the making of whiteness. In the first part of the chapter I gave an overview of the study of whiteness. I paid particular attention to how anti-racist research on whiteness can be conducted that does not single out whiteness as an autonomous entity in itself and that excludes others from view but is placed within histories of racism. I noted that the white body occupies an ambiguous place in the literature and that whiteness is mostly referred to as a universal norm and as a non-colour in racial visual schemas.

It is from here that I begin to develop a reconsideration of the body in social theory from a feminist materialist theorization that challenges social inscription models, and draws on affect theories. Affect presents the conceptual starting point for this thesis, which proceeds to explore contemporary anti-racist white femininities as affective performances of 'race' and gender. I retain “the analytical eye” on the white body as a corporeal phenomenon and on its affective practices “as a basis for action, subjectivity and society” (Schilling 2012: 102). By theorizing whiteness through its affective dimensions, I aim to contribute to an understanding of whiteness as a racial category, examined as a discursive and corporeal phenomenon delimited in time and space and to pre-empting it as a “mirage” of an unmarked norm (Frankenberg 1997: 5).

## Chapter 2. Towards an Artful and Performative Live Sociology

*In the meantime, in the course of daily travel and repose, I practice a visual sociology. A visual sociology not of direct formulation, not for the testing of hypotheses, not for the collection of data, but a practice in the living of a life.*  
*Visual sociology as a fine art; life as a fine art.*  
*The only proof is the practice itself. And any consequence of a life so lived.*  
Richard Quinney, 1995: 61

This chapter presents a critical reflection on a methodological strategy that has allowed me to perform an artful<sup>18</sup> sociological type of research in relation to more established modes of sociological inquiry. My research combines semi-structured interviews and the creation of performative situations through artistic research methods. Central to this chapter is the question of whether artistic research methods can be applied to produce social research in order to reveal sociological knowledge pertaining to affect that might not be revealed by other, more traditional approaches. I take up the proposition of 'live sociology'—immersive and attentive research—developed by Les Back and Nirmal Puwar, who claim that “widening the parameters of what counts as sociological research will strengthen rather than weaken the discipline” (2012: 12).

This methodological strategy grants a balanced focus between interviewing and artistic research methods. My research project investigates the body in/as performance and applies a research methodology which allows for a shift from performance as the object of investigation to performance as a means of investigating (Barrett 2009). Performance constitutes a research method alongside the more traditional and empirical method of conducting semi-structured interviews. Art practice too is presented as an actual method of thinking and social knowing. I pursue artful live sociology that involves “considering the essences of traditional research models in order to understand, critique and appropriate them according to need” (Stewart 2009: 126). Departing from Visual

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<sup>18</sup> I explore art here as an ensemble of practices, performances, experiences and artefacts rather than as a singular object (a painting or a sculpture) (Dixon 2008; Hawkins 2010). This attentiveness to art practices in addition to the finished object points to understandings of art as a site where “new multi-dimensional knowledge and identities are constantly in the process of being formed” (Rogoff 2000: 20; quoted in Hawkins 2011: 465).

Sociology and excavating the tenets of art practice, I evoke a range of senses and affects that go beyond the visual,<sup>19</sup> and apply these to my research methodology in order to develop a sociological argument. I propose that the performances present not only a visual argument accompanying the written thesis, but that they too create realities in the locations where they were staged, even if only temporarily (Law 2004). Arguing for 'artful and performative live sociology' I aim to produce effects and transformations—realities and new versions of the social—which I consequently map out in Chapters 4 and 5. I use the terms 'artful sociology' and 'artistic research methods' to emphasise my argument in favour of expanding sociological research through an artful approach. In this chapter I propose using art as a sociological research method alongside a focus on the 'fuller use' of bodies, that is, paying close attention to corporeal senses and affects in ways that are often elided in the narrow application of 'visual' sociology. "It is the 'imagination", writes Mills, "that sets off the social scientist from the mere technician" (1970: 211). In this chapter, I trace how my imagination has aided me in designing the research. Using the combination of semi-structured interviews with artistic research methods—and thus moving beyond the constraints of traditional sociological practice—it became possible to transform the body from an externally made, discursive construct (Butler 1988) to a physical, real, somatically felt body (Blackman 2008) that is knowable in reason and in the flesh (Pink 2012).

This chapter is composed of two main parts. In the first part of the chapter, I describe the semi-structured interviewing technique employed in this research. In the second part I elaborate on and propose a methodology of artful and performative live sociology, as a model for doing Visual Sociology. I present the artistic practice and the interventions<sup>20</sup> that I initiated in the different settings of my field of research and, specifically, I discuss how they have helped to shape my thinking about the role of bodies and affect in the making of anti-racist white femininities. I close the chapter with a short reflection on issues of reflexivity and ethics in this research.

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<sup>19</sup>Following Sarah Pink, I understand the visual in social research methods as referring to visual images and to the processes through which they are created with photography, video (film) and digital hypermedia as the main technologies of their production (2001).

<sup>20</sup>Following Hawkins, I understand intervening to mean using artistic practices "as productive, as doing work in the world" (2015: 253). "In other words, close readings or listenings—whether for cadence, rhythm, rhyme, timbre, colour, the decodings of iconography or even attunements to affect—are not just conducted for their own sake but as the means to understand how these creative practices go to work" (2015: 253).

## Performing and Interviewing White Woman

In the first stage of this research (between 2011 and 2013), I created a music video (*Jane and Atinuke*), a sound installation (*Untitled*), four performances (*I Love Black Men*, *Freeing Up Shame*, *Cruising Black Women*, *The Blush Machine*), and two exhibitions (*Visualising Affect* and *The Future of Art is Urban*). Then, between June and October 2014, I interviewed anti-racist activist white women. I staged the last performance of this research project in July 2014 (*The Chamber of White*), immediately following the first three interviews that I had conducted. My art practice, which I elaborate on below, has helped me to investigate issues and questions relating specifically to the embodied affective experiences of social conventions and discourses of 'race' and gender, the invisibility of whiteness, the role of the visual and other senses in racialization, and artistic research methods in sociology.

I chose to use art as a research method because it enabled me to activate my own body and the body of the participants as a conceptual entry point in my performance-based research. The performances I developed allowed me to encounter, listen to, and sense performing bodies in order to collect information and to gain a deeper understanding about the workings of affect as it is attached to and moves around white female bodies. It has been argued that other, more established sociological methods such as ethnography is embodied because it requires the bodily presence and immersive involvement of the researcher in a way that other methods don't (Coffey 1999). My research—because it is about the body—requires greater attention to the body than classical ethnography can provide. Creating performative situations through artistic research methods has enabled me to gain access to those registers of human experience that cannot be adequately expressed through words. Through my staged performances, however, it was possible to investigate social discourses as they are co-constituted with lived experience, that is, how they “intermingle and inhabit one another” (Gunaratnam 2003: 7). Because the qualitative interview “works with words” and aims to “[obtain] nuanced descriptions from the different qualitative aspects of the interviewee's life world” (Kvale 1996: 32), I wanted to apply a method that works directly with the body and its affects and does not require language as a means of accessing lived experience. A method, moreover, which is capable of problematizing “the centrality and centredness of language in relation to the meanings embedded in cultural experience” (Willis 2000:



10). Throughout this thesis (and in Part III in particular), I demonstrate that meaning does not only reside in language but in the body as a whole. I show the “critical importance” of “sensuous meaning” (2000: 13). Furthermore, I demonstrate how language and embodied meaning-making processes—“abstract and sensuous forms of knowing”—are connected, and that, in fact, language is also embodied (2000: 13).

This interconnection between language—“the principal instrument of reason” (Willis 2000: 11)—and affective and sensuous meaning-making processes informed each other and are at the core of the two methods I employ in this research. I interviewed eleven participants aged between 31 and 68 at the time of the interviews, which took place between June and October 2014. The selection of the eleven interviewees was not random. I used my professional and personal contacts to approach women whom I knew had been working in anti-racism and feminist contexts in Europe and who identified as white. The basis of a selection of the questions that I asked during the semi-structured interviews was derived from the issues raised by the artworks which I developed prior to conducting the interviews. This refers especially to my performances of *I Love Black Men*, *Cruising Black Women* and *The Blush Machine*. Without having developed and experienced these performances first, I would not have been able to have the sense of what to ask the interviewees, nor would I have obtained the same kinds of accounts from my participants. Furthermore, during the interviews, much was unspoken, left to vibrate in the air, and could not be captured on tape or in video recording. These interview processes were intensively affective such that the words uttered throughout could only, at best, indicate reminders of intense corporeal episodes. As I transcribed my interviews, I felt much frustration as there wasn't any way to even give a sense of how those moments actually played out. The only way I felt I could transmit these experiences was through art, and specifically, through performance. In my last performance piece, *The Chamber of White* (see Chapter 5) I worked in the affective experiences of the first three interviews.

The creation of performative situations—spaces of social encounter with performances of affective white femininities—allowed me to learn about how bodies take part in meaning-making processes. In this sense, I picked up the thread of the interviews, the knowledge gained through a recounting of life histories of actual living white women. I placed the figure of 'white woman' alongside the white female body in dense affective

fields as a way of experiencing in my own flesh the affects of 'race' and gender; this was also my intention for the visitors of my performances. In these constructed situations it was possible to explore affective dimensionality, situated and contextual experiences (Haraway 1988) and multisensory experiences “in ways not enabled by traditional textual representation” (Leavy 2015: 183). John Law argues that methodology in social sciences is not a set of procedures intended to report on a given reality; “rather it is performative. It helps to produce realities” (2004: 143). The realities that were produced and performed in my interviews and performances were mutually constitutive not only in my ability to then develop an approach to whiteness as affect, but in their envisioning of an anti-racist reality during the encounter.

### **Feminist Interviewing**

In performing qualitative interviews, I conducted “conversations with a purpose” (Mason 1996: 38). The approach I followed is not one of data collection, but data generation, where data is co-produced between the interviewer and interviewee(s) as a result of their interaction (Mason 1996). I conducted one-to-one interviews, where voices and experiences of a sensitive nature, such as racism and sexism, could be approached sensitively and opened up as part of a dialogue so as to produce fuller accounts (Byrne 2004). Here, a useful resource was the tradition of feminist qualitative interviewing, which seeks to capture “voices and experiences 'from below'” (Byrne 2004: 182). The feminism espoused by this research lies in my concern with the tenets of a distinctively feminist approach to research and knowledge making, a model that, since the 1980s, has been framed as an inquiry “that recognised and overturned systemic gender disparities, validated women’s 'experience', rejected hierarchies between the researcher and research participant, and had emancipation and social change as its purpose” (Gunaratnam and Hamilton 2017: 1). This research was guided by my desire to conduct a feminist research practice despite the fact that the debate of what a feminist methodology entails is still ongoing (see Reinharz 1992; Bryman 2004; Gunaratnam and Hamilton 2017). According to Beverly Skeggs, the goals of feminism can be pursued through a practice “with its emphasis on experiences and the words, voice and lives of the participants” (2001: 430) and by providing a space “for the articulations and experiences of the marginalized” (1997: 23, quoted in Bryman 2004: 310).

Feminist scholars have argued that semi-structured, in-depth face-to-face interviewing is the “paradigmatic 'feminist method'” within a feminist research framework (Kelly et al. 1994: 34; quoted in Bryman 2004: 336). Drawing on the work of Ann Oakley, Alan Bryman explains that this is because in a semi-structured interview a high level of rapport between interviewer and interviewee, and simultaneously a high level of reciprocity can be established on the part of the interviewer. Thus, the perspective of the woman being interviewed can more easily be taken into account and a non-hierarchical relationship can be achieved (Bryman 2004, Oakley 1981). Feminist researchers argue that documenting women's lives while also understanding their perspective and context is significant (Reinharz 1992). My background of having worked for over ten years in anti-racist advocacy and activism and having experienced many of the issues that the research is concerned with provided me with a high degree of sensibility and sensitivity that I could bring to the interview situation. Although this experience was at times uncomfortable, it ultimately helped me to better relate to some of the experiences that my interviewees shared with me.

I did not regard interviews as either statistically representative nor were they analyzed as representative of the interviewees' lives. Rather, I worked with the interview material by considering the “particular moment in which certain representations of their [the interviewees] subjectivities were produced” (Byrne 2006: 31). I expected that a rich source for my research would be the interviewees' discussions of the particular moments and periods in which they joined and worked in the anti-racist movement. In fact, prior to conducting the interviews I imagined that I would find a heightened sense and awareness of the interviewees' whiteness and gender in direct relation to their work, but also a more nuanced understanding of the constructed nature of these categories as a result. I employed a life history approach, whereby interviewees were invited to look back at their lives during our interviews. The life history approach documents “the inner experience of individuals, how they interpret, understand, and define the world around them” (Faraday and Plummer 1979: 776). Here, my emphasis was less on the different histories of their life stages than on how interviewees accounted for affective practices in the development of their subjectivities.

I interviewed women who are based in various European countries in order to add to the mostly British and US whiteness literature that this research draws on. As this was a

principal aim, it also meant that I needed to interview eight women online, via Skype, as travelling across Europe was not manageable financially and personally (during the interview period I was pregnant and then had a new-born).

While social scientists tend to regard face-to-face encounters as the optimal way to actively engage research participants in constructing knowledge, the lower cost is one of the main advantages of conducting interviews online as opposed to having to travel between locations (James and Busher 2009). In cases when face-to-face contact is absent, in the “disembodied, anonymous” environment when visual and verbal clues are missing, researchers might struggle to be sure about “the authenticity and identity of online contributions” (2009: 13; 17). In my case, that I knew most of the women before the interview (see Appendix 1) and that I conducted interviews via Skype video and made video recordings of these interviews enabled me to maintain face-to-face contact and the identification of the interviewees. Even though I did not share a physical space with them, I could capture not only what they said but also how they said it, changes in facial expressions and non-verbal comments (e.g. 'Ahmmm...'). I conducted all interviews in real-time which allowed for a high level of “immediacy and engagement with the topic being discussed” (2009: 26). Even though the “bodily element” was reduced in Skype interviewing, I maintain that “meanings can still be created when there is a physical distance between researcher and participants” (2009: 40).

The analysis presented here is based on the interviews and on four performances produced during the research (*I Love Black Men Cruising Black Women*, *The Blush Machine* and *The Chamber of White*). Both methods were used to generate data for analysis. Harriet Hawkins states that “creative methods rarely stand alone but are often situated as part of a tool-box of investigative techniques: used by researchers and artists alike” (2015: 263). She offers three “analytics” to navigate the intersections between art and geography, which I adapted to my sociological research. These are firstly the “changing orientations towards the sites of art’s production and consumption”, secondly “art’s investigation of bodies and experiences”, and thirdly “an ontological project around the practice and materiality of 'art'” (2012: 55). Concerning the first, I consider the performances as relational and event-based socially engaged works that “take human

relations as subjects” (2012: 58) and as their site<sup>21</sup>. The political potential of the artworks lies in how they establish relations and how they imagine how these relations could be otherwise, in the potential of creating connections across and envisioning moving beyond categories of 'race' and gender. Here, according to Hawkins, the imperative of the investigation of the artworks lies in “what these forms of art 'do', or are claimed to 'do', regarding building communities and places, but also in the name of radical politics” (2012: 57). The second analytic relates to an engagement “with the body as something through which research is done” and considers the role of art as a “'lab' for sensory exploration” (2012 60; 61). Telling in this regard is the choice to name the performance space where I installed *The Chamber of White*, 'Performance Sense Laboratory'. The third analytic entails a potential of art to serve as a social science research method oriented at “increasingly practice-based explorations of worlds, subjects, and knowledge in-the-making” (2012: 65). With this research, I want to demonstrate the epistemological work that these explorations offer for the discipline through an “ongoing material making and shaping of the world” (2012: 65).

### **Arts-Based Social Research**

This research adds to the new modes of producing research and disseminating its results that have emerged in the last decades “beyond the flat page of the academic journal article or book” (Puwar 2012: 124). A growing number of social researchers are using media technologies, including film, photography, audio (Pink 2001; Blunt et al. 2003; Knowles and Sweetman 2003; Rose 2005, 2010; Blunt and Dowling 2006; Kuhn and McAllister 2006; Back 2007; Hawkins 2015), and also increasingly art formats like theatre, performance, installation and curatorial practice (Denzin 2003; Latour 2007; Puwar and Sharma 2012; Jungnickel 2013). Still, it remains the case that “the inclusion of audio or visual material in the context of ethnographic social research has been little more than 'eye candy' or 'background listening' to the main event on the page” (Back 2012: 27). By employing artistic research methods, I want to show how sociological research can step out of the so-called flat page to an embodied and performative creative practice.

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<sup>21</sup>I understand site in this respect as an “immanent, material connection between bodies and unfolding, situated practices” (Woodward et al., 2009: 273 quoted in Hawkins 2012: 59).

While taking inspiration from existing artworks by female artists whose work can be located within feminist and anti-racist art (see Chapter 4), this research is *not* one that examines visual art practices already out there in the world as distinct from my research project. I staged the performances, videos, installations, and exhibitions discussed here in different art settings, and these were then perceived by various audiences as artworks and art exhibitions. My process of making these works was however not driven by producing artworks and exhibitions in the art world, but rather to use art as a research method to access and uncover information that traditional sociological methods are less suited to capture, namely embodied knowledge and affect. I actively used the performances, alongside and in a mutually reinforcing way, with evidence generated through the interviews that I conducted. Until recently, making images as a way of answering research questions was relatively rare and dispersed across the social sciences, but is now forming a persistent body of work and continuously growing (Rose 2005). The performances that I produced are therefore not mere illustrations of some aspects of the research, not just a “largely redundant visual representation of something already described in the text” (Banks 2001: 144, quoted in Rose 2005: 237).

I thus demonstrate how art practice can enrich sociological research and, in doing so, establishes connections between the two. “The arts can uniquely educate, inspire, illuminate, resist, heal, and persuade [...] it is for these reasons [...] that innovative scholars across the disciplines have harnessed the power of the arts in their social research”, writes Patricia Leavy (2015: ix.). In her own discipline of geography, Hawkins sees the turn to creative practices as offering the potential to explore “embodied and practice-based doings” (2015: 248). According to her, creative practice “demands the means by which to engage, research and re-present the sensory experiences, emotions, affective atmospheres and flows of life”, while also “grasp[ing] the messy, unfinished and contingent” (2015: 248). These are the fields of engagement that this research seeks to further develop within the discipline of sociology.

When it comes to articulating a research methodology that encapsulates a variety of arts-based or artistic processes, the terms 'art practice' and 'performative' are those which are most debated and referred to. In the following sections, I elaborate on artistic research methods and what this means in relation to my research. I then turn to discuss the performative and elucidate key lines of debates with regard to my methodology.

Finally, I elaborate on my specific proposition of artful and performative live sociology.

Artistic models of inquiry have been captured by a variety of approaches. Leavy uses the term 'arts-based research' and points out that with the growth of artistic research methods in recent decades the literature has been flooded with a frantic labelling that aims to distinguish this work and its practitioners, which in many cases adds to confusion (2015). To illustrate her point she put together a table of twenty-four terms ranging from 'art-practice as research' to 'transformative inquiry through art' (2015: 5). The social scientist Helga Nowotny (2010), for example, prefers 'artistic-research' instead of arts-based research, for the term's ability to emphasize the analogy to scientific research. Further, these more experimental approaches which draw on the arts are often presented as encompassing entirely new directions. For Leavy, arts-based social research pushes the borders of an alternative research paradigm<sup>22</sup> to the quantitative and qualitative (2015).

I am not concerned with labelling and the question of whether or not artistic research can be considered an additional research paradigm. The crucial aspect of this debate for my study is the epistemological question of how artistic research methods enable a way of sociological knowing. The striking difference and potential benefit of arts-based research are that “it might reveal new ways of researching and provide insights and understanding beyond the arts themselves” (Biggs and Karlsson 2010: 2). This 'something new' is firstly the knowledge that is acquired through the methods of arts-based research. This is a kind of knowledge that offers a challenge to the dominant model of a scientific concept of knowledge, namely that which is arguably 'objective' and 'impersonal'. In contrast, “artistic knowledge seems to have more potential in relation to the human individual, their experience, their emotions and their embodied relationship with the world” (2010: 2). Secondly, the novelty of artistic research lies in its outputs, the artworks that “themselves embody knowledge or in some way play an instrumental role in the research or its communication” (2010: 2). The outcomes (embodied knowledge), and the outputs (artworks that embody and communicate this knowledge) then demonstrate the potential for arts-based research to have an impact “far beyond the arts”

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<sup>22</sup> Following Kuhn (1962), “a paradigm is a worldview through which knowledge is filtered” (quoted in Leavy 2015: 7).

(2010: 2). Similarly, for Henk Borgdorff the intrinsic nature of research in the arts is that “art practice—both the art object and the creative process—embodies situated, tacit knowledge that can be revealed and articulated by means of experimentation and interpretation” (2006: 18). Important for my research, is the growing recognition that artistic research methods can be put to use in social sciences:

[Arts-based research practices] *are a set of methodological tools used by researchers across the disciplines during all phases of social research, including data generation, analysis, interpretation and representation.* These emerging tools adapt the tenets of the creative arts in order to address social research questions in *holistic* and *engaged* ways in which *theory and practice are intertwined.* (Leavy 2015: ix; original emphasis).

In line with Leavy's argument and expanding on this prospect of using art as a set of methodological tools in all phases of social research, I contend that artistic research methods can offer new ways of doing sociology and not just in or for the arts, where this debate has mostly taken place (Borgdorff 2006). Following Leavy and Borgdorff, I would argue that artistic research methods can enable a holistic engagement with sociological theory and practice throughout the *entire* research process. Art practice—understood here to include both the means of production and the artwork as the output of the research—can become productive not just as inspiration, companion, or appendix to the written piece, but productive in their own right in sociological research. In this thesis, I demonstrate that the making of, the creative process itself, along with the artworks created, can be put to work in a sociological research project. I make the claim that these artworks have the potential to reveal the situated and embodied knowledge that this research aims to produce.

## **Performative Social Science**

This thesis develops a performative approach to social research and aims to expand the framework offered by Performative Social Science (PSS). PSS is understood as a methodological framework for scholars who are 'courageously' adopting artistic research methods and techniques to disseminate new knowledge for audiences beyond the



academic arena:

'Performative' in the widest sense of the word, has become' a 'working title' for the efforts of social science researchers who are exploring the use of tools from the arts in research itself and/or using them to enhance, or move beyond, PowerPoint conference presentations or traditional journal submissions in their dissemination efforts. Those engaging in this new 'Performative Social Science' are often shifting existing boundaries or transforming them through relational processes (Yallop et al. 2008: 1).

PSS is thus a space for artistic and social science research practices to interact, where individuals and groups are stepping out of the transcribed interview text and field note observations “as acting, interacting, touching and feeling, making sense of and representing their live experiences through a variety of media” (Roberts 2008: 17). While I concur with this emphasis on embodied forms of representation and meaning-making, I intend to move beyond the concern with dissemination and sense-making. Law argues that these realities which are produced through social research methods are not free and random, they operate through a “hinterland of realities”, already enacted patterns, resonances, and absences that cannot be ignored. But methodology can also be creative: through re-working the hinterland of realities they can be re-crafted and thus “new versions of the world” are created:

Enactments and the realities they produce do not automatically stay in place. Instead they are made, and remade. This means that they can, at least in principle, be remade in other ways (2004: 143).

Thus, social science methods do not operate in a vacuum and always, they have political implications. For Law, the issue then is about “what kinds of social realities we want to create” (2004: ii). He argues that the world is quite differently textured than social scientists usually realize, and traditional methods are not able to capture these differences. What we miss then are:

Pains and pleasures, hopes and horrors, intuitions and apprehensions, losses and redemptions, mundanities and visions, angels and demons, things that slip and slide, or appear and disappear, change shape or don't have much form at all, unpredictabilities, these are just a few of the phenomena that are hardly caught by social science methods (2004: 2).

Affects, I contend, are one of these elusive, fluid, ephemeral and messy phenomena that Law refers to. Investigating the movements of affects and their role in shaping and producing embodied subjectivities might be more difficult with traditional text and talk-based methods of sociology. As Law states:

But one thing is sure: if we want to think about the messes of reality at all then we're going to have to teach ourselves to think, to practise, to relate, and to know in new ways. We will need to teach ourselves to know some of the realities of the world using methods unusual to or unknown in social science. (2004: 2).

This thesis is an experiment in finding new ways to acquire “forms of knowing as embodiment”, “as emotionality and apprehension” and “as situated inquiry” (Law 2004: 2). I approach the question *how are anti-racist white femininities constructed as affective performances of 'race' and gender?* through the pains and pleasures of the body and its sensibilities, opening up new worlds that might travel or just make sense in a definite moment and a particular space.

Barbara Bolt starts her thinking about the performative in research methodologies with a critique of the uncritical and often over-used application of the term. She questions whether any production across the creative arts (theatre, paintings, sculptures, films, performance events and so on) can be called performative only because the practice brings into being what it names (2008). Far from being exhaustive, however, I contend that the concept is a “possibility of things being otherwise”, to use Vikki Bell's words (2007: 5). I understand the expansion of creatively using a wide range of artistic research methods as a compelling invitation to open up landscapes of inquiry about difficult

questions. Doing so, the processes, limitations, and mechanics of knowledge production and dissemination are rendered visible, alongside the effects—the realities—that such knowledge production can bring about in the world.

In my research practice, the concept of performativity allows me to think about its capacity for inaugurating movement and transformation, of enacting and producing realities, and of the affective dimensions of creative production within the framework of a sociological inquiry—in a similar vein to what Bolt approaches as the performative nature of artistic research. She uses Butler's notion of iterability (1993) and Austin's conceptualisation of the illocutionary and the perlocutionary (1975). Working through these concepts she arrives at the conclusion that similar to science, procedures in the creative arts are based on repetition, and that performativity is not first and foremost about meaning—it is about force and effect. The force and effect of the creative production are then where we can locate the truth claims of the performative. “Here the work of art is not just the artwork/performance or event but *is also* the effect of the work in the material, affective and discursive domains” (Bolt 2008: 9, original emphasis).

In Bolt's interpretation, creative arts research is thus directed at mapping the movements and ruptures that are created by its productions, and at recognizing the transformations that have occurred. Law is concerned about the realities that are made and remade through social science methods out of the existing hinterland of realities. Their account is useful in thinking through the transformative potential of an 'artful performative live sociology' that I am developing in this thesis. This approach creatively and carefully combines semi-structured interviewing with artistic research methods and produces situations where the felt and lived experience are brought within an affective register in order to create new worlds out of our inner and outer hinterlands.

### **Artful and Performative Live Sociology**

Departing from and expanding on these new and emerging frameworks, this thesis proposes an artful and performative live sociology. In Back and Puwar's approach 'live methods' present an opportunity for a more 'artful' and 'crafty' sociology, the development of “forms of attentiveness that can admit the fleeting, distributed, multiple, sensory, emotional and kinaesthetic aspects of sociality” (2012: 28). Artfulness in this

understanding is not just about form but also about “being mindful of the kinds of realities that are enacted and produced” and “bringing a *bit of craftiness into the craft*” (2012: 33, 34, emphasis original). They suggest that by embracing multi-media (sound, image, text), the sociological form can be extended, thereby giving us new innovative ways of how to attend to the social world:

The component elements of live sociology proposed here seek to expand the sensory dimensions of sociological attentiveness, to design methods that move with the social world and to develop multiple vantage points from which empirical accounts are generated (2012: 28).

Although in artful sociology “explicit research questions can be critically transformed into aesthetic practices” (Puwar and Sharma 2012: 10) and the fostering of inter-and trans-disciplinary collaborations between social researchers and creative practitioners are encouraged, there is also a warning about blurring the boundaries between social research and art too quickly. Hawkins echoes this warning (2015). She guards against a “collapse, often born of enthusiasm, of the differences”, in her case, between geography and art (2015: 248). I concur with this expressed need to exercise caution when working with different traditions of knowledge production. I would argue, however, for expanding the scale of experimentation in sociological methods through art in order to further the 'sociological imagination'<sup>23</sup>. I contend that there is a scope for using artistic research practices that go beyond their use merely as tools for the dissemination of research findings—which is mostly the case with social science research—to affect audiences into enacting and creating a social world as they develop a certain understanding of it in the process of experiencing the artwork. This opening of the research scope is where I expand on the concept of 'live sociology'; I do so by arguing that by working with art in sociology, excavating art's performativity and the affects that

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<sup>23</sup>C. Wright Mills's concept of the 'sociological imagination' is central in underpinning the analytical possibilities and conceptual pragmatism of this research. The sociological imagination draws connections between “the personal troubles of milieu” and the “public issues of social structure” (Mills 1970: 14). It captures the intrinsic links between the larger social and historical landscapes in which lives are set with individual experience and biography (Mills 1970: 12). It is this hinterland of realities that I work with to understand “how the smallest units of social analysis—people, lives, the minutiae of material culture” (Knowles and Sweetman 2004: 8) operate in the broader social structure and how they can be effected to create new realities.

are evoked by art, the research process itself can be transformed and new worlds created in the process. The dialogic encounter between art and sociology as different formations of knowledge production can be exploited by attending to the performative and affective dimensions of art.

A crucial element in Back and Puwar's live sociology is to find ways of expanding the attentiveness of researchers. It is my intention to demonstrate how the artful approach I employ in this study expands not only my attentiveness “to the *doing* of social life” and my sensitivity “of tacit co-existence, the fleeting, the emotional and sensory” as the researcher, but also to achieve the same for the various research participants (2012: 11; original emphasis). Continuously switching between the modes of art practitioner and social researcher is less a challenge than it is to achieve a transformative experience. In this process of switching roles is one in which I have been “learning to be affected” and have been open to “being affected to learn” (Gunaratnam 2012: 117, 119). I have persuaded others, participants of the research and my collaborators—performance artists, photographers, and filmmakers—to do the same. In this research, I create “constructed situations’ aimed to produce new social relationships and thus new social realities” (Bishop 2006: 16). In these situations, I am able to physically engage and activate viewers to become producers of the artworks and thus, also active participants in the research. The design of the artworks was led by my “desire to create an active subject, one who will be empowered by the experience of physical or symbolic participation. The hope is that the newly emancipated subjects of participation will find themselves able to determine their own social and political reality” (2006: 12). Furthermore, I designed the performances so as to bring into view particularities of lived experience “that reflect alternative realities that are either marginalised or not yet recognised in established theory and practice” (Barrett 2009: 143).

### **Embodiment and Bodies in Research**

My body-centred methods engage with embodiment and affects. “In all that I do, there really is the necessity of the human body, so that it expresses itself or is revealed as in a first [primary] experience”, writes artist Lygia Clark (1968: 110). I have argued that whiteness is dominantly conceptualized as being produced through disembodied discourses, ideologies and power structures. When researchers examine the corporeality

of the racialized and gendered body, it is mostly the external surface of the body and visual practices that are given dominance in processes of racialization. Through my conscious engagement with the materiality of bodies and the affects that circulate around them, I want to explore the potentials and limits of theorizing whiteness through the body and embodiment. I aim to allow the bodies in this research to “reveal themselves as a first and primary experience” (Clark 1968: 110) and as sources of knowledge in and of themselves.

The importance of embodiment and reflexivity—the emphasis on the role of the body in human experience and research practice, and on the processes of knowledge production—has shaped how social research has been conducted since the 1980s (Pink 2012). It is not new for researchers to place their own sensing body at the centre of analysis (Okely 1994; Seremetakis 1996). The initial body that generated this research was my own—in proximal relation to other bodies. As my own project evolved, the research method that became most valuable to me required my attention to other bodies alongside an understanding of how my own affective experiences helped me learn about other people's worlds. This attention was particularly prevalent in the performances in which I myself performed (*Cruising Black Women* and *The Chamber of White*) and when I used my own body—the body of a white woman—to capture and induce affects (*The Blush Machine* and *The Chamber of White*).

Embodiment implies an understanding of the body as a source of knowledge. This lies in contrast to the mind/body divide that otherwise renders the body as merely a source of experience that requires the intellect to rationalize and give meaning to corporeal experiences and practices (Pink 2009). The concept of embodiment enables the social researcher “to think of the body as a site of knowing while recognising that we are capable of objectification through intellectual activity” (Pink: 2009: 24). Pink (2009) draws on recent research by Greg Downey (2007) to flag developments in understanding embodiment as a process that involves biological processes and a relationship between humans and their material, sensorial environments; she also accounts for the situatedness of the knowing body (Pink 2009; Downey 2007). According to Pink, researchers have been acknowledging the centrality of the body of the researcher and the embodiment of the ethnographer during fieldwork in particular since the 1990s. She suggests that the emergent concept of emplacement “supersedes

that of embodiment”, by implying a “sensuous interrelationship of body-mind-environment” and thus adding environment to the body-mind integration (Pink 2009: 25). Consequently, Pink proposes 'an emplaced ethnography' that “attends to the question of experience by accounting for the relationships between bodies, minds and the materiality and sensoriality of the environment” (2009: 25). Besides investigating the emplacement of research participants, it is equally crucial to examine the emplacement of the researcher as an individual. Thus, in Pink's sensory ethnography “the experiencing, knowing and emplaced body” becomes central (2009: 25).

I use much of Pink's conceptualization of sensory ethnography, especially her focus on 'sensory-experiencing bodies' and the understanding of their interdependence on the “social, material, discursive and sensory environments” that can produce situated embodied knowledge and “reveal important insights into the constitution of the self and the articulation of power relations” (2009: 25; 17). The methodological strategy I employ, however, differs at a crucial point to Pink's sensory ethnography. My focus is on affects which, rather than investigating as one of the senses, I consider as a movement that shapes bodies through a relational process of affecting and being affected. I am interested in working with affect for its capacity to provoke a mode of thought that does not think with self-contained and fixed bodies but foregrounds the processes, movements, and relationalities which shape bodies and transform our material realities. As Deleuze and Guattari state:

We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body, either to destroy that body or to be destroyed by it, either to exchange actions and passions with it or to join with it in composing a more powerful body (1987: 257).

## **Performative Situations and Performance**

Concerning the settings in which I investigate the movements of affect I use Pink's conceptualization again. The concept of emplacement that extends embodiment to environment, and her formulation of place “as a coming together and 'entanglement' of

persons, things, trajectories, sensations, discourses and more” (2009: 41) helps in understanding the situatedness of my research. She proposes “ethnographic representation as ethnographic places” that researchers “make when communicating about [their] research to others” instead of “actual, real, experienced places ethnographers participate in when they do fieldwork” (2009: 42). I draw on her proposal for creating places where audiences can “imagine themselves into the places of others” and involving the researcher “*intentionally pulling together* theory, experiential knowing, discourses, and more, into a unique configuration of trajectories” (2009: 42; emphasis original). As I have argued, however, my approach differs in that I am not foremost interested in methods of communication and dissemination of research, but in the production of embodied knowledge through working with affects and the senses.

The environments—the performative situations/performance spaces—that I examine are not 'real' landscapes that are already out there in the social, but ones that I create out of our social, material, discursive, sensory and affective hinterlands (Law 2004; Pink 2009). These settings, situations, and environments that I stage in the performances present a way for me, as the researcher, to affect others, and to learn about a reality through the process of affecting it and letting myself and the participants be affected and transformed by the research process at the same time. Pink suggests that,

[S]ensory knowing is produced through participation in the world. Following this idea, the self emerges from processes of sensory learning, being shaped through a person's engagement with the social, sensory and material environment of which she or he is part (2009: 40).

Sensory knowing is not just imagining ourselves in the position of others but actively participating in producing realities, knowledge and subjectivity through sensory engagement and learning.

To facilitate my audiences' engagement and effectively encourage them to become participants in the research, I have turned to performance art. Performance ethnography—a tradition of doing ethnography through performance—is grounded in



the belief that we learn through performing and participating. Norman K. Denzin describes the 'knowing' promoted by performance ethnography as that which

[R]efers to those embodied sensuous experiences that create the conditions for understanding. Performed experiences are the sites where felt emotion, memory, desire, and understanding come together (2003: 13).

It has been argued that in the twenty-first century it is increasingly difficult to set limits on the plethora of events that constitute performance: “just about everything can be studied *as* performance” (Schechner 2002: 30, original emphasis). Richard Schechner distinguishes between the bounded events understood to be performance by context, convention, usage and tradition, and human experience and its by-products that we are able to understand and analyse 'as' performance. He claims that “there are limits to what *is* performance because convention defines it in relation to 'cultural practice'” (2002: 30, original emphasis). This 'is'/'as' distinction is a foundational component in Schechner's theory of performance. In my project, I work with this formulation by using body-centred research methods that allow me to encounter performing bodies in order to collect evidence and information, and to gain a deeper understanding about the performativity of identity and the workings of affect in the performative enactment of racialized and gendered identities. In performance events, there are many ways in which I engage with performing bodies “*in* spaces of performance” and consider “how bodies might *become* or *produce* performance spaces” (Parker-Starbuck and Mock 2011: 211, original emphasis).

Unlike bodies represented in other media, the body in a live performance is unique in that it shares the same space and time with the audience and participants of the live act. Through the live performer's strong physical presence, the culturally coded body—that which is performed and enacted—can step outside of the fiction and confront audiences with the juxtaposition of the signified body with the real, signifying body of the performer (Counsell and Wolf 2001). I address the relationship between the real and the mediated, the physically present and the represented body, through the strategic use of different formats and media. *The Blush Machine* and *The Chamber of White* (discussed in Chapter 5) use video and the physical presence of performer and the participant. The

performances were also recorded to capture the act, the fleeting sensation—but once they were made manifest, they became something other: a record (Phelan 1993). I have made extensive documentation, recordings of live performances in the forms of photography and videos (please see USB attached to this thesis<sup>24</sup>). I base my analysis not on these records but on the actual events as they took place. When I myself performed (in *Cruising Black Women* and *The Chamber of White*, discussed in Chapter 4 and 5 respectively), I wrote down some reflections in the notes I took after the performances. As I discuss in Chapter 4, performing myself enabled me to feel affects evoked around the figures of 'white woman' and 'white man' in my own flesh. This has greatly contributed to the analysis presented here. Equally important was also to design performances in a way that visitors could directly respond to them. This was particularly relevant in *The Blush Machine*, and in *The Chamber of White* the affective movements between visitor and performer was the focus of my explorations.

I set up *The Blush Machine* and *The Chamber of White* (discussed in Chapter 5) as installations into which the viewers physically entered; their bodies and active participation were needed in order to realize the work. I use installation as “a spatialisation of self-narratives and critique” (Schneider and Wright 2006: 97). Following Claire Bishop, I understand installation not as the arrangement of objects in a given space, but as

[A] term that loosely refers to the type of art into which the viewer physically enters, and which is often described as 'theatrical', 'immersive' or 'experiential' [...] presupposes an *embodied* viewer whose senses of touch, smell and sound are heightened as their sense of vision (2005: 6, original emphasis).

Viewers thus became active participants in creating artworks: making affective figures of the idealized trope of the 'white woman' and in producing embodied knowledge.

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<sup>24</sup> Please note that there is no video documentation of *Cruising Black Women*, as it is a re-enactment of a performance by Adrian Piper, of which only a photograph remained. I re-created this photograph (see Chapter 4).

## Visualising Identity and Performing Affect: Developing an Anti-Racist Art Practice

Using art as a research method has enabled me not only to produce this thesis but also to develop an anti-racist and feminist art practice on whiteness. In Chapter 1, I point out that the invisibility of whiteness, and the discussion of white as a colour or, rather, as the privilege of being a non-colour in the racial hierarchy, is a central theme in the whiteness literature. My contribution to this debate stems from the art practice that I develop as a direct response to this body of literature on the visual register of whiteness.

I believe that there is value in addressing questions of white power through art and scholarship to build an understanding of how whiteness works and is played out in mundane intersubjective encounters. Being aware of the critiques of the “declarations of whiteness”, as Ahmed put it (2004c), I intend to make art that is neither narcissistic nor apologetic. My artworks are a lens on whiteness to scrutinize, debate and feel. My work is inherently partial, I cannot assume a black gaze at whiteness. I don't know how being non-white feels in the presence of whiteness. I can only do sincere art based on the critical reflection of a white life and the feeling I have of being white. Whether I have managed to produce genuinely anti-racist art and scholarship, work “not of narcissistic escape but of social engagement” (Doyle 2013: xi), remains an open question for readers and audiences of this work.

Conceptualising my work as an anti-racist and feminist intervention into whiteness allowed me to enter the problematic domain of identity politics art<sup>25</sup>. Art critics have long dismissed the direct address and evocation of identity and emotion in art. As Jennifer Doyle explains, this art is seen “as naïve, literalist forms of propaganda disengaged from aesthetics and art history [...] especially when race and gender are on the table” (2013: 12; 21). She argues: “Emotion, especially when coupled with a legible politics, appears as critically indigestible matter, a roadblock to 'serious' criticism” (2010: 12). She however places herself amongst a (relatively small) number of critics<sup>26</sup> who

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<sup>25</sup>According to Smith: “coined in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the shorthand term was initially applied to artworks that openly addressed social, political, and historical issues relating to an artist's identification; however, it later came to be aligned with the judgement that such works of art demonstrated poor technical skill, a lack of concern for form, and an indulgence in separatist, self-centered politics” (2011: 28).

<sup>26</sup>According to Doyle, others include English Darby, Amelia Jones, Susan Best, Cherise Smith, Kobena

don't follow the influential views of art critic Hal Foster—who for a long time condemned all artists from the contemporary art world whose works, in his opinion, suffer from “ethnographer envy” (1996: 183)<sup>27</sup>—but instead engage with art that is structured by an interweaving of narrative, politics and feelings. For Doyle these present not a lack of sincerity but the difficulty of engaging with the artwork, intellectually and emotionally.

## **An Artful Sociological Research**

In the first two years of my doctoral research I developed interventions “that produce affects and reactions that re-invent relations to the social” (Back and Puwar 2012: 9). These interventions helped me shape my thinking of the research as a whole, both regarding the theoretical approach I took and the development of the four performative situations I would come to create. I briefly present here all the artworks and exhibitions that I created during my research to demonstrate that the process itself was “productive of knowledge and engenders further practice demonstrating the emergent nature of the process” (Barrett 2009: 9). Hawkins also is concerned with “creative doings in and of themselves” and what happens during the creative production or practice instead of focusing on finished research output (2015: 250). She advocates for “appreciating the very process of image-making itself as a means to come to know” (2015: 256). I follow this understanding of research that is as concerned with the experience of practice and its generative potential of knowledge production as it is with its outputs and outcomes. I describe below how my art practice has directed my sociological inquiry and has not only enabled me to produce a thesis but has itself evolved into an anti-racist and feminist practice on whiteness.

My initial focus was on black and white bodies, and slowly the figure of 'white woman' emerged to take centre stage. I selected four performances to discuss in Part III—*Performing Affective Anti-Racist White Femininities: The Performances*—because these directly engage with the focus of my research on the affective dimensions of the production of white femininities. The other artworks and exhibitions that I created were

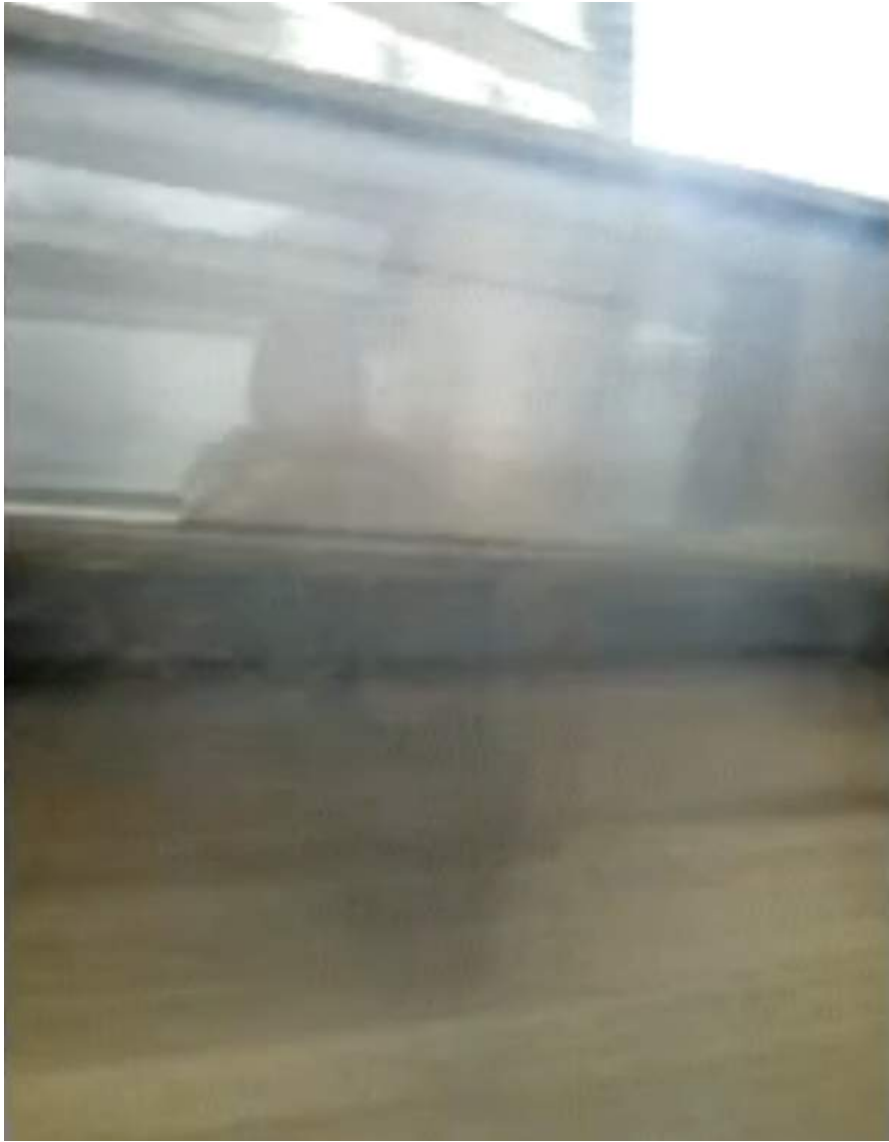
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Mercer, Jane Blocker and Jennifer Gonzales.

<sup>27</sup> Doyle explains 'ethnographer envy' as a term used by Foster to describe “discourse-specific practices” that address social issues and which “often seek out a relationship with the 'other' and risk an overidentification with the subject 'othered' by the discourse these artists engage, in a collapse of critical distance” (2013: 21).

equally crucial in directing my research, but do not focus solely on the making of 'white woman' and hence I discuss them only briefly below.

In the first piece, a music video entitled *Jane and Atinuke* (2011), I transformed my own body into a conduit through which ideas were discovered and presented. I used my iPhone to record a short clip on a London overground train crossing between the diverse inner-city areas of London and edited the footage to Jane Birkin's song *Black ... White* (1980). The music video taps into the constitution of whiteness through blatantly simple and fixed racial categories. *Jane and Atinuke* examines the complexity of constructed identities by playing on the convenient black/white binary categorization—the two bodies which appear in the video are simply reduced to these two colours. I directed the camera to the window of the train. We see rooftops of East and South London moving by, parts of the city inhabited by diverse ethnic and cultural populations, and the reflection of the two bodies in the window as the song is playing (see Figure 2.1). The video directly responds to the invisibility of whiteness by attempting to make it visible and to the privilege of seeing white as a racial colour only in relation to and against black. The video however is also disturbing in that beyond questioning these constructs it does not offer a re-imaging of them. I quickly abandoned this piece for its reifying racial schemas and divisions. When I showed this video at the visual sociology crits session at Goldsmiths, I felt shame, the reasons of which I was able to understand. But my shame was something that started to interest me. With the next piece I wanted to find out how my contemporaries feel about how we use visual racial registers in our making sense of the world, each other and our positions in relation to each other.



*Figure 3. Jane and Atinuke (2011)*

The first piece then led me to the development of *Untitled* (2011)—an audio-visual installation that explores the nature of contemporary thinking on race and racism, and further explores visuality as the basis of identity and its role in the shaping of subject positions. With this piece I wanted to explore whether visual perception and racialized seeing, and the colour of the skin used to designate people in different racial categories, are crucial in our sense-making of the world. I used a piece of footage from the civil rights movement in the US. I edited the found footage which shows Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and a peaceful demonstration that turns violent with police officers arresting people and using water cannons to dissolve the crowd (See Figure 2. 2). I asked participants to take on the role of observer and narrator at the same time: to reflect on the rhythm of the events as they were shown. Five participants offered insight into their perceptions, feelings, and ways of thinking about how race is made in our societies. In the final piece, we see the footage while listening to the different voices narrating it. These included: “So this might be in the US in the 70s.... so many black people ... some clerics... so it’s maybe a religious parade or something”; “it might be the 40s I suppose, people are singing... we’ve got a policeman looking a bit dodgy... the tanks are coming in ... to disperse the crowds”; “ahh... makes you angry... you wanna support the underdog... we don’t protest like that anymore... I think they’ve got too much to lose”. At the end of the footage, we see credits rolling: the words participants used to describe themselves (e.g. immigrant, pretty cheerful, young, female, from the South).

The installation was set up in the specific setting of a former detention cell in Deptford’s Old Police Station Gallery, London as part of the Engaging Tactics Conference at Goldsmiths in 2012<sup>28</sup>. The conference investigated the engagement of social sciences with both research participants and emerging publics. It encouraged site and tactic specific presentations, performances and interventions and provided a space for the exploration of possible modes of engagement. During conference, engagement with *Untitled* was both relational and continuous: a sensory interplay of content, media, space, and the audience’s interaction with these elements, and an on-going examination of historic and present riots, their action and interpretation happening at the same time (see Figures 2. 3 and 2. 4).

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<sup>28</sup> For more information on the Engaging Tactics Conference please see the website: <https://engagingtactics.wordpress.com/page/4/> [Accessed 1 June 2018].



*Figure 4. Untitled (2011)*

from Arkansas, South  
liberal

white  
female  
Spanish  
young

*Figure 5. Credits of Untitled (2011)*





*Figure 6. Installation view of Untitled, The Old Police Station, London (2012)*



*Figure 7. Installation view of Untitled, The Old Police Station, London (2012)*

In parallel to *Untitled*, I developed a performance that explores the performative and intersectional processes of the construction of 'race' and gender in the representational figure of 'white woman'. Chapter 4 discusses *I Love Black Men* (2011), alongside *Cruising Black Women* (2013).

*I Love Black Men* raised the question of the role of affects in creating subjectivities. The performance made it clear to me that the performing bodies and their affects cannot be ignored if I was to theorize the making of 'white woman'. Understanding this I started to work with affect directly. In *Freeing Up Shame* (2012) I not only recorded the performance but interviewed the performers on film too. I investigated the question of what it means to “claim an identity through shame” (Ahmed 2004: 101) and worked with the double play of concealment and exposure argued to be crucial to the work of shame. Stories of real-life experiences of shame that were submitted to an open call I sent out via email to colleagues and contacts<sup>29</sup> were written up and alongside poems by Audre Lorde and Paula Gunn Allen; these were used as triggers during the performance.

I asked four performers to read the stories to each other and reflect on them, and then write words, draw, or leave whatever marks that came to them during the piece on a big blackboard, first using white and then black spray paint. These instructions were given at the beginning of the performance, in which participants were free to enact what they felt using simple movements—walking, reading, writing, drawing—and then jointly creating a painting of words and marks of shame. On the blackboard, I projected the face of 'white woman', which slowly appeared as participants were using the white spray paint, and then gradually disappeared again as the black spray paint was used. In the piece, I privileged the performative mode: footage was projected, poetry and live experiences cited, and a common painting created that reflected the emotional journey the participants were experiencing during the event, a painting of words and marks of shame (see Figure 2. 6).

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<sup>29</sup>I sent out the following text: “I’m doing a theatre and performance art residency at an old slave plantation in Brazil to develop a site-specific and participatory piece \*performing white shame\* [for my PhD]. I’d be grateful if you could share your experiences/incidents/fictions/real life events I could work with. Anything goes, from nicking a can of beer from the corner shop to barking at your face in the mirror in the morning after what happened to you/with you/because of you the night before. Please send me a word, two words, a story, a line, a picture, a sensation, a reaction. All will be dealt with sensitivity and confidentiality. Thank you.”

*Freeing Up Shame* was performed at a theatre festival at C.P.C Gargarullo (Ponto de Cultura) Theatre, Miguel Pereira, Brazil, where I was invited to take part in an international residency for people with careers in theatre and performance art. After the performance, I asked the four people who performed the piece for an interview about their thoughts on the piece and how they felt about it during the performance. I filmed these interviews (see Figure 2.7). Some of their reflections included: “I enjoyed it because I was engaging with it and I was very active in my thinking and also in action. My perspective would have been very different if I was just sitting in the audience watching it. I don’t think I would be so inspired by the stories if I was just watching. And I also enjoyed how my thinking was subconsciously affected by what the others were thinking and writing on the board. Visually it was nice to engage with the board, turning it white and then black.” “I enjoyed how the words built on each other, and the white and black against each other.” “It wasn’t like, ‘Oh, I’m on the stage’-kind of performance.” “During the action, I was only thinking about doing associations and not about the theme, about shame. But somehow it stayed with me and affected me. When I was in my bed the next day, before falling asleep, I remembered a moment when I was eleven. I was in my classroom trying to speak to do a presentation of some work. And I couldn’t. And I remembered that feeling of shame when the class started to laugh. What I found was interesting that I did not feel this shame during the performance, but a day later. But I’m sure it was because of it”. “I must say that it was fun. Because it is not a ‘normal’ thing that a ‘normal’ person can spray paint. So that was fun. And because you are collaborating with other people, it also made it more fun.”



*Figure 9. Freeing Up Shame, Miguel Pereira, Brazil (2012)*



*Figure 8. Screenshot of interviews with participants of Freeing Up Shame, Miguel Pereira, Brazil (2012)*

'White woman' stepped out from the background of *Freeing Up Shame* and became fleshy materiality at the centre of *The Blush Machine* (2013) and *The Chamber of White* (2014). These performances are discussed in Chapter 5.

I explored questions relating to the connections between sociological and artistic research practice and knowledge production in two exhibitions. *Visualising Affect: an Exhibition on Race, Gender, Sexuality and Affect (2013, UK)*<sup>30</sup> was organized as part of the 2013 Annual Conference of the International Visual Sociology Association (IVSA). Artworks produced by sociologists and emerging and internationally acclaimed artists from the UK, South Africa, North Korea, Bolivia, Spain, Germany, and Switzerland were shown at Lewisham Arthouse, London. The organization of the exhibition in conjunction with the IVSA 2013 conference allowed the bridging of arts and visual sociology research and the presentation of works in a way that crosses disciplinary boundaries. The affective dimensions of our responses to the ever-present references to 'race', gender and sexuality framed these works. I published a catalogue<sup>31</sup> of the exhibition that discusses working with affects in social research and art. It includes an interview with artist Sutapa Biswas<sup>32</sup>, and essays by sociologists Yasmin Gunaratnam and Konstantinos Panapakidis.

The exhibition *The Future of Art is Urban – Artistic Research Practices and Methods in Social Sciences (2014, UK)*<sup>33</sup> was born from the desire to curate a show that would provide a perspective of social research as artful. The exhibition was framed through a context in which the extensive use of artistic research practices and methods could be presented as alternative and engaged. The 50th anniversary of Goldsmiths Sociology and a series of events organized in celebration of the 20 years of the Centre for Urban and Community Research (CUCR) provided the occasion to put together a vibrant exhibition, with

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<sup>30</sup>Exhibition website: <http://visualisingaffect.weebly.com/> [Accessed 1 June 2018].

<sup>31</sup>Please see exhibition website: <http://visualisingaffect.weebly.com/catalogue.html> [Accessed 1 June 2018].

<sup>32</sup>Sutapa Biswas works across different media including painting and drawing, film, digital video, performance and photography. Her art engages with questions of identity, race and gender in relation to time, space and history. Her works are inspired by oral histories, literature and art history. She is particularly interested in the ways in which larger historical narratives collide with personal narratives. Biswas' works have been widely reviewed and are held in numerous collections including: TATE Collections, Arts Council England, Sheffield Museums and Art Galleries, APT New York, Reed College (USA).

Available at: <http://www.art.mmu.ac.uk/profile/sbiswas> [Accessed 1 June 2018].

<sup>33</sup>Exhibition website: <http://thefutureofartisurban.weebly.com/> [Accessed 1 June 2018].

accompanying events, talks, a film screening and an urban game.


The exhibition included the work of a generation of PhD researchers at Goldsmiths who in their respective work redefine the discipline of sociology and open up new terrains of thinking and knowing through a variety of artistic approaches, including photography, film, collage, performance, installation. Their works triggered discussions on the nature of the visual works produced in the framework of sociological research. I organized talks by Michael Guggenheim, Bernd Kräftner, Nirmal Puwar, Alex Rhys-Taylor, Alison Rooke, Monica Sassatelli, and an urban game session by Viktor Bedö; and published a catalogue<sup>34</sup>. These events investigated the pertinent questions of how, why and to what degree does the social intervene in the urban, artistic research practice in social research, and the researcher in the life of the city. Each articulation demonstrated a remarkable perspective and together offered nothing of a comprehensive answer but entry points into further interventions on artistic research methods in sociology.

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<sup>34</sup>Please see exhibition website: <http://thefutureofartisurban.weebly.com/the-catalogue.html> [Accessed 1 June 2018].

**SOCIOLOGY  
METHODS LAB**  
VISUALISING AFFECT

**Goldsmiths**  
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON



**VISUALISING AFFECT, LEWISHAM ARTHOUSE, 8-10 JULY**  
Sutapa Biswas | Sandra De Berduccy | Nirma Puwar | Yasmin Gunaratnam  
Julio González Sánchez | Karín Michalski | Laura Cuch | Yvonne Füg

Visualising Affect investigates art-practices and visual research strategies that consider and challenge the affective and emotional dimensions of race, sexuality and gender-constructs in art and society. It provides a compelling argument for an aesthetic engagement with affect and offers an insight into the ways in which social research remains concerned with the role and possibilities of feeling.

Curated by **Katalin Halasz** and **Polly Card**

Films by **Jane Kin Kaisen** and **Guston Sondin-Kung**, **Jack Tan**, **Justin Archer**, **Martin Bleazar** and **Rosanna Scott**, and by **Konstantinos Panapakidis** are screened as a special event to the exhibition.  
<http://visualisingaffect.weebly.com/>

**Private View:** Monday 8 July, 7.30-9pm  
Open daily, 12-6pm except special events.  
Admission free, step-free access

8 - 10 July 2013  
Lewisham Arthouse  
140 Lewisham Way  
London, SE14 6PD  
**Email:** [theblushmachine@gmail.com](mailto:theblushmachine@gmail.com)

The exhibition is held in conjunction with the International Visual Sociology Association Annual Conference 2013, organised by the Centre for Urban and Community Research at Goldsmiths, University of London.

Figure 10. *Visualising Affect* exhibition poster (2013)

**SOCIOLOGY METHODS LAB**

CUCR 1904-2014 **50** Supported by donors to the **Annual Fund** Goldsmiths

**The FUTURE of ART is URBAN**  
 ARTISTIC RESEARCH PRACTICES and METHODS in SOCIAL SCIENCES

curated by Katalin Halász 30 May — 14 June 2014

**30 MAY - 14 JUNE 2014**

**ENCLAVE**  
 Revolution War  
 London SE8-4NT

**Private View**  
**Friday 30 May, 6-9pm**  
 Exhibition continues to Saturday 14 June  
 Open Wednesday to Saturday, 12-6pm  
[www.thefutureofartisurban.weebly.com](http://www.thefutureofartisurban.weebly.com)

The Future of Art is Urban – Artistic Research Practices and Methods in Social Science blurs the borders between art and social science. It presents a wide range of different social research practices in which knowledge is produced through artistic approaches. Participants use the city as a site for artistic research and experimentation, of collaboration and interaction. This exhibition discovers how visual researchers unfold and reveal the implicit aspects of the social in the urban space. Practices and processes of artistic social research become alternative models of thinking and knowing.

**Alexandra Baixinho, Viktor Bedő, Dominika Blachnicka-Ciacek, Luca M Damiani, Sara Faridamin, Holly Gilbert, Katalin Halász, Felipe Palma, Harriet Smith, Philippa Thomas, Christian von Wissel**

Curated by Katalin Halász

**Special events in Urban Game, Talks and Film screening**  
**12 June, 3-9pm**  
[www.thefutureofartisurban.weebly.com/events.html](http://www.thefutureofartisurban.weebly.com/events.html)

In an Urban Game session by **Viktor Bedő** participants will play a smartphone-based game in the urban space around the gallery and discuss urban game design as prototyping and mapping tool for urban design and research.

Talks by academics **Michael Guggenheim, Bernd Krüfener, Nirupal Pawar, Alex Rhyt-Taylor, Alison Rooke and Monica Sassatelli** will explore key themes of the exhibition: the intertwining of aesthetics and city life, the politics of art in the city, artistic methods in sociology, and bringing science into urban space.

The screening of the film 'The Region' by **Felipe Palma** will close the day of special events on 13 June.

design: [www.enclavestudio.com](http://www.enclavestudio.com)

Figure 11. The Future of Art is Urban exhibition poster (2014)



Title	Context	Location	Date
Jane and Atinuke (2011)	Visual sociology PhD crit session, Goldsmiths	London, UK	2011
Untitled (2011)	Engaging Tactics Conference	The Old Police Station gallery London, UK	2012
I Love Black Men (2011)	Bat Pack II group exhibition	Pavilion, London, UK	2011
	Researching Feminist Futures Symposium <sup>35</sup>	UK	2011
	Post-racial imaginaries, darkmatter online journal	online	online
	Feral Feminisms online journal	online	online
Freeing Up Shame (2012)	Theatre festival	Ponto de Cultura Theatre, Miguel Pereira, Brazil	2012
	Engaging Tactics Conference	London, UK	2012
Cruising Black Women (2013)	Part of the The Future of Art is Urban. Artistic Research Practices and Methods in Social Sciences exhibition	Enclave gallery, London, UK	2014
The Blush Machine (2013)	Solo show	Kiosko Gallery, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia	2013
Visualising Affect exhibition (2013)	In the framework of the International Visual Sociology Association Annual Conference 2013	Lewisham Arthouse, London, UK	8-10 July 2013
The Future of Art is Urban exhibition (2013)	Showcasing the works of visual sociology PhD students	Enclave gallery, London, UK	30 May- 14 June 2014
The Chamber of White (2014)	Part of the Performance Sense Laboratory, Art Zone, Roskilde Festival	Roskilde, Denmark	2014
	International Visual Sociology Association Annual Conference 2018	Évry, France	25-28 June 2018

Figure 12. Exhibitions, journals and conferences where the artworks of the research were shown

<sup>35</sup>I include here only those occasions here where the works have been shown in their entirety as artworks, and not as part of a paper presentation.

## Reflexivity

One of the central issues for feminist researchers is the power relationship in research, whether the interaction during interviews permits a non-exploitative relationship between researcher and researched (Bryman 2004). Here, the issue of reflexivity becomes essential. It denotes the critical self-scrutiny of the researchers, the acknowledgement of their specific position and differences in terms of class, 'race', gender, religion, and ethnicity that "can impinge on the possibilities of interaction and interpretation, and so on how the social world is known" (Holland and Ramazanoglu 1994; quoted in Byrne 2004: 184). The idea of the neutral observer is thus abandoned. Researchers need to ask themselves about their role in the research and how it impacts on the interaction with interviewees and the analysis that follows. Being a white, middle-class woman myself with professional experience in anti-racism, there was a 'matching' of 'race', gender and class between myself, the researcher and the interviewees (see Riessman 1987; Phoenix 1994). Besides 'telling the story' of the research, it has been argued that being attentive to these questions can also be achieved by developing personal involvement and friendships within the interview process. As Ann Oakley claims:

The goal of finding out about people is best achieved when the relationship of the interviewer—interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship [...] Personal involvement is more than just dangerous bias—it is the condition under which people come to know each other and to admit others into their lives (1981: 41, 58).

To consider Oakley's proposition was fundamental since I have nurtured friendly collegiality or even close friendships with many of the women whom I interviewed. I accounted for the closeness to my interviewees carefully. From the start I made it very clear that the information gained through the interviews—which followed a semi-structured format and not our usual chat over coffee or wine about life and work—would be used for this study. I handed over information sheets about the nature of the

research and asked them to sign consent forms (see Appendix 3). Knowing the interviewees enabled me an intimate interaction with them and helped in breaking down any sense of a hierarchical relationship between us. It was also challenging though, as I had to take great care of not assuming any answer or interpret any silences or a slip of the tongue based on my knowledge about their lives before the interview. I am also aware of critiques of the reflexive account of the researcher. Beverly Skeggs cautions against the “tendency to think that the problems of power, privilege, and perspective can be dissolved by inserting one's self into the account and proclaiming that reflexivity has occurred in practice” (2001: 360). Writing the self into research accounts can rely on or lead to the fixing of others (Skeggs 2001; Adkins 2002). I attempted to foreclose this by allowing the voices of the interviewees to come through to as great a length as possible, in particular in those instances when they themselves questioned racial and gender constructs or offered a vision of moving beyond them (see Chapter 3 and Conclusions).

Concerning the performances, it has been remarked that visual ethnography “has recently developed an acute interest in telling the story of the research process as part of the research results, which is now referred to as reflexivity” (Harper 2012: 39). Pink warns that “reflexivity is not simply a mechanism that neutralizes ethnographer's subjectivity as collectors of data through an engagement with how their presence may have affected the reality observed and the data collected” (2001: 23). She argues that “subjectivity should be engaged as a central aspect of ethnographic knowledge, interpretation and representation” (2001: 23). My embodied subjectivity was a central issue in my research. My previous experiences working on anti-racism as a white woman, my background in activism and my personal values significantly impacted on how I designed the performances (Leavy 2015). Moreover, how I experienced my own body in relation to the research was crucial to the research process. As I have explained, I started off the research by attending to my own body (see the section above on *Jane and Atinuke*). In three of the performances that I discuss in detail in this thesis, I used my own body as a conduit for affects (see *Cruising Black Women* in Chapter 4, and *The Blush Machine* and *The Chamber of White* in Chapter 5). My bodily experiences and embodied subjectivity are not only an element in the writing but are a central topic in Part III of this thesis.

## Ethics

Ethical concerns were crucial in this research for two main reasons. Eight out of the eleven interviewees know each other as they had all been working at the same organization at one point in their lives. All information regarding their country of origin, marital status, number of children, and particular life histories make them easily identifiable not just to each other but also to other members of the organization where they work and its member organizations<sup>36</sup>.

I informed all interviewees about the nature of the project and asked them for written consent for the use of the information and materials gained (see Appendix 3). Informed consent means to “discuss the potential harmful consequences of publishing information that the informants might regard as confidential or damaging by being disclosed publicly by the researcher” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 268). It is argued that accounting for consent, anonymity, and disclosure can help by protecting the respondents from possible harm in the research process (Byrne 2004). I followed the requirements of the ethics form and the ethical practice issued by the British Sociological Association (BSA) that state that “the anonymity and privacy of those who participate in the research process should be respected” at every stage of the research process (1992). The confidentiality clause of the BSA requires that all information, such as details about location and time are distorted to remove any information that might make participants identifiable. This clause serves to protect both the participants and myself, between whom personal and intimate information was exchanged.

The second ethical concern regards the use art as a research method. It has been argued that arts-based research is “radical, ethical and revolutionary” (Finley 2008: 71, quoted in Leavy 2015: 29). In this sense the very practice of art as a social research method has been argued to be moral and ethical (Denzin 2003: Finley 2008). In contrast to traditional research that tends to be accessed by the research community, arts-based research is accessible by a wider audience, and “draws on the emotional, evocative, and

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<sup>36</sup> For this reason, I have included all personal information that helps to gain a picture of the social status of the interviewees exclusively in Appendix 1 but not in the body of the thesis itself. Appendix 1 and Appendix 4, a sample transcript of an interview, are only made available for viva examination. Following discussions with the deposit librarian of Goldsmiths library, Appendix 1 and Appendix 4 are removed from the final hard and electronic copies, which are deposited at the library and put online.

resistive to jar people into seeing, thinking, and/or feeling differently” and thus has the potential “to evoke change” (Leavy 2015: 29). An issue central to the production of my artworks is emphasized in the literature. It is argued that participants and audience members should be understood as collaborators not only in the completion of the artworks but through this activity in the research itself (Finley 2008). The impact of performance on the audience in social research remains an underdeveloped field however. “Given that the paradigm is in a time of rapid development, ethical issues are particularly thorny and as a result the literature in this area needs to catch up to the field”, argues Leavy (2015: 281). Some guidelines are offered in the literature as regards performed ethnodramas in health-related areas, but none of them were applicable for my research. Neither a preview performance nor “postperformance forum sessions” (Mienczakowski et al. 2002: 49, quoted in Leavy 2015: 191) were possible to assess the impacts of the performances, since they were performed in art settings or even at a music festival, for regular visitors to these cultural spaces. Similarly, given the settings of the performances, informed consent could not be obtained from the visitors. Norman K. Denzin argues that traditional social science ethical codes that require the completion of forms of informed consent, risks and benefits of the research for subjects, confidentiality, anonymity and voluntary participation are not applicable to “many forms of participatory action research” (2003: 249). These forms of research include, for example, performance ethnography which is the closest to my research, as well as ethnodrama, reflexive ethnography, or performance autobiography amongst others. Denzin argues that in these cases the relationship between subjects and researchers are collaborative and public:

Confidentiality disappears, for there is nothing to hide or protect. Participation is entirely voluntary, hence there is no need for subjects to sign forms indicating that their consent is “informed”. The activities that make up the research are participatory; that is, they are performative, collaborative, and action and praxis based. Hence participants are not asked to submit to specific procedures or treatment conditions. Instead, acting together, researchers and subjects work to produce change in the world (2003: 250).

Being aware that the subject matter of the performances addressed difficult issues, and indeed I aimed to create a space where these difficult issues could evoke difficult affects, I tried to build in an element of release into the design of the pieces. In *Freeing Up Shame* and in *The Blush Machine* visitors were offered a space of contemplation where they could release their thoughts and feelings through spraying words, marks or drawings on a big canvas (see Chapter 5). In *The Chamber of White*, the video, which was an integral part of the piece, ended on a gentle notion of human connection which I attempted to amplify by the tender moves and smiles of the character I performed (see Chapter 5). The design of the performances was in line with Denzin's argument for "a collaborative social science research model that makes the researcher responsible not to a removed discipline (or institution), but to those he or she studies" (2003: 258). The model he advocates stresses "personal accountability, caring, the value of individual expressiveness, the capacity for empathy, and the sharing of emotionality" (Collins 1990: 216 in Denzin 2003: 258). I could not provide a thorough assessment of the visitors' well-being after they had experienced the performances. This ethical dilemma on the art-social science continuum is one I was not able to resolve, and existing literature does not provide sufficient guidelines in this respect (Leavy 2015).

I received ethical approval from the Goldsmiths Chair of Research Ethics Committee on both parts of the thesis, on the interviews and separately on the performances. The thesis will be put under embargo for 36 months.

## **Conclusion**

This research remains experimental, confronting the limitations and possibilities of artistic experimentation in sociological research as a way of creating a material and emotional account of the embodied and affective experience of anti-racist white femininities. It involves "practice as a response to lived experience, the temporal, the personal and the collaborative—revealing how subject matter requires new forms of expression and presentation" (Barrett 2009: 10). It proceeds by combining semi-structured interviews with art as a research method. The knowledge-producing potential of a sociological practice through art practice is articulated in the creation of performance spaces/performative situations. I suggest that performance as research is not only an art form but can be used as a means of revealing aspects of the affective

dimensions of anti-racist white femininities and modelling affective processes in ways not available to other modes of qualitative research<sup>37</sup>. In this research, different performance artworks are used as a means of exploring and articulating experiences which give shape to nuances of anti-racist white femininities. It also permits an embodiment of what has remained unanalyzed and unspoken in discourses on the white female body—the processes of affects. With my anti-racist artistic research practice, I contribute to the widening of our conception of how research can be conducted by pursuing 'live sociology', that in Back's interpretation is “able to attend to the fleeting, distributed, multiple and sensory aspects of sociality through research techniques that are mobile, sensuous and operate from multiple vantage points” (2012: 18). My research reflects sensitivity and a direct response to Back's call to “enact reality rather than simply reflect it” (2012: 18) and performs artful live sociology.

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<sup>37</sup> In understand qualitative research as “all forms of social inquiry that rely primarily on qualitative data ... i.e., nonnumeric data in the form of words” (Schwandt 2001: 213).

## Part II. European White Women in Anti-Racism: The Interviews

### Chapter 3. “This See-throughy Skin”

In this chapter I turn to the interviews and I consider how the interviewees see or don't see themselves as white (Miller 1992; McIntosh 1988; Allen 1993; Frankenberg 1993; Hardiman 1994; Martin et al. 1996; Nakayama and Krizek 1995; Hurtado and Stewart 1997). I discuss situations where 'race' and gender featured subtly or prominently in the life histories which the respondents shared with me.

My argument is that the production of white femininities need to be understood as ongoing performances of affective practices, where affective practice means embodied meaning-making (Wetherell 2012). This chapter explores how bodies get affected by racialized and gendered discourses. I look at how certain affective practices become stable and constitute the making of the 'white woman'. I trace the lived realities of 'race' and gender in the life histories that were shared with me. I argue that, in order to understand the making of 'white woman', it is necessary to reckon with the specific material and corporeal processes in these social encounters and interactions of everyday life alongside the socially constructed representations of 'white woman' as disseminated in society at large. I analyze how the thoughts and actions of the women interviewed were structured by their whiteness and by their gender, class, and in some cases religion, which complicate their whiteness.

In the last part of the chapter, I investigate what might be at play in those occasions when the interviewees described an understanding of themselves as white women and being perceived by others as such. I propose that anti-racist white femininities only acquire their meanings in relation with racialized others, *in performances of white affects*: when a range of discourses, power relations and bodily states that are attached to whiteness and femininities get activated and assembled in affective practices.



## The White Women Interviewed

The self-identified white women have all been activists in Europe. Nine out of eleven women have earned their living in anti-racist organizations (Annabelle, Barbara, Carmen, Dorothy, Emily, Helen, Jessica, Molly, and Rosemary). Two have taken part in anti-racist projects (Amanda and Natalie). Because of their professional engagement in anti-racism, in advocacy for racial equality and minority rights, they are highly knowledgeable on issues relating to identity, diversity, migration, racism and racial discrimination in education, and employment, and on religious and gender discrimination. They are very conscious about racism and its effects. Regarding feminism, Amanda and Natalie were members of a feminist organization, while all the other women identify with the aims of feminism<sup>38</sup> and express its impact on their lives.

The fact that they have all been involved in anti-racism meant that they all had a high level of self-reflection on themselves and their positions in society regarding racial differences. Consequently, I heard many stories during the interviews that sounded as if they had been told many times before. In particular, this was the case when there was a family story of migration, as with Helen and Rosemary, or when they explained to me national policies that affected their lives, as did Helen and Dorothy. There were many instances, however, when it was clear to me that they were piecing their answers together during the interview, thinking through my questioning on the spot, especially Amanda and Natalie. I will flag these throughout the chapter.

Apart from Dorothy, who said she was upper-middle class, all the women identify as middle-class. There seemed to be some reluctance with the identification of the term middle-class because of its negative connotations. Many of the women only referred to their income when asked about class, except for Carmen who made a distinction between income, culture, and relationship to wider society in terms of class. She stated that she identifies more with counterculture than with the mainstream, but she nevertheless accepted middle-class for herself.

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<sup>38</sup> The respondents understood feminism as a critical way of thinking about gender equality and traditional gender roles in society.

## Theorizing Anti-Racist White Femininities through Affect

To put forward my argument on white affect—understanding the production of anti-racist white femininities as ongoing affective performances of 'race' and gender—I am examining the discursive and affective elements that are attached to the white female body in this chapter. I work with affect as the relational process of “being affected and affecting others” (Blackman et al 2008: 16) and place an emphasis on the affective movements that circulate in social interactions. I use affective practice as my operational concept because it allows for the interconnection of the mind and the corporeal in embodied meaning-making. My goal is to move away from examining how white people feel about themselves and about the world and giving a narcissistic account of the feelings of white people. I aim to demonstrate an operational way forward for conceptualizing anti-racist white femininities that may enable the fleshy, material, living white female body to take a more central role than allowed by previous concepts; concepts which focussed on disembodied terms of power, privilege, and representations, and their impacts on passively recipient bodies.

I refer to the conceptualization of 'sensory racial stereotypes' offered by the historian Mark M Smith (2006: 5). Through a historical account of slavery and segregation from the colonial period and until the mid-twentieth century, Smith looks at the roles the senses have played in making 'race'. His argument complicates the purely visual sense of racial categorization and illustrates how 'sensory stereotypes' were manufactured about black people through using the senses of “smelling, touching, listening and tasting, as well as looking” (2006: 4). He argues for taking seriously “the role of the senses in structuring historical meaning” (2006: 4). According to Smith, investigating the role of the senses in 'race'-making enables us to comprehend “the historically conditioned, visceral, emotional aspect of racial construction and racism” (2006: 4). The point where my approach differs from Smith's is my emphasis on the relational processes that encapsulate the definition of affect that I use. This is a definition that also includes sensory experiences but stresses the affective movements that happen between social actors too<sup>39</sup>. In this sense, feelings—what I have referred to as embodied sensations

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<sup>39</sup> As I explained in the Introduction, I do not believe in separating affects, emotions and feelings, but for definitional clarity in this field that is already muddled I work with the term feelings as sensorial experiences or embodied sensations; emotions as articulated and interpreted, named and identified impulses; and affect as the broader term, the corporeal and cognitive processes that encapsulates both feelings and emotions.

throughout this thesis—are part of the meaning-making processes that I investigate, but I also insist that discursive actions and representations are core elements in making whiteness.

My approach is closest to Étienne Balibar's who wrote about racism as a web of 'affective stereotypes':

[Racism] therefore organizes affects [...]. It is this combination of practices, discourses and representations in a network of affective stereotypes which enables us to give an account of the formation of a racist community [...] (1991: 18).

As I will be arguing in Chapter 4, using stereotypes—understood here as representational practices— as an analytical framework is limiting as it draws back to the socially inscribed body. The practice approach by Wetherell seems to be more open to encapsulate a range of social and corporeal processes, their formation and repetition and interconnected nature:

A practice approach focuses on processes of developmental sedimentation, routines of emotional regulation, relational patterns and 'settling'. These routinely embed patterns of affective practices as a kind of potential. The individual is a site in which multiple sources of activation and information about body states, situations, past experiences, linguistic forms, flowering thoughts, etc. become woven together (2012: 22).

Drawing on the work of Theodore Schatzki (2001), Wetherell further explains that “practice thinking” helps us to recognize that social action is “in constant motion” while also being determined by the past that “constraints the present and the future” (2012: 23). Thus, affective practice can capture ongoing social actions and the fixings—the patterns—that subsequently emerge. Further work is needed, however, on developing the practice approach, specifically by engaging in more depth with practice theory (see Li 2005). Nevertheless, this approach has allowed me to bring back the white female body into an empirical study of whiteness.

To explore anti-racist white femininities as a product of affects, I first examine two aspects of the invisibility of whiteness (see Chapter 1). Firstly, I consider whiteness as an invisible norm, power, and privilege. I open the discussion on how the women I interviewed contested whiteness as an identity category. They did so while simultaneously indicating that they did not see their whiteness; for some women whiteness was only intelligible through a conceptualization of their white privilege. I present how the respondents have worked through their privilege and the perceptions they and others have of their white female bodies, and the meanings attached to them in their anti-racist work and daily life.

Secondly, I explore the notion of white as an invisible colour. I examine how/whether the respondents understand white as a racial colour and how it gets 'blackened' in some cases, that is, how it gets complicated by structures of class and religion. This discussion problematizes 'race' as a product of visual practices and opens a door to consider what else might be in play in processes of racialization.

In the last section of this chapter I turn to the central argument of this thesis: I argue that theorizations of whiteness and its invisibility have failed to explore the role of white female bodies in the practice of 'race' making. I suggest that there needs to be a better understanding of the corporeal and affective practices of white female bodies if we are to make sense of how whiteness figures in racism. The discussion on how far gender has been part of the women's lives compared with the silence of 'race' allows for an understanding of how their bodies are gendered but escape racialization. The white body is also a site where internalized racialized emotions and inner racisms assemble to then direct actions, as some of the interviewees explained to me. I employ the concept of white affect to understand an incident at an anti-racist meeting, where I argue the white female body figured as a site where “body states, situations, past experiences, linguistic forms, flowering thoughts, etc. become woven together” in an affective practice (Wetherell 2012: 22).

### **Whiteness as Invisible Norm and as a Racial Identity**

The literature on whiteness insists that “as a supra sense of human particularity” (Back 2010: 465) it is established as the norm, as the universal (Frankenberg 1993; Dyer 1997).

Muñoz explicitly talks about “official national affect”, which “positions itself as the law” (2000: 69). He posits whiteness as “a cultural logic which can be understood as an affective code” (2000: 69). Whiteness as an invisible norm is emphasized by research that draws attention to how white people don’t consider their whiteness as a prominent aspect of their identity (Miller 1992; McIntosh 1988; Allen 1993; Frankenberg 1993; Hardiman 1994; Martin et al. 1996; Nakayama and Krizek 1995; Hurtado and Stewart 1997). In line with the literature, the respondents explicitly contested whiteness as a racial identity. Other than Dorothy, a middle-aged chief executive who identifies herself culturally as a white person, for the others, white identity seems to have no content at all. Barbara, a middle-aged director of two human rights organizations, who has lived in many countries across the globe, was opposed to whiteness as either an ethnic, racial or cultural identity:

KH: Would you say that you belong to an ethnic group?

Barbara: No.

KH: So, you wouldn't define whiteness as an ethnic group.

Barbara: No. No! I don't feel like that at all!

KH: And you don't see yourself as racially or culturally identified?

Barbara: No. No.

When I asked the same questions to Emily, a married woman in her early thirties, she answered by talking about her nationality, religion, politics, and gender, but whiteness as a form of identity did not seem to occur to her at all:

Well, I was raised as ah ... not really as Catholic, because my parents are not really religious. But I guess with the cultural Christian values. And ... in a mix of Franco-German culture. And ... yeah. And more on the left side. Yeah. But ... Yeah. That's it. And as a, as a girl. I didn't know if I was ah ... really gendered as a girl. Well ... I ... yeah.

Carmen, however, explicitly questioned white identity, the very meaning of it:

I don't even know what it means if I'm honest! ...I'm, it's ... Maybe because I know stuff about the area, maybe because I have a very overly analytical mind, the kind that has to really be able to define something before I'm willing to call myself it ... I think it's a handy term, when it comes to monitoring ... it's ... probably a useful way of ... categorising people. ... It's not that I wouldn't, I would not describe myself as it. It's that I would hesitate before I proactively did ... But I have no idea what else I would describe myself as. So, it's more of a default. And ... I look around and I don't see something else that fits. ... Yeah.

She seems to imply that the practice of identifying as white is “more of a default”, something that she does only reluctantly because nothing else is there. Whereas Carmen does not seem to reject the term white identity, she also appears to be very uncomfortable with it. She is unable to fill it with a meaning that she could identify with.

If white racial identity has any content or meaning at all, it is only in relation to histories of racism. Similar to the other interviewees, Molly, a mother of two young children, seemed to have trouble coming to terms with how to define the meaning of a white identity:

KH: And would you say that you yourself belong to an ethnic group? Or, a culturally or racially defined group? Would you say that about yourself?

Molly: .... No.

KH: So, you wouldn't say that white people could be defined as belonging to an ethnic group? Or a cultural group?

Molly: ... Yeah, I 'spouse yes, actually [LAUGHS]. Now that you say it [LAUGHS] ... But I don't really think of it as that, because ... I mean when you say it, I don't think whiteness as an ethnic group, I mean, I guess it's an ethnic group and a cultural group, when you think of it, just like any other group. But it's ...

KH: So, would you place it in the racial palette?

Molly: Not really. I mean ... in ... without the history of racism, like, I am thinking of Europe, like it probably would be an ethnic group, like ... I guess in an ideal world, I don't know if it makes sense what I'm saying, but in an ideal world it would be an ethnic, cultural group, you know, among many others, but because of ... yeah, because of the history of racism and of ... of white people being ... you know taking the feelings of superior, like in the history of racism, but it's still in a way like that, nowadays. It's ... it's a slightly, I mean it's not ... I don't know how to explain it, but it's not ... it's not race ... you know, racial category as such. Or it's not ... I don't perceive it as such today. If you see what I mean.

KH: Yeah. Would you see it in the racial hierarchy then? Does whiteness have a place in there somewhere?

Molly: Yeah. Yes.

First, Molly seems to contest that she is culturally, ethnically or racially defined as a white person. But when I phrased the question differently and opened it up to white people in general, she becomes very perplexed about it, trying to understand whiteness “just like any other group”. However, it seemed that something was not right about this for her. I interpret her answers as her thinking out loud ways in which the question and

the possible answers to it would make sense to her. First, she suggests that she doesn't think of "whiteness as an ethnic group" but implies at the same time that maybe it is. Then again, she doesn't seem to place it in the racial hierarchy because of histories of racism: without it, in "an ideal world", whiteness would be just one amongst many ethnic and cultural groups. The role of the "superior" that she appears to give to white people in histories of racism, that she suggests continues today, seems to make her think of whiteness not as a racial category—yet, she still seems to place whiteness in the racial hierarchy. Her account could be read as a complex meaning-making process, where we are left with an understanding of whiteness as something that is not raced or identified in cultural or ethnic terms but that nonetheless, plays an important, "superior" role in racism, not only historically but today as well.

## **White Privilege**

For some of the women, their whiteness only made sense through an understanding of their privilege, how they use it or turn it around in their everyday lives or in their work in anti-racism. Barbara seemed to find it difficult to accept her white privilege:

Barbara: Yeah, but ... What am I? That's the other thing. White, of course, I am white, yeah. And of course, I know all the little exercises when you put me ... and at the end you will have the black man, and at the front you will have the white man, and the white woman is next to the white man. Of course! Yeah, that's the reality! Definitely. And you should not accept that, like that!

KH: So, you challenge it yourself? You don't agree with that kind of categorisation of people?

Barbara: Why would I be more than them? I mean ... for getting a job for example. If all the rest is the same.

KH: What do you mean for getting a job?

Barbara: If you apply for a job, why would I have ... why should I have a ... priority than somebody else. Who has the same capacities as I have. And the same experience. Even different experience, it doesn't matter.

KH: So, you think you have a privilege in that?

Barbara: Of course!

KH: And you don't accept that?

Barbara: ... And we don't accept that? I don't accept that?

KH: Yes, that's the question.

Barbara: I will definitely not say I have this ... I want this priority because I am what I am! Ah no! ... But I don't know! Tomorrow I get a job, and I would know, if there is a black woman, who had the same ... points or whatever that I have. Would I give the job to her? ... Is it also that what is expected? When you live together? I mean those who choose you, they should do it in a correct way!

From this account, it seems that for Barbara her whiteness acquires meaning through an ordering of categories according to privilege, where 'white woman' is next to 'white man', and both before 'black man'. This categorization resembles the historical one offered by Frankenberg (1997) that I also used in my performances (see Chapter 4 and 5). For Barbara, this ordering of people is not historical, but a lived reality that she seems unwilling to accept. She questions this system of whiteness whereby she is automatically granted privilege over black women when looking for a job for example. While she seems outraged by this, she also raises highly important questions regarding the deconstruction of whiteness: what is expected by white people to dismantle whiteness? How far is it one's individual responsibility and at which point can we expect actions from “those who choose you”—from a system that is also inherently white and made up of white men and white women at the top of the racial ordering of people?

In the following section, I look at how the respondents work through their privileged position and discuss their motivations for working in anti-racism, and the roles they have assigned themselves in this field. Finally, in this section, I explore how the respondents are perceived in the anti-racist movement as white women by looking at some of the reactions they got, and how their work has shaped their sense of self.

### **White Anti-Racism**

As seen in the first quote by Barbara in the previous section, for her it is not clear “what is expected” from her as a white woman in relation to how far she should go in trying to give up her white privilege. The central call in studies of whiteness is to name and mark whiteness so as to expose it, to understand and to “displace” white domination and privilege (Frankenberg 1997: XX; Wander et al. 1999; Nakayama and Krizek 1999). The women interviewed find that working in anti-racism is what they can do in this regard, as expressed by Natalie, an elder woman with significant histories of active involvement in both anti-racist and feminist protests and activism:

You have to try. All I can do is try to use some of my skills to make some sort of difference.

My respondents' motivations for choosing to work in anti-racism were mostly professional, stemming from an interest in human rights. Ranging from “no particular



reasons” (Molly) or “by chance” in the cases of Emily and Jessica, to personal reasons, either because of family histories of persecution, immigration or minority status, or a mix of both (Annabelle, Carmen, Helen, Jessica, Molly, Dorothy, Rosemary). The respondents seemed to have a highly professionalized attitude towards anti-racism, attitudes which began either during university undergraduate courses on human rights or, later on, during masters and PhD level studies in the field. This attitude was most clearly expressed by Annabelle who, by the time of the interview had gained considerable experience working in human rights advocacy. She drew a clear line between anti-racist work as a career option and as a passion:

Annabelle: Also, because ahm ... maybe I should have also said that I really feel that I'm a professional, human rights activist or professional, you know, anti-racist activist, rather than, well, actually, I'm more professional human rights ah ... yeah. Rather than an activist.

KH: What's the difference?

Annabelle: The difference is that is my job! It's my career!

KH: And an activist?

Annabelle: An activist ahm ... is someone that is committed, you know, like, 100 per cent, you know, in their life, they may have a job on the side and they do that in their free time, they're volunteers, they ahm ... yeah. They are, you know, passionate about it. And some of my colleagues are activists, I think, because they're also involved in, you know, at the local level and ahm ... but for me it's always been, since the beginning my career, and my job. And I think I'm good at it, because I bring like professional added value to the field. And I think it's also needed when you do advocacy with other stakeholders, like, the difference between the professional advocate and versus the passionate activist. Ahm ... yeah.

Annabelle seems to suggest that being an activist means being “passionate”, “committed 100 percent” and doing activist work alongside one’s main career—in contrast to a professional who considers anti-racism foremost as a career, with less passion but with the added value of professionalism. It is interesting how she seems to draw these lines along professionalism as if a passionate activist would not be able to bring up the cool-headed “professional added value” needed in advocacy. Earlier in the interview she also brought up a very apparent understanding of how whites can use their privilege in anti-racist work:

Annabelle: I do feel that it it's extremely important that we are aware that ahm ... aware of the privilege we have as whites and that, recognise that. And use that in our work! Ahm ...

KH: And how can you use it?

Annabelle: By recognising it. Because I think so many people do not recognise it, and I think it's powerful when white people say it too. And say yes, there is a difference ah yes, we are not all the same ... and yes white are like, have been privileged and the situation of minorities in Europe is the result of this, you know, long term and historical privilege. And ... I'm not gonna speak for you, but I'm gonna be ah hearing what you have to say and confirming what you what you say. You know, I'm just here to help, kind of. To support. To be next to you. But not ahh ... you know, speak instead of you. Or something like that.

She appears to echo the importance given by Natalie and Barbara in the quotes above about recognizing white privilege and the consequences it continues to have on minorities in Europe. Carmen, who was discriminated for her belonging to a cultural minority seemed to touch on this when she said in the interview that because of her own experiences of exclusion at school, when she first learned about institutional discrimination, she had a moment of recognition:

When I started actually looking into this stuff properly, I was like going, 'I recognise that! I know that I experienced that!'

She went on to explain to me that it must be difficult for people to understand that if they had never experienced it. For her, despite her personal histories of discrimination, her role in anti-racism is not as clear as for Annabelle and, as a result, requires her continuing reflection:

Where I am in this? Am I somebody coming from majority community stepping into minority organisations ... how should I feel about having this job? And it not being someone from the minority background having it.

She suggested that a way for her to define herself was to say that part of her job was to “do herself out of the job”, to capacity build communities to speak for themselves. She left me with a warning about speaking on behalf of communities as a white person:

I do think it's important in an area where identity does matter. And where having ... as one of the really ... the central goal has to be for communities to speak for themselves. And where it's very much justified that the kind of majority coming in as experts and taking over the agenda, has to be guarded against. Because there is a very real risk of that happening. I think it's a legitimate thing to be questioning, challenging on.

The role of “helping that voice being heard” was expressed by Annabelle, and also by

Dorothy, who, similarly to Carmen, seemed to be very aware of institutional discrimination. She explained the contested nature of the role of “giving voice” that white women often assign to themselves in anti-racism. In her account, the supporting role that she was awarded as a white woman in anti-racism seemed to be more of a product of institutional racism, rather than having an honourable reason. As she explained to me, because of structural exclusion, there are few positions where there are Black leaders, so it is understandable that they would not want a white woman in a leadership role. She said she understands this but still feels frustrated with how structural exclusion and barriers are being reproduced only to allow white privileged rich people who have the right connections to progress to management positions in most sectors. She explained to me how being white can be of advantage in anti-racism beyond the contested “giving a voice” role:

KH: So, in many ways it helped in your work that you were white?  
Dorothy: Yeah. I think so. It allowed me to be a bridge, or a mediator. It was possible to bring groups together, to still be able to have inclusive ways by being able to have separate and different conversations with different groups. Ahm ... So, I think there were lots of benefits in that way too.

It thus appears from this analysis that issues of identity, representation and, whiteness itself, complicate the roles white women can take up in anti-racism. An openly aggressive incident at a meeting, where black people questioned the “mandate to represent them to speak” left Molly denying her whiteness to herself in order to get on with her work. After decades of working in the field, Helen, herself a member of an ethnic minority in the country where she lives, left her job:

I think I've seen too much and I don't believe that anything will change.

Besides working in anti-racism as a profession, however, there are opportunities that one can use in their free time to help the cause, as Barbara explained to me. She regularly organizes street parties with her neighbours, amongst whom there are Moroccans and old white pensioners who were suspicious at first but joined later on. She is also a member of the local Green Party. She commented on her activities as being “the more practical realisation of the bla-bla-bla that we tell here at my organisation, you know?” (Barbara) She seemed to have a realistic take on what she can achieve with her efforts:

Barbara: Ah, I am very realistic about that. If I can change, just one thought in the heads of people! Or just at least make them wonder about certain things! Then I think I can be happy. You know. And then you can only hope that next time they may wonder, a little bit again. And why and how and this or that. Ah ... because as an individual you are standing against everything nowadays. The media, the extreme right, and the right, and what they all dare to say today! Pfhu ... You know, it's so ... Yeah, some people would maybe just give up. And say, "You can't do anything, ah? You can't change anything anyway!"

KH: But you are not one of those people?

Barbara: No, I don't think so! Yeah? [BOTH LAUGH] I don't think so! [LAUGHS]

## White Women in the Anti-Racist Movement

In this section, I look at some of the perceptions narrated by my respondents regarding what others in the anti-racist movement have of them, the meanings that got attached to anti-racist white femininities and how their white female bodies figured in these situations. Through exploring how they thought and felt about themselves in explicitly affective terms, it is possible to begin gaining a picture of how these experiences affectively shaped the interviewees' sense of self as white women.

The following quote from Molly, whose experiences in the movement had already complicated her sense of self as a white person and led to instances where she denied her whiteness to herself, introduces the debate that questions white women's legitimacy in working on anti-racism. This issue appeared in several other interviews.

I can't remember exactly when, but I do remember some moment where ... like some people ... you know ... questioned my skills ... because I ... members of staff who were white, or in fact anyone who was white [laughs] wouldn't be able to ... understand ... you know for example the experiences of black people, which is ok, I can understand the point that we of course are not black, so we can't understand how they experience it, but there were some unpleasant moments when they were like, well you can't ... I'm simplifying it slightly, but like you can't, you can't be working really on anti-racism, you know, if you're not ... if you're not a victim of racism. I'm simplifying. But that was the kind of logic behind some of the things some people said.

She said she was "frustrated and disappointed" by this reaction, which seems to apply the figure of 'white woman' on her, and the particular power relations that this trope entails (Frankenberg 1997, see Chapter 4). But she "feels strongly about anti-racism" and

wants to “join the fight”, but also understands where this comes from, as she is “inevitably more distant from the issue” and experiencing racism “must make a difference” not to be a victim of racism. On my question about whether she is made to feel this in her everyday work, she said that it is not “prominent”, although “sometimes in some discussions you can feel it below the surface”; but most of the time it's not an issue. Nonetheless, the experience of working in anti-racism, where she is in the minority, contributed to her sense of self as a white person:

They were like ... more ... non-white people, like, as a whole, I would say than white people. And that, actually, made me more aware of myself as a ... you know as a white woman, yeah, I guess. I mean maybe I wasn't conscious of myself in a setting where I'm not in the minority, but, you know, I'm, yeah, I mean I'm not in the usual setting where I am really clearly part of the majority. So ... yeah. I think that's made me more aware of myself definitely as white. Maybe not so much as woman, but as white, definitely, yeah.

Rosemary, a middle-aged married woman with histories of migration and religious discrimination in her family, seemed to be very upset by some of the reactions she got at the beginning of her career, especially from some men:

It was a man in particular there, who was very. Every time we were meeting at conferences on these issues, or seminars, he was really, you know, regarded me almost as an impostor, and what was I doing here, as a [nationality] woman, white ... ah ... working on the issue. And it wasn't for the fact that I was [nationality], more the fact that I was white, you know.

Set against a background of generations of persecution and migration in her family, she felt that she had similarities with people who come from India or Africa but was denied acceptance in the movement because of the perception people had of her as a 'white woman'.

I was easily put, you know, into the [nationality] woman, you know, box, with all the meaning that they attach, you know, what [nationality] can be, or, you know. Including sexuality. Which is very annoying.

This changed later in her career, which she explained was because with the passing of time and due to her older age, people became less competitive. She came to the country where she lives now in her thirties, a young white woman with enthusiasm and ambition. She told me about several instances when she received offers of a sexual

nature, her youth and beauty were compounded by the facts that she was white and from a nationality that was prone to sexual stereotype (see more on the sexualization of the figure of 'white woman' in Chapter 4). Her reaction was to distance herself from black men in the movement, even if it meant that she lost possibilities. Carmen also hinted at the role that gender played as “one of the reasons why they won't be showing you that full respect”. Rosemary is now a well-respected figure in the movement—a director and a trustee of several organizations.

The account given by Helen (a mother of two in her mid-thirties, member of an ethnic minority) shows how highly context-specific affective practices are. When she does European anti-racist work, she is mostly perceived as a white person. In her home country, however, her gender plays a more significant role in people's perception of her. When I asked her if she gets particular responses to her gender from her European colleagues she responded:

Sometimes. Yes. You start feeling it already. But I think it's more like “you white cannot understand what we black feel.” [...] It's very different overall. Because in [name of home country] is more gender issues, you know and then at the European level is more black and white issues.

She went on to explain to me that when put in the perspective of the widespread Afrophobia in Europe, the discrimination she faces in her home country seems like a smaller issue:

So, and you get to Europe, you get this whole picture in you, and you feel yourself fine, is like ok, not having citizenship is not such an issue as comparing being afraid for your life. So, you're kind of, it's like ok, it's so.

Nonetheless, when she goes home she is treated to the same exclusion and discrimination as the other people who are part of her white ethnic minority:

And then you come back. It's more your life. But it's the issues that maybe you cannot visualise very much. You know when somebody is being beaten up, you can show it. [...] So, you have the majority of cases you have either this, you know, kind of hate speech that you can hear, it really doesn't show anywhere, other than the person feels bad about it, it's employment issues, it's the education issue, access to services, you cannot, it's, it can be very subjective how you understand it.

As an example, she told me that doctors might refuse to speak the language of the children in hospitals when they learn that they are from a minority group. In these instances, as she said, the racism they face is less “visual” because of the white on white exclusion and because of the nature of discrimination, which tends to be hate speech or discriminatory treatment rather than of the physical kind. The affective practices around her are distinctly different in these two settings. In the organisations which work at the European level, where the presence of black people and the issue of Afrophobia is very present, she is perceived as a European 'white woman'. Her legitimacy of knowing the experience of racism is fundamentally questioned by the black members of the organization as she is foremost understood through structures of power and not through her personal histories of discrimination and prejudice that is a constant daily experience for her in her country. When she steps back, reflects, and understands the different depth of the issues, her problems seem to shrink compared to the threat of life that visible minorities tend to experience. In the organization she is made to be a representative of white racist society. Back at home, where she is a member of an ethnic minority, her whiteness and that of her children do not save them from disrespectful and discriminatory treatment.

The notion that the presence of non-white people is necessary for the respondents to see themselves as white (discussed below in more detail) seems to be reinforced in the following accounts from Emily and Annabelle (both from a Western European country and in their mid-twenties at the time of the interview). They talk about how their work with non-white people in anti-racism contributes to the formation of their sense of self as white:

And being a white in general, that is something that I am more and more aware of, because at work I've become more and more aware of, you know, the situation of people of African descent in Europe, and how they feel, and how everything is dominated by white people [laughs] everywhere and that ... I try to be aware of that.

Emily explicitly mentions the fact that because she didn't belong to the groups that are “fighting for more visibility”, she was made aware of her whiteness. There was a surprise that followed this realization—by her lack of awareness that preceded her anti-racist work. Her sense of self as a white woman started to develop through this work that persevered in other work assignments too:

Because now I notice immediately. When I go to a meeting where I see only white men over 45. It's my first thought. There are no women there, it's only white people.

Their work in anti-racism surprised the respondents about their ignorance and started them off on a consequent and continuous challenging of their inner racism and stereotypes. On the question of how their work has contributed to the formation of their sense of self some of the women told me about a very positive development they are undergoing. As Emily commented:

I have a bias about something and working in anti-racism it makes me sometimes ... you know rethink, like ... question my initial bias about something. So that's what I really like actually about working at this organisation as that it ... like it always questions ... like ... if ... yeah, I'm always in a kind of questioning ... and reassessment of how I think about things. So. Yeah.

In Annabelle's words:

You try to challenge your own stereotypes and your own perceptions and ... and your own representation that you thought were given, trying to see them through different eyes.

The work gave Carmen a feeling of empowerment, righteousness and self-respect:

I quite liked that sense of myself. ... I found it very empowering, and ... I ... kind of gave me a lot of self-respect. Because I felt like I was doing something that not only I enjoyed, and it gave me a lot, but was worth it in the bigger picture as well. ... and so that's kind of strong kind of understanding of myself of somebody who ... who cares about things, cares about impact, cares about things happening, but cares about those things that actually matter.

Emily said that in doing anti-racist work she never had to overstep the moral standards she had set up for herself, which is not the case in her other work assignments. For Jessica, a young woman who has converted to Islam, her work gave her a way to use her “high sense of justice” which she did not know how to use before, but that people now expect a lot from her. She sees herself as an “activist” and feels that she has “a stronger role in defending some rights”.



## White as Invisible Colour

The respondents understand racial distinctions primarily through the colour of the skin. Besides skin colour, other physical characteristics, such as body shapes, hair and phenotype also contribute to people's ordering of others into racial colours (Saldanha 2007). Although no person is literally or symbolically black or white (Dyer 1997), these seemed to be the two poles of the racial visual palette that guided the interviewees' understanding of racial differences. White as a racial colour plays a paramount role in the racializing processes that I examine here and as such, the act of marking—seeing—it as a colour rather than as absence of colour is crucial in the naming of whiteness (Ahmed 2004c). The colour white is also a marker of whiteness (understood by the power axis of privilege, majority status, and material well-being) that however gets destabilised by other factors, such as ethnicity, class or religion, and, paradoxically, by its own ineffectiveness as a racial marker.

This ambiguity of white as a racial colour could be observed in the following excerpt from my interview with Emily; she suggests that her whiteness has been questioned by others because she was “quite tanned”:

I come from the countryside. But ... quite mixed countryside. With a lot of immigration, I guess. And ... because, I was quite tanned, so ... I had, I always had like a lot of questions, like for example in the school, like if I eat pork, or things like that, so. ... And it's ... I guess this kind of made me aware like, how people can perceive you from your physical appearance.

This experience made her aware of the importance of physical attributes that people use to categorize others along racial lines. When I asked her about her reaction to the question on whether she eats pork or not, and about her realization of what these questions might suggest, she said that she did not pursue it any further and just responded by saying that yes, she does eat pork.

In the case of Jessica, the youngest of the interviewees, it was not a summer tan that made her effectively lose her whiteness. Her skin colour remained intact, her physical characteristics unchanged. It was a piece of clothing that in her words “blackened” her: the headscarf. She was already in her twenties when she converted to Islam. Since then society treats her differently:

People outside in the society see me as black. Like, you know, they see me as a minority. Not in the ... in the dominant structure.

Since her conversion, she has experienced racism on a daily basis. She told me about an incident when she registered at the local administration and the fact that she was married, had a stable job, was from a Western European country and had white skin didn't matter to the official who dealt with her case. She was treated disrespectfully by the official who warned her not to take advantage of the social security system when she will eventually lose her job, which seemed to be inevitable to the administrator. In another instance she was directly questioned as to why she has consciously chosen to lose her whiteness:

Jessica: I remember once someone told me, [...] yeah, I don't ... I don't understand that you ... you are a converted Muslim and you are wearing the headscarf, it's like you want to be discriminated against. Is like you put the headscarf to be discriminated against.'

KH: So, this person said that they don't understand why you did it?

Jessica: Yeah, and this person told me, because she was black, and she told me, everyday my son is telling me why ... why I am black mummy, why I am black, and you, you become, you ... you put your headscarf, and it's like you become black and there is a lot of blacks they don't want to be black because they are discriminated against. But I ... I told her, I mean I yeah, I told her that ... I shouldn't be [RAISED HER VOICE] discriminated against [LAUGHS]. It's difficult to explain but I shouldn't be discr ... it's not because I cho ... I had ... I made a choice, first when I met this choice I was not aware of the levels of discrimination that was happening. And I I ... I shouldn't be discriminated against, I should be someone as anyone! ... so, for me, it's it's it's in a way good, that I also feel good, that I, at one time represent Muslim women in the society, I take, I speak, [...] I think it's good, because it also ... it's also good for people to see that Muslim women are part of the society, like any other and they shouldn't be discriminated against. So, it's more in this way that ... I think for me it's ok, because I want society to be used to that. That ... diversity is part of society. So. Yeah. I have no problem with that.

Jessica's conversion seemed to be the central decisive event in her life, something that she repeatedly returned to in the interview, turning nearly all my questions back on it. Her depth of reflection on her converting to Islam was striking. This reflection might not be surprising given how her life seemed to have changed, of which the above excerpt is an illustration. She said that she hadn't been aware of the levels of discrimination

directed towards Muslim women before she began wearing the headscarf herself. At an earlier point in the interview, she explained to me that one of the decisive reasons why she had converted was the emancipation she found in Islam as a woman. One could interpret the discriminatory treatment she started to receive from society after her conversion as backfiring against her quest for liberation. She encountered racism, which is an everyday reality for people who are deemed not white by white people. She was directly questioned by a black woman about her apparent incomprehension of why she had willingly given up her whiteness; she cited the cries of her young son who would not want to be black had he had the choice. And yet, Jessica willingly gave up her “greatest asset” (Dyer 1997: 44) of being treated as a white woman—given what white connotes—at the moment she put on a headscarf. Her response is thus an outcry to society: she should not be discriminated against, she should be treated like anyone else, part of a diverse society.

The unstable relationship between white as skin colour and white as a racial category are also evident in the interviews with Helen and Carmen. Helen belongs to a white ethnic minority in her home country and has experienced systematic discrimination from a very young age in education, when looking for a job, and on a daily basis from her immediate surroundings. She questions white on black racism:

Sometimes you have to start proving that ... you know that trying to explain to other people that you know, it's not all the Afro-phobia, for me is of course a big question, but ... and it's a question, a problem as itself, but at the same time you cannot forget that racism is not only Afro-phobia.

Belonging to a white ethnic minority, she appears to suggest that white as a skin colour alone, when detached from majority status is not enough to escape racism in her country. In the case of Carmen, cultural minority status complicated her whiteness. As she explained, she had a privileged background that allowed her to live in a house as opposed to many from the community that she identified with and go to university. Her white skin and privileged status, however, did not save her from discriminatory treatment too though. Similar to Helen, she equates her experience of discrimination with racism:

And, when I started looking at institutional discrimination in particular, all I could think of was my school. Just like, this is describing my experience of school. ... and the other thing that

came with it as well, was this discussion around ethnicity, race, what makes up an ethnic group, what is racism, because I think the way in which people from my community were treated within that school system was an example of racism. Doesn't mean that I was a victim of racism in the classic sense, I have, you know privileged background, I don't have that long history, you know, in many ways I have my escape route in that I was able to go to university and stuff like that, which others wouldn't have done to be able to get away from that treatment and behaviour. But the behaviour of the school and the authorities and many of the individual teachers was very much motivated by racism against [...]. They didn't know that I wasn't an ethnic group [...]. Cause they didn't understand that distinction themselves. They just went [...], equated with nomadism, therefore equals stupid, ill-behaved, must-to-be-enforced discipline ... not going to achieve anything ... you know, all of the classic stereotypes were imposed on us. ... and I spent most of my school life fighting back against them.

Carmen seems to draw parallels with “racism in the classic sense” and explains that the facts that she was from a privileged background and did not have the same history meant that she could make use of an escape route that was not available for others from her community. It appears, however, that her combination of wealth and white skin did not rescue her from racism by her school teachers: they did not give her the same treatment that white people usually get. In such processes of racialization, visual practices of racialized seeing is a primary component. As Back states: “I would maintain that racism—as a historically produced sensory system—*sees* first” (2010: 465, emphasis original). Similarly for Byrne, 'race' is a product of visual practices (2006). Carmen's, Helen's and Jessica's cases demonstrate, however, that white as skin colour is a shaky racial category and that the colour of the skin is weighed against other factors in the formation of whiteness. In the last section of this chapter I turn to how the respondents considered the experiences of their bodies alongside visual practices as a way of understanding what other corporeal processes need to be reckoned with in the making of 'white woman'.

## **I am Gendered, you are Raced**

While gender has structured the respondents' lives from an early age, 'race'<sup>40</sup> was present in their lives only in interactions with others who they perceived as black, Asian, or otherwise non-white. In the first interviews I have coupled the issues of 'race' and gender into one question, asking respondents about instances in their lives when these came up prominently or impacted them profoundly; my goal here was to allow the women to choose which category to start with, as I assumed that 'race' is a more sensitive issue, and more difficult to talk about. I soon realized that this was not necessary since all respondents have been active in anti-racism for years, either professionally or as activists, or both. They were thus all ready to talk about 'race,' racial differences and identities. Having the analytical capacity to reflect and talk about systems of oppression made their subsequent silence of whiteness as a racial category even more telling: the white women interviewed did not seem to see their bodies as racialized but rather, as profoundly gendered.

Whereas 'race' came up only in relation to talking about other people, all respondents conceived of their gender as having a profound impact on each stage of their lives, a reality they have lived through and reconstructed on a daily basis. For them, their bodies did not seem to be raced, but they were gendered and sexualized throughout their lives. In the cases of Carmen and Dorothy, this was already their experience during their school years. Dorothy, who has been a respected director or chief executive of anti-racist organisations for a considerable time in her adult life, refused as a student to comply with sexist homework that required her to cook dinner and prepare tea for her father and brother (but not her mother who was expected to help her in fulfilling her task), even if it meant that she would be expelled from the extracurricular all-girls group she was a part of. Carmen, who has been a passionate activist since she left university, challenged the division of boys and girls when she started school, a practice that she was not used to at the time:

And then I went into the mainstream school I was just like, "what you mean, boys over there and girls here? What you mean I can't play with the boys? What's wrong with playing with the boys?" And it's just, like, I was really, very conscious of the kind of imposition of the separation between boys and girls.

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<sup>40</sup> I use the word 'race' in this section on occasions when respondents themselves used the word or talked about non-white people (e.g. black family in the neighbourhood, Asian colleagues etc.).

There was a general sense in all of the interviews that the awareness of gender has been a critical point in the lives of these women. As Molly, married and a mother of two young children at the time of the interview, put it:

I guess there is always a memory when you realise, you know, your gender identity.

In contrast, 'race' appeared to have less of an impact in their lives (as discussed below).

Jessica, who converted to Islam and has been wearing the headscarf since her early twenties, explicitly contrasted her gender sensitivity with 'race':

I think I was more gender sensitive. I was more sensitive to discrimination against women. I would say, because of I was kind of ... I am still! Kind of feminist, feminist way of things, or something. So, I think the kind of injustice towards women and the ways that men behave and ... So yeah. I would say that I was more sensitive to that. I remember I was conscious of that, and I was thinking about it.

Similar to Jessica, feminism as a tool to understand and question gender roles was crucial for all respondents. Feminism, as an ideology and a movement, has been present in the interviewees' lives and has given them the language and mechanisms to critically examine their positions and question their roles in society. They have consequently acted on it in various ways. As Natalie, a founder of feminist organizations and passionate activist in the '70s, explained it:

Feminism gives an eye on that! You wouldn't necessarily think or get that! So quickly. You wouldn't know what questions to ask!

Amanda, an elder mother of two and also a founding member of a feminist organization, expressed the same sentiment:

I think feminism gave ... in the early '70s, I think it gave an ... structure and ideology to things that you've felt, you know, but suddenly there was a theory, which was great. So, it wasn't just you, feeling things.

In Dorothy's words:

I would say it [feminism] gave me words to talk about what I was feeling and experiencing.

Many of the women were influenced by their mothers and aunts who they said were feminists and were role models for them. Reflecting on the continued need for feminism

over generations, Barbara, a mother of a grown-up woman, prompted a call:

When I look around and I see that all these younger people, you say, ah shit! Look at that! Pha! I would not accept that! While these young ... Also, because, these young people, young women, they would have something against feminism. Because, why, why? They consider that they are that far, you know? But when I look or hear the stories sometimes, and I think ahm! No! Not at all! Maybe you should be a little more feminist!

As powerful as it was to point out gender inequalities, feminism did not help Amanda to see inequalities across racial lines. She told me about a project when she and her colleagues did not think to work together with black or Asian people, and it only occurred to her several years later, upon deeper reflection, that she was “missing something vital”. In response to my question on whether she could identify what it was, she responded:

No, No. Or I didn't ... I just felt inadequate I think. ... And so, it needed a debate like we had about feminism, it needed a debate about racism.

Her response feeds into the black feminists' critique of second-wave feminism as being a white middle-class movement that is blind to any other forms of oppression and, as a result, itself reproduces racism—a discussion that is outside the scope of this thesis. What is interesting here is how she and the vast majority of other respondents who are involved in feminism or use it in their lives to form an understanding of the workings of society don't seem to need a similar understanding of racism from the position of whiteness. This could suggest that it was not a concern for them, that it was outside of their experiences. It seems that there was no framework available to them with which to place whiteness into structures of racism, nor does it seem as if their understanding of gender inequalities crossed over to an analysis of 'race' inequalities. Amanda seems to imply that there was no language or tool available for her to understand and act on 'race' in the way that feminism is there for gender. The idea that the analytical tools—“frame” as Annabelle put it—to examine gender inequalities could be used to examine whiteness from a racial equality point of view was explicitly discussed by Annabelle. Whereas Jessica referred to 'race' in a general sense in the quote above, when she compared it to her gender sensitivity, Annabelle mentioned whiteness in particular in contrast with gender:

In my case, becoming aware that I was a woman much earlier than thinking that I was white. I mean this is still, something that is still developing ... Especially now, because I work on these issues, while becoming woman has been there for some time now. [...] I think let's say about femininity and what it means being a woman and the difference between men and women, it is something that I've been more ... that is seen as less sensitive. And that is more shared around, in my surrounding, in my family, in my mother, my friends, it's like, it's accepted! That there are differences that women are ... discriminated or ... not equal. I mean in that frame it's perhaps easier realising that there are also power struggles between races and that ... as white you are privileged. ... Not everyone is aware of that in my surroundings and therefore it makes me more ... doing that realisation alone. And also, being a woman, you are more in the ... minority, or ... in the dominated part, while being white you are in the majority. You are in the dominating part. So ... different ... yeah.

Annabelle seems to imply that both, becoming a woman and realizing her whiteness are ongoing processes. While “thinking that I was white” came at a much later point in her life and was very much developed through her work in anti-racism, “becoming aware that I was a woman” was a much earlier realization for her. She explains this by referring to her close circle of family and friends who seemingly share the view that unjust differences exist between men and women and therefore, the topic of gender inequality is seen as less sensitive, to the point that it is accepted in her “surroundings”. She points out that this frame of inequality could also be used to understand racial differences, and, importantly, that “as white you are privileged”. Her network of family and friends, however, seem not to be aware of this and she feels left alone in making this realization on her own. From her account, we might conclude that gender struggles are a more acceptable form of power struggle for whiteness than the fight for racial equality. Seeing whiteness, in this case, could be read as an act of will, an act of power, and would be a political act if followed through as it would necessitate acknowledging the majority position and therefore the position of power, that “you are in the dominating part”. But, Annabelle avoided it, and what is interesting is that it is not a conscious act of avoidance, just something that is not out there even as an option to consider avoiding or not, since it seems to be of no concern at all. Speaking from a position of a dominated minority as a woman as opposed to the dominating position of whiteness seems to be a more accepted form of struggle for justice for Annabelle. Her account could suggest the embeddedness of gender in white women's lives, something that is of concern to them,



whereas realizing racial discrimination and unjust differences based on 'race' would require an act of will that needs solitary work to be done by some white people which would involve the acknowledgment of their majority “dominating” power position in society.

In the rest of this section, I focus on how the women responded to my questions about the memories they have which are associated with 'race' issues and awareness of 'race'. None of the women started answering by talking about their whiteness first. They all answered by talking about meeting or interacting for the first time with people who were non-white. The exclusive term 'non-white' is important here, as the visual perception of race based on skin colour seemed to be their primary way of understanding my questions on race. In Molly's words:

I mean I was conscious that they were different, probably, because they just had different skin colour.

Barbara searched her memories for anyone who would be different in the village where she lived as a child, thinking of people from Africa or Roma people, but could not remember any. Carmen told me about a sweet childhood memory when she was dancing around the table with her friend, listening to the original version of Little Eva at a house of a friend of the family—the only black family in the area. Both Jessica and Molly went to diverse schools and recounted events in which “different” students 'different' were mocked. Interestingly, Molly seemed to be searching for adverse experiences associated with people with different skin colour. In primary school she could not remember any however, and only recalled instances in secondary school where students from Moroccan origin “didn't have many friends, they were always kind of mocked at”. At a later point in the interview, she told me that she also was part of the group of students who ridiculed the Moroccan students. Annabelle also seemed to associate racial differences with segregation and disenfranchisement:

But my first encounter really the difference was when I moved to [...], because I come from a region in [...], where actually there is a very small ... population with migrants. So, for example there is barely any black in my high school, there were a few Arabic people. But, when I moved to [...] I was 20 years old, and ... I saw really Roma people ... living a parallel life. Like being completely segregated, you know, and you had dogs, like stray dogs ... collecting garbage, and Roma, collecting garbage. And I was kind of, the first time that I saw such a segregation, such a

different ... you know, and it was related to the fact that there were Roma. And the racism was shared among everyone. Almost all my [...] encounters. ... and then, you know, with that in mind I also came back to [...] and of course saw a lot of problems, that they were, there was in [...], included Roma issues, but that was my first kind of realisation.

This account by Annabelle could be read as the need for her to see contrasts to whiteness in order to experience 'race' not only in terms of skin colour (black and Arabic people in school) but also in terms of a highly segregated and disenfranchised “parallel life” lived by Roma people. It appears that she had to be exposed to this very extreme form of racism in another country at a considerably late age of 20 years to understand how racial differences operate in her own country. This perception of whiteness as “non-raced”, that “other people are raced, we are just people” (Dyer 1997: 1) was a prevailing sentiment shared by the vast majority of the women interviewed. 'Race' was always about others, 'race' always seemed to be present in their lives only in relation with others, and whiteness emerged in the interviews as a relational construct (Parish 1997; Gunaratnam 2003).

Dyer explicitly warns that focusing solely on interactions of racial difference “may reinforce the notion that whiteness is only racial when it is marked by the presence of the truly raced, that is, non-white subject” (Dyer 1993: 14). This is to say that whiteness is there, everywhere, it “reproduces itself in all texts all of the time” (1993: 13), not only in relation and against non-white. Ahmed's point that non-whites see whiteness everywhere also emphasizes its universality (2004c). I want to suggest however that whiteness is the only 'race' that can allow itself to see itself as racial only in relation to others. Although it is everywhere, it has the privilege of not seeing itself raced. I would argue that it is precisely for the reason that whiteness is the norm that it does not become racial until it gets *affectively* racialized in interaction with racial others. In the following, I examine internalized racialized emotions as bodily processes and the actions against inner racisms before turning to white bodies in intersubjective and intercorporeal affective practices.

## Internalized Racialized Emotions and Inner Racism

When realizing what it entails, white privilege comes with a strong set of emotions. Emily told me that when she learns about gross human rights abuses she feels disgusted but to carry out her work she needs to block out her emotions. However, she is also afraid to do so:

I'm afraid that if I block them I don't feel anything anymore.

Exceptionally amongst the interviewees, Natalie reflected on her body as being racialized through the emotions attached to whiteness. She used the words “painful” and “uncomfortable” to describe the process of learning her place in the world, which she connects with the colonial history of the country from where she comes. She explained to me that for her these emotions became internalized to the point where they affect how she perceives her body. Quoting Maya Angelou, she looked at her hand while saying:

I thought it was so marvellous what ahm ... Maya Angelou said the other day, she said ahm ... “when I was little”, she said, “when I was little I didn't think that white people were real” she said, you know, I felt like, god! With this see-throughy skin!

Having racist sentiments also appeared from the interviews to be an element which makes whiteness. Although I was aware of the high levels of self-reflection that the women were practicing not only during the interviews but in their regular working and daily lives, I was still shocked by the honest and up-front admissions by some of their own racism. Natalie continued to explain how she faces up to her inner racism:

I would have to face my inner racism. 'Cause I do believe that we are all racist, you know. And that you don't lose that, you know. It is a struggle, I think. You have to be honest, you know. Because those sorts of differences we have been all brought up ... our feelings of fear of difference or whatever is deeply internalised I think. From very long, you know. And I think it's ... it's ... ahm ... it's much better to sort of say to acknowledge that is there to some degree, you know, like, yes, I do find black men very sexy. A lot of the time. Sorry, but I know I am subject to this stereotype. You know, I am subject to it!

Natalie explained her inner racism in relation to the sexualized stereotypes of black men. Dorothy told me about her “paternalistic racism”, which she said was “good intentioned”, “not realising that that was racism”, but it was racism nonetheless. Molly explained her

racism at a young age, with being “a bit bitchy teenager” at school where she “went with the majority, with the flow” making fun of Moroccan pupils. Looking back, she said she feels “a mixture of shame and regret”. To be conscious of inner racism seemed to be the first crucial step towards eliminating it for the respondents. Barbara, like Natalie, seemed to believe that we are all racist, no matter if we acted on it or not:

Oh, I definitely will always say we! Because like I said it's in all of us. Somewhere. And ... ahm ... you have to be conscious of that. And ... there are things which I know I will not do any more. Or I have never done that. But that doesn't matter in fact so much. It's there. And ... you have to be conscious of that! That's it! And then, it's only then when you are conscious that you can come to another level and change it.

In these quotes, disgust and shame appears to be coupled with admitting racist beliefs. The respondents consciously worked against the kind of racist sentiments that seem to be internalized by them to the same degree that uncomfortable or disgusted feelings about racism were. 'Race' seems to open up a variety of emotions, often contradictory and destabilizing.

### **White Bodies in Affective Practices**

It has been argued that white bodies are not racialized the same way as black bodies are, that white people are not reducible to their bodies as black people are (see Chapter 1). For Dyer, the meaning of whiteness resides in that which is beyond the body: “To be seen as white is to have one's corporeality registered, yet true whiteness resides in the non-corporeal” (1997: 45). He argues that the question of being seen or unseen relates closely to power. The above interview examples underline this argument since respondents only seem to register their whiteness in interactions with others; their bodies seemed not to be raced for themselves. In the cases of Emily, Jessica, Helen, and Carmen, their white bodies became corporeal through interactions with racialized others and when they lost their whiteness (see section above on the instability of white as a racial colour). In this last section, I consider the elements discussed thus far that make the 'white woman'. I investigate what might be at play in those occasions when the interviewees understood themselves to be white women and were perceived by others as such. As I will show, affective practices render the interviewees' white female bodies not only visible to themselves and others but also felt and affected/enacted at the most visceral/embodied levels.

I suggest that in the following story and Dorothy's subsequent translation of the events that unfolded at an anti-racist meeting, the elements that I have discussed thus far and argued that are attached to the figure of 'white woman' are assembled in affective practices: whiteness as a racial identity only makes sense when put into histories of racisms; being part of the majority in structures of power and privilege is a marker of whiteness; white as a racial colour is unstable, yet as a common visual denominator it does play a prominent role in designating whiteness; the contention that while white women's bodies are gendered, they get racialized and perceived by themselves as white only in interaction with racialized others; and finally, internalized racialized emotions and inner racism are significant components in the making of whiteness.

I trace how these elements got mobilized in affective practices that I argue can be effectively captured in this example by Dorothy:

When we were meeting the [international anti-racism] work, and that was [X] and I. Ahm ... [X] was perceived as a white woman until the day she put on her sari and declared herself to be of a mixed heritage, at which point she became more acceptable to that group. [Name of organisation] in particular, but to others as well. So ... but while we were there ... ah ... I was ... I could not lead the conversations or discussions, it was made clear to me that I was not going to be the one who would lead any of the discussions, and it was in very blunt terms that no white woman would be leading the discussions for the [nationality] group here. Ahm ... and there were some nasty incidents, at the consulate actually, where [X] and I were both physically attacked ah ... because of something that [Y] said ah ... because we talked about ... [Y] was a trustee, a patron ... ahm ... we were there with trustees and patrons and during politicking, as one does, that's what you're there for to do, thinking about how we can, how we can move some of the ... and turn the items forward, and [Y] made the mistake to say that "in a conversation I had with Dorothy and the [organisation where Dorothy worked] team last night, we came up with ... I thought that perhaps the way forward would be we bla bla bla" ... I can't remember what the issue was. At which point one of the members of [name of organisation] literally left up, grabbed me by the neck and threw me out to the floor, screaming about "white women shouldn't be doing this work". [Y] was black woman, right. Yeah. So ... And then that created divide. But the divide was such that it was about three quarters really being offended by what had happened, and ... not taking sides but taking the position that that's ludicrous and that anyone who has the capacity to lead should be leading and working with us here today on these issues. And then one quarter, which was primarily the staff of [name of organisation] and a few

others ahm ... who just wouldn't accept that that was even a real possibility. [...] Well, they were forced to apologise, but it's clear that that was their position all the time. But that was the minority position. There. Not the majority of the movement, not the majority of the activist, I think felt that way. Ahm ... but here, in [name of country where Dorothy lives], I think the majority feel that way.

Dorothy got physically attacked at an anti-racist meeting because she was perceived as a 'white woman' by some of the black attendees at the meeting. Her white femininity seems to have caused a rage that ended in violence. Working with the operational definition of affective practice it is possible to untie the discursive, representational and visual practices and the workings of power, which got mobilized in those affective movements between Dorothy and the attacker. The concept of affective practice allows us to understand how these elements got assembled together to produce embodied meaning in the reaction to her white femininity. I would argue that the anger that was evoked by her presence in turn racialized her white female body. Her white femininity became not only visible but also tangible in its corporeality and was then acted upon. It is possible that in the affective movements between her and the others who were present, and between her and the person who attacked her in particular, a whole array of cognitive and bodily states got entangled with one another into an embodied meaning of 'white woman', which surged to the surface at that particular time and place between those people present. On the basis of the life stories that Dorothy shared with me, I suggest that her own understandings of discourses of 'race', structures of power and privilege might have gotten activated alongside her own struggle with her inner racism, her desire to contribute to anti-racism and to find her own role in the movement. This complexity could have affected the other person, who might have similarly affected Dorothy in a constant movement—passing of affects—between them. We don't know what went on in the attacker's mind, but we could assume that the visual practice of racialized seeing played a role in designating Dorothy as a 'white woman'. The roles that white women have played in histories of racisms, their position in relation to power and the subsequent privileges and a simultaneous questioning of the legitimacy of white women working in anti-racism was probably what induced the attacker's anger. I propose that this example can serve as evidence of how Dorothy's white female body was placed into structures of racism and systems of power and privilege. The affects that circulated around it evoked a physical reaction from another person, whose body

similarly became racialized in those moments of affective interaction. Histories of meanings of whiteness and blackness might have added layers to the actual personal history of Dorothy and her attacker as two individuals. I use this incident to argue how some affective practices become stabilized to produce meaning. Here, Dorothy was perceived foremost as a 'white woman'. People got affected primarily not by her person but by her white femininity. She was more than just a symbol or a sign, she was the embodiment of an *affective* figure in racism.

“An obvious entanglement for human social actors occurs routinely between embodied states and the semiotic”, writes Wetherell (2012: 353). It could be argued that this incident is evidence of the discursive-affective practices that go into processes of racialization, how there are relationally constitutive, and how bodies may engage beyond talk and discourse, “beyond the deliberative and reflective consistencies of representational thinking” (2012:356). I contend that representations, body actions, material and social contexts got assembled in this affective episode. The interview material demonstrates that racialized seeing—designating people in racial categories on the basis of the colour of their skin—is a widespread and common practice amongst the respondents, but also that it can be easily destabilized as this example so clearly shows us. Dorothy's colleague was also perceived as a 'white woman' until the point that she declared otherwise and made her statement stronger by putting on a piece of clothing that is associated with women of Indian/South Asian heritage. In Dorothy's case, we could observe how the visual, the material, the social and the cultural got relationally co-joined and articulated in the creation of the affective figure of 'white woman'.

When I asked her whether she could accept the anger that had been directed towards her, Dorothy answered:

Yes. Yes, I can accept the anger. Can I accept their theorizing or rationalizing of the anger, of their position? Yes. But do I think that it shouldn't be the guiding principle of solidarity.

She continued to explain her quest “to learn and understand better what I needed to do as a white woman supporting the cause of equality” that she identified as necessary for bringing communities together. These mixed reactions to her as a 'white woman' in anti-racism being physically attacked and acting as a bridge between communities result

in her polarised sense of self. This quote illustrates how these affective experiences have shaped her embodied subjectivity:

It's... it's kind of polarised, polarised reactions to me creates polarised issues for myself. Sometimes being confident, sometimes being not confident. Sometimes feeling like I know that I'm absolutely right, sometimes never knowing if I'd said the right thing. Ahm ... Sometimes feeling completely comfortable and right in being who I was and being who I want to be here, other times questioning whether or not I should be in this position, whether or not someone from a minority ethnic community should take over. So, really understanding the ones who really didn't want me there and accepting that there is a truth to what they are saying.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I opened up the discussion on the invisibility of whiteness by focussing on whiteness as a universal racial norm and theorizing whiteness through affect. I investigated some processes by which power, privilege, discourse and bodily states get assembled and activated in affective practices around white female bodies, which I argued, contribute to the racialization—and the visibility—of these bodies too. Returning to my main argument, I want to stress that without reckoning with affective encounters between white and non-white bodies what we are left with are but disembodied concepts and discourses of whiteness. These, in my view, are often rigid and stable forms of producing meaning and do not allow for livelier account and more open-ended ways of constructing often fleeting meanings that might only be meaningful in those passing moments for those involved. Back writes that “whiteness is not anchored in the racialised body but in the colour of the imagination: for racism is a regime of power that damages our ability to sense and make sense” (2010: 465). While in this chapter I have shown how whiteness often escapes white female bodies, I also want to suggest that we approach whiteness not only through disembodied ideas of power and privilege and the imagination, but also through those 'damaged' senses. I tried to grasp how whiteness damages our ability to make sense, or, in other words, what meanings get produced through affects that are attached to and evoked by whiteness. I demonstrated in the last example by Dorothy what whiteness does to our senses and to our flesh—how whiteness can become embodied in affective practices. I suggest that in this instance the white female body was not a passive recipient of power that is inscribed on it, but active and central in producing meaning through its corporeality.



## Part II. Performing Affective Anti-Racist White Femininities: The Performances

In the following two chapters I discuss four performances that I created for this thesis: *I Love Black Men* (UK, 2011); *Cruising Black Women* (Germany, 2013); *The Blush Machine* (Bolivia, 2013); *The Chapter of White* (Denmark, 2014). In each performance I directly contrasted the representational trope of 'white woman' with the physical, fleshy, living materiality of white female bodies by instituting different social encounters at multiple sites and locations (e.g. on the streets of Berlin, Germany and of Santa Cruz, Bolivia, or the closed performance space of *The Chamber of White*, see Chapters 4 and 5).

As seen in the previous chapter, interviewees were confronted with the trope of 'white woman' (Frankenberg 1997, see Chapter 4) in their lives on many occasions. Barbara, in particular, referred to the hierarchical ordering that structures the relationship between 'white woman' and 'black woman'. Molly explained how her skills were questioned by members of the anti-racist organization she worked for because she was perceived as a 'white woman' lacking any direct experience of racism. Helen was acted towards as a 'white woman' with no legitimacy to work on anti-racism in a European organization, whereas in her home country she suffers discrimination and is a victim of hate speech because of her minority status there. Rosemary had to face a sexualized version of the trope and received offers of a sexual nature from a member of an ethnic minority organization because she was a 'white woman'. Finally, Dorothy was physically attacked not because of her character, but because she was made to embody 'white woman'.

Building on these real-life experiences of middle-class white activist women, the trope of the 'ideal', 'respectable' 'white woman' (Skeggs 1997) and white femininity—understood as gendered and racialized social convention (Young 2005)—is at the centre of all four performances. The performances work simultaneously with and against the contradiction between theoretical understandings of 'race' as socially constructed, relational and situated, and the essentialism inherent in 'frozen' unitary categories such as the figure of 'white woman' that continues to shape lived experiences (Gunaratnam 2003). They all employ this rigid representational trope. The anti-racism expressed in these performances is done so in how they imagine forming new relationships around

this figure through the very corporeality and affective relations of white female bodies. In the following two chapters I trace how lived female experiences and social discourses are mutually constituted (Gunaratnam 2003) and how social discourses are embodied affectively.



*Figure 13. The Blush Machine (2013)*

*It is advisable to watch videos and documentations of the performances (please see attached USB) before reading the discussion of the artworks in the following chapters. Please don't watch all of them at once but proceed one by one (i.e. first watch the photo of Cruising Black Women when you get to that section in the chapter after the introduction and then read the text; then watch the video documentation of I Love Black Men when you get there in the text and read about it only after watching it, and so on), as the performances and the written text build on each other.*

## Chapter 4. The Racialized White Female Body and its Affects

In this chapter I examine the affective responses of bodies to representational tropes constructed by a particular discourse on 'race' and gender that I employed in two of my performances, *Cruising Black Women* and *I Love Black Men*. Both performances worked with a particular white stereotype that establishes relationships between 'white man', 'white woman', 'black man' and 'black woman', which Frankenberg described as the “trope-ical family” (1997: 11). This representational trope posits an elemental sexual attraction between 'white woman' and 'black man'. This racialized discourse has had far-reaching ramifications not just for sexualizing the relationship between white women and men of colour, but regarding white woman's positioning in the ruling hierarchy, their relations to white men and peoples of colour, and for the most violent and dangerous forms of subordination.

My performances activate concepts on the construction of whiteness through discourse and processes of racialization in representation, stereotyping, and cultural inscription. I employ the performances to challenge these models by insisting on the relevance of materiality and affective relationality in any theorization of the making of whiteness; I do this by directing attention to the 'somatically felt body' (Blackman 2008) and its affects.

My analysis of the performances is guided by the contention that our understanding of white femininities can be expanded if we consider the racialized white female body and its affects. More specifically, this chapter addresses the tensions between sociocultural norms and affective experiences of white femininity articulated in this particular representative trope of 'white woman'. I argue for an analytical framework that acknowledges that discursive and affective practices are equally constitutive in the making of whiteness; and which, while taking affective body states seriously, does not “ignore the meaning-making contexts and histories that so decisively shape the encounters between bodies and events” (Wetherell 2013: 355). I suggest how discourse is embodied affectively, and direct attention towards processes of affective meaning-making.

Before discussing the two performances, I first position the argument of whiteness as affects in relation to theorizations of 'race' in the prevailing social construction framework and more recent material accounts of difference. The first part of the chapter discusses the relations to the past that my performance works embody: the temporal relations between my artworks and those made in the 1970s-80s and early 1990s. I contextualize my performances by referring to artworks that I drew on during their making, including Adrian Piper's *Cruising White Women* (1975), and Diane Torr's gender performances in the 1980s and *Man-For-A-Day* workshops (first held in 1990). In the second part of the chapter, I move on to argue that in order to conceptualize whiteness we must consider not only the discursive constructs and visual paradigm of representation but also the haptic felt body and its affective practices and their entanglements.

### **Whiteness as Affect**

In conceptualizing whiteness as affects I place my work in materialist accounts of difference that have infused feminism (Grosz 1994) and some recent theorizations of 'race' (Saldanha 2007). After decades of social constructionism, "a renewed emphasis on how difference is generated in and through the material processes, interactions and encounters of everyday life" (Braun 2009: 501) has challenged previous conceptualizations of 'race' that focussed on its discursive constructions and were predicated on a strong anti-essentialist pursuit. As Diana Fuss put it: "What is at stake for a constructionist are systems of representations, social and material practices, laws of discourses and ideological effects" (1990: 2, quoted in Blackman 2008: 29).

Materialist approaches look at the lived realities of 'race', and thus attempt to remedy the shortcomings of constructionist approaches that "became trapped in the cycle of categorizations and identifications that mapped representations of race onto styles or resistance or models of recognition" (Slocum and Smith 2009: 499). From this perspective, the dissolution of embodied difference is not the desired end-point of anti-racist practice; on the contrary, difference is the point of departure to confront racism in its various everyday realities (Sharma and Papadopoulos 2008). For Saldanha, this means the proliferation of race removed from racism, wherein its "true form" race can be "wild" and "liberatory" (2006: 21). In this 'cacophony' of racial differences, whiteness is

just one amongst the different bodies that are linked with “all sorts of wealth and all sorts of way of life” (2006: 21). Embodiment and the problem of biological essentialism of 'race' become crucial in this materialist perspective, which places emphasis on visible physical differences and phenotype. Here the question can be raised about how to be anti-essentialist and non-reductionist when thinking about 'race' as a real and material phenomenon and not merely a construct. Saldanha sees phenotype as a critical element in his ontology of 'race', which he theorizes as an event, an assemblage of changing and comparatively stable elements constantly in the making and remaking in daily life (2007). He pre-empts essentialism by arguing that culture determines phenotype: “because phenotype is already nondiscrete and shaped by culture, race cannot be an essentialist concept” (2006: 20). 'Race', then, is a culturally contingent and embodied phenomenon in its materialist conceptions, “which is felt, lived, re/made through multiple habitual ways in our everyday lives” (Sharma and Papadopoulos 2008).

This focus on embodiment, on bringing the body and its practices back into analyses of 'race' (and into conceptualizing gender in corporeal feminism) is the line of thinking where I place my work and to which I add my contribution. From my performance works, I argue that social inscription models and representations of white femininities have conceptual limits because of their disengagement with the body in its corporeality. I, therefore, argue for an embodied conception of the formation of white female subjectivity. I attempt to show how affects surge to the surface of the body, re-orientating its relations, and breaking through and contesting rigid forms of representations. Affect in this sense allows for the creating of new relations and the making and remaking of subjectivities in and through these relations. As Slocum and Smith argue, the “emphasis on working with bodily practices—their engagements and disengagements, their fixity or movement, their material encounter—that stands in contrast to a body of work reflecting on the representations that people deploy to define or resist others” (2009: 500). In this research I 'take embodiment seriously' to emphasize “the entangled nature of events and the ways in which multiple figurations interact to produce the sites, scenes and episodes of social life” (Wetherell 2013: 358).

*I Love Black Men* was my first performance in this research as a reaction to the literature on the constructive nature of white femininities. As I will discuss, putting these theories to work revealed their limits, and by working with the white female body I was able to

be attentive to its corporeal intensities: affect emerged as a by-product that took centre stage in my analysis. I suggest the concept of white affect, an approach that is based on the felt realities and material embodied experiences of people but that does not make the question of construction redundant. I analyze affects as part of the processes by which gender and 'race' are constructed. As Saldanha put it: "However penetrating it once was, the consensus that 'race is a social construction' without questioning which processes do the constructing is missing much of the reality of racism" (2009: 512). I intend to complicate the social constructionist framework by contending with the materiality of difference beyond representations, and by arguing for the embeddedness of affective experiences in everyday routines, situations, and sense-making processes of social life, and their role in the making of 'race' and gender. To be clear, my emphasis on relationality derives from constructionism. With my approach, however, I want to refocus on the very acts of construction, on the elements and processes of the making of meaning on the basis of—rather than separated from—the bodies that produce it. This is more than having it both ways: I seek an analytical apparatus that enables the conceptual infusion of construction with materiality, representation with affect—an apparatus that emphasizes the affective power of socially constructed representations and the ways in which bodies are affected by these representations. As discussed in Chapter 1, my approach to affect acknowledges the role of cognition and discourse in affective meaning-making, and I employ affective practice as an analytical tool for my sociological research into anti-racist white femininities.

## **Stereotyping as Representational Practice**

The performances discussed in this chapter, *I Love Black Men* and *Cruising Black Women*, are related through their use of and responses to racist discourses of sexuality, as well as their subversion of the stereotype of the sexual attraction between white women and black men, and white men and black women. Importantly, the performances work with *white* racial stereotypes<sup>41</sup>, that is, with those stereotypes that have been formulated and practiced with often fatal consequences by white people<sup>42</sup>. The alleged sexual attraction

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<sup>41</sup> bell hooks 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." (Hansberry in hooks 1992: 170).

<sup>42</sup> Vron Ware refers to lynching as "a form of racial terror [...] ideology of white womanhood legitimated

between white women and black men that grounds much of the relationships in the 'tropic-ical family' as explained by Frankenberg (1997: 11) is essentially a white construct that has been the cause of continuing violence and suffering<sup>43</sup>. In engaging with this white stereotype as a white woman, I was encouraged by the work of Adrian Piper who worked with the same stereotype in her performance *Cruising White Woman* (1975), which forms the departure and reference point for my work.

While acknowledging that there is no one true meaning (Hall 2013), the performance pieces employ stereotyping as a representational practice that fixes meaning. As Stuart Hall states in the “racialized regime of representation”, stereotyped means “reduced to a few essentials, fixed in Nature by a few, simplified characteristics” (2013: 237). hooks explains how stereotypes work as forms of representations:

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 both performances, I attempted to re-create the relationships between members of the 'tropic-ical family' in order to examine how bodies react to this discourse through their affective responses to it. 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 Color” and “Woman

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lynching as an apparently spontaneous response to the alleged rape of white women by black men” (1992: xvi).

<sup>43</sup> The last reported lynching was in 1981.

Please see: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murder\\_of\\_Michael\\_Donald](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murder_of_Michael_Donald) [Accessed 1 June 2018].



of Color” (1997: 11). Frankenberg demonstrates the complementarities and contrasts that give meaning to 'white woman', which I quote at full length because these relationships are at the heart of the two performances in this chapter:

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 flounder 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 (1997: 12).

### **Cruising through Identities and Time: Cruising Black Women (2013)**

*Cruising Black Women* is a re-enactment of Adrian Piper's<sup>44</sup> performance, *The Mythic Being: Cruising White Women* (1975). Piper performed a fictional male persona, *The*

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<sup>44</sup>Adrian Margaret Smith Piper (b. 1948) is a first-generation Conceptual artist and analytic philosopher. She attended the New Lincoln School throughout grammar school and high school, and the Art Students' League during high school. She began exhibiting her artwork internationally at the age of twenty and graduated from the School of Visual Arts in 1969. While continuing to produce and exhibit her artwork, she received a B.A. in Philosophy with a minor in Medieval and Renaissance Musicology from the City College of New York in 1974 and a Ph.D. in Philosophy from Harvard University in 1981 under the supervision of John Rawls. She studied Kant and Hegel with Dieter Henrich at the University of Heidelberg in 1977-1978. Her formal education lasted a total of 27 years. Available at: <http://www.adrianpiper.de/biography.shtml> [Accessed 1 June 2018].

*Mythic Being*, for two years, from 1973 until 1975. Dressed in drag, wearing an Afro wig, working-class male clothes, moustache, and sunglasses, the persona walked on the streets of New York City, in public places, parks, on the subway, and went to see films and concerts. The appearances of *The Mythic Being* are documented in still photographs, “in a documentary film about the New York art scene”, in advertisements in the Village Voice newspaper, and “in hand-worked photographic images of staged tableaux” (Smith 2011: 27)<sup>45</sup>. My performance is based on the photographic documentation of *Cruising White Women*, one of Piper’s performances as *The Mythic Being*<sup>46</sup>. My goal was to recreate this photograph. Here is a detailed description of the photograph by art historian Cherise Smith:

In a photograph of a city sidewalk, entitled ‘*The Mythic Being: Cruising White Women*’ [...], pedestrians walk alongside parked cars, moving toward and away from colonial-style buildings in the distance. In the foreground, a man sits in profile on the top of two brick steps. With his head turned away from the camera and toward an approaching pedestrian, which obscures any distinguishable facial features, we can make out only a man of short stature with curly hair and eyeglasses. Pressing a cigarette between his lips, he sits with arms crossed, resting on knees that are slightly less than shoulder-width apart. A second man sits a few feet down on the same step. He is farther away in distance and should appear smaller due to the perspective of the photograph, but he is visibly larger than the man in the foreground. The man in the foreground has small feet, and there is a light manner in the way his arms lean against each other. His hand rests delicately on his thigh, and his pinky finger seems slightly raised above the others. His back curves gently, tilting his pelvis forward and making his position look cramped and closed.

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<sup>45</sup>I use Smith’s discussion and listing of the documentation of the persona, as the Adrian Piper Research Archive had surprisingly little information on this work. Smith adds: “Piper was interviewed in Peter Kennedy’s film, *Other Than Art’s Sake* (1973). During the course of the filmed conversation, Piper transforms into character by putting on an Afro wig and mustache, and then, the Mythic Being walks down a busy street uttering a ‘mantra’” (2011: 248).

<sup>46</sup>I contacted the Adrian Piper Research Archive in Berlin, but unfortunately, they could not provide any other documentation of the performance.

Suddenly, the figure in the foreground doesn't look quite so male. In fact, the person sitting casually in the foreground of the photograph is not a man at all. He is the Mythic Being (2011: 26-27).

As the description of the photograph demonstrates, *The Mythic Being* is a fluid character with multiple identifications. I was drawn to this persona, and the performances Piper undertook under its guise, for its effective manipulations of the tropes of black masculinity, that of the hyper-sexual and hyper-masculine black male and the emasculated, feminized one<sup>47</sup>. I worked with images and signs of stereotypes attached to white and black masculinity and femininity and searched for artists who have similarly entered the discourse of the constructed and performative nature of identity using the iconography and relationality of the 'trope-ical family'. My primary concern was how artists had navigated the delicate threshold between calling upon stereotypes without reifying them, while also adding to and shaping the prevailing discourses on identity and identity politics of their time. *The Mythic Being* is engaging for many reasons: it plays with the rigid categories of gender and 'race' to the point of escaping and successfully blurring them. The persona bears the burden of its stereotypical identifications but is also empowered by the artist to destabilize assumptions and break with the limitations imposed on her by the visual signifiers of identity categories.

Dressed as a white man, I traced the footsteps of *The Mythic Being*, and appropriated the piece in which the persona was cruising white women. In a double turn, I assumed the character of 'white man' and was looking out for black women. My performance, *Cruising Black Women*, followed an intensive two-day workshop entitled 'Man-For-A-Day', run by the performance artist and drag king impersonator Diane Torr<sup>48</sup>. In the workshop, I was taught how to walk, eat, talk, and dance as a man, and to dress in drag, with full make-up, clothes, and a fake penis. As Torr said, she showed us "how to become more"<sup>49</sup>. Torr gave the first 'Man-For-A-Day' workshop in 1990 in New York.

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<sup>47</sup>In her essay "Feminism Inside: Toward a Black Body Politic" (1995) bell hooks claimed that the fetishization and eroticization of the black man's body "feminizes", weakens, and subordinates it. Similarly, the power of black males is "diffused" by their lack of authority and agency relative to males. (In Smith 2011: 52-53).

<sup>48</sup>Diane Torr was a performance artist working in dance, drag king performance, installation, film, and video. Originally from Aberdeen, Scotland, after graduating from Dartington College of Arts, England, Diane moved to New York in 1976. Over 30 years, Diane Torr developed her artistic career as an integral part of New York's lively downtown art scene. During that time, Diane created over 35 original performance works, videos and installations, and her work was presented in downtown spaces such as Franklin Furnace, The Kitchen and also in New York clubs including The Mudd Club and Danceteria. Her performances have been seen internationally at venues and festivals such as an-der-werf Festival, Utrecht and Migros Museum, Zurich. She was a fellow of the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program and in 2003, she gained a Masters Degree in Fine Art from the Milton Avery Graduate School, Bard College, New York.

Available at: <http://dianetorr.com/artist-bio/> [Accessed 1 June 2018].

<sup>49</sup> Diane Torr offered a brief discussion on her workshop series in a recent TEDxTalk: *Man for a day*,

She had since been invited to present the workshop in many countries, including India and Mexico, and they continued to be fully booked by women with wide-ranging interests in taking part. The workshop I participated in was transformative for many. An actress who had lost a breast to cancer in her late twenties and the other breast when the illness recurred in her early forties said she was starting to understand the signs her body is sending her (by losing female body parts) and is, as a result, transforming to acquire a new gender identity. Another woman, who had fought her entire life with her family over her desire to become a man, left the workshop with newly found courage in full man-attire and fake facial hair to meet her daughter at the train station and with the intention of never returning to her female life.

Adrian Piper and Diane Torr were influential figures of the 1970s New York art scene<sup>50</sup>. They came both to a consciousness of their positions in society as women, as “a black” in the case of Piper (1995: 31; quoted in Smith 2011: 40), and as artists in the 70s, when the exploration of gender and racial identities were at the heart of second-wave feminism, Black power, and the women's art and Black arts movements. I would not venture to call them identity-artists or label them emblematic of any of these political or art movements of the time, but they have both directly addressed processes of becoming an identity.

For me, what connects the two artists are their exploration of gender identities through persona-play performances. They both use their own bodies as medium and material to explore the politics of individual and collective identifications, visualize the performative processes of identity construction, examine perceptions and relations between themselves and others, and, crucially, to make an impact. As Piper asserted in her 1970 essay *Art as Catalysis*:

The strongest impact that can be received by a person in the passive capacity of viewer is the impact of human confrontation (within oneself or between people). It is the most aggressive and

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*woman for a day.*

Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=paBsyBY\\_-d](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=paBsyBY_-d) [Accessed 1 June 2018].

<sup>50</sup> My aim is not to provide a full account or a discussion of the work of these two artists. My interest in their work relates closely to the two pieces discussed (*The Mythic Being: Cruising White Women* by Adrian Piper and the *Man-For-A-Day* workshops by Diane Torr) and only insofar as they are relevant to my research question and methodology.

the most threatening, possibly because the least predictable and the least controllable in its consequences. (1996: 34; quoted in Smith 2011: 40).

Both artists offer the possibility of multiple and intersectional identifications and the breaking through of essentialist notions of racial and gender stereotypes and visual representations.

My white male persona cruised black women on the streets of Berlin. A photographer<sup>51</sup> documented the re-enactment, and, like Piper, I was accompanied by a male friend. Similarly to the 1975 piece, my performance was encountered by non-traditional audiences who did not belong to the art world: people on the streets, in cafes and public spaces, or sometimes I walked with my companion on empty streets without an audience. Piper had a complex relationship with her audience, which she had consciously formed through newspaper advertisements and direct correspondence amongst others<sup>52</sup>. For me, the leading concept was to pursue everyday, common interactions and relationships with people I encountered during the performance. I was guided by what Piper said: “as a human being any identity I may assume seems to depend largely on my interaction with other human beings” (1996: 35; quoted in Smith 2011: 57) and her insistence that the audience—be it people on the streets unaware that they are seeing a performance—is bringing the persona to life, in my case a white male. The fact that Piper did not specify the gender and racial identity of her character might suggest that she left it for her audience to assess and construct, whereas my aim was to put myself in those situations that my white male persona created, and feel the affects surrounding and evoked by the white male—to activate affect and put my fingers on its pulse.

In entering the discourse, concerns, and aesthetics of the 1970s—the particular time in history when Adrian Piper was performing *The Mythic Being* and Diane Torr started on her life-long exploration of gender and performance—my primary concern was firstly to

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<sup>51</sup> Many thanks to my husband, Viktor Bedö, for taking the photos.

<sup>52</sup> For a detailed discussion on Adrian Piper's 'acting on' her audience see Smith, C. (2011) *Enacting Others. Politics of Identity in Eleanor Antin, Nikki S. Lee, Adrian Piper, and Anna Deavere Smith*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

understand more about constructions of white femininities in the present: how these discourses affect us today, how relevant they are in the current decade when post-identity discourses (post-race, post-feminism) have emerged. Secondly, my goal was to position my academic and artistic pursuits and build affective communities with artists of the time and their explorations of intersecting identifications. I sought to do this with related theories of the time that can be broadly gathered under the umbrella term 'second-wave feminism' and the anti-racist movements that have grown out of the civil rights movement. And thirdly, by placing myself in the performance—by performing myself and using my body—I sought to experience the work of affects on my flesh. Following the works of Piper and Torr, I wanted to affect myself and expand my consciousness. 'To become more', as Torr suggested, to make a new or different—even if temporary—reality for myself.

I now want to elaborate briefly on my desire to build affective communities through my theoretical work and performance practice that have grown out of this research. My performances demonstrate an affectionate desire to embrace feminism and anti-racism through acts of appropriation<sup>53</sup> and the aesthetics of feminist artworks from the 1970s. I aim to create relations and connections to the past, to changing ideas of white femininities, using my relations to others as a white woman as a starting point. I am indebted to Piper and Torr, among other artists, who address questions of 'race' and/or gender<sup>54</sup> and the constructedness of identity and processes of identifications in their works and how they critique the ways in which representations limit our subjectivities.

With my practice, I seek to establish connections with these artists through the historical continuity that my works present. I use mainly performance art for its productive potential to explore questions of identity, processes of identification,

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<sup>53</sup>“Appropriation in art denotes the practice of creating new work by taking a pre-existing image from another source and transforming or combining it with new ones. Some common sources of appropriated images or borrowed elements are works of art from the distant or recent past, historical documents, media such as film and television or consumer culture such as advertisements or products. Sometimes the source is known, sometimes not, but it often has personal associations for the artist. The source of an appropriated image or object can be politically charged, symbolic, ambiguous or it may also push the limits of imagery deemed acceptable for art. Appropriation clearly manifests itself as a layered amalgamation of entangled texts or images: behind, beside or inside a picture, there is another picture” (Koobak 2013: 249).

<sup>54</sup>I refer here to the works of Sonia Boyce, Glenn Ligon, and Coco Fusco whose work I studied in much detail.

emotions, bodies, and affective fields; and for its prevalent use by female artists in the 1970s. I want to provide an account of the material corporeal circumstances of the embodied experience of 'race' and gender at this particular historical moment and on how previous discourses have shaped us and are made relevant today. My work appropriates the narrative from this particular time in history, but rather than directly borrowing from the original pieces I aim to engage today's audiences.

I now turn to how I experienced affects as a white male persona cruising black women on the streets of Berlin.



## Affects in Action

*I am thrown out onto the street; my heart is pulsing in my ears; my palms soaked in sweat. I wipe them against my trousers, the trousers of my husband, with whom I practiced white masculinity at home, mainly entailing punching my chest and roaring like Tarzan in the woods while walking from one room to the other. But now I am here, mittendrin, all dressed up, with a fake penis made of a stuffed condom pushed to the left (I'm a lefty), fake moustache and stubble, following a black woman, who is carrying eggs in one hand and a two-year-old in the other. She turns at the corner, and I decide this is not good; I am not here to harass anyone. I quickly turn back and walk towards the African Hair Boutique, the only one in the close neighbourhood of Neukölln, Berlin. I am after black women; I want to see them, smell them, desire them, look at them with the gaze of the white man. I want to experience, deep down, in my guts, beyond the fake penis, what it is to have that gaze that is in control, for centuries, and for centuries to come. But I am still only a white woman, dressed up, doing sociological research into whiteness, intellectualizing the gaze; I haven't arrived yet. So, I sit down in the pub next to the shop, order a beer, and watch. The waitress smiles at me awkwardly; she can't decide what sort of creature I am: something is not right—I sit like a woman, talk like a woman, but look like a man. So I quickly reassemble myself, open my legs and light up a cigarette, between my thumb and index finger—like a man, not between my index finger and middle finger like a woman—I remember from the workshop.*

*The beer and cigarette help me to loosen up; I start feeling comfortable watching the passers-by. Most of them are coming to the shop—some men but mainly women. The boutique seems to be a social place; some customers are sitting on the stairs, chatting. I put on my sunglasses and start to gain power behind the black lenses, watching the women. I lay back in the chair, take off the sunglasses, and openly stare at one of the women, young and voluptuous, with blonde locks in her braided hair. She stands in front of the shop, heavily articulates while explaining something to the other two women sitting on the stairs. I want her to notice me, my liking of her, my delight in watching her. She catches my stare and smiles at me. I wink at her and at once I feel a flush of excitement. But before I could fully engage in it two men come out of the shop, one goes directly to her, and she stops looking at me. I finish my beer, toss some coins onto the table, and walk to the spot that resembles the place where Adrian Piper used to sit and where the photographer must already be waiting for me.*



*Figure 14. Cruising Black Women (2013)*

I include this short reflection on my experience performing a white male as a taste of the “affect in action” (Wetherell 2012: 4) that was evoked in the research, especially in the performances *The Blush Machine* and *The Chamber of White* (see Chapter 5). This short account of my performance *Cruising Black Women* is already full of ideas, expectations, and feelings around black and white femininities: they enclose the two characters. Re-enacting Piper's performance with the twist of creating a white (rather than black) male persona gave me the opportunity to attempt to display the social status of 'white man' and manage the stereotypes attached to it through bodily performance (Goffmann 1959). In this way, I sought to use my own experience to imagine those of the white male patriarch, the head of the tropical family, who is said to hold sway over all other members: “White women are viewed both as objects of white male protection and as people unable to control their own sexuality. In either case, white women and nonwhite men are to be kept apart, by white men” (Frankenberg 1993: 81).

From this account I suggest that 'white man' and the 'black woman' are intensely positioned in a web of relations, their bodies locked in ready-made gendered and racialized characters. Femininity and masculinity are interwoven with whiteness and blackness, mutually constructing and closing down on each other. Seen through the lens of cultural inscription, there is no opening for 'black woman'; she is reduced to her body, made to be the object of sexual desire once again. Here, 'white woman' is trying to escape, dresses up and sets out to take on the cultural codes of white masculinity. I studied white masculinities and femininities to break them down to their elements and construct them anew. I wanted to become a man: I opened my legs. In this one small move that is now so general and embedded that we no longer even notice it, gender is made and remade every day. “It is just one of the ways men take up more public space and assert their authority”, said Torr at the workshop. Similarly, Piper listed in her journal those stereotypical and socially acceptable straight male behaviours that she assumed when she changed into her costume: “I swagger, lope, lower my eyebrows, raise my shoulders, sit with my legs wide apart on the subway, so as to accommodate my protruding genitalia” (Piper 1996: 117; quoted in Smith 2011: 63). In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's words, in *We should all be feminists*:

We teach girls shame. *Close your legs. Cover yourself.* We make them feel as though by being born female, they are already guilty

of something. And so girls grow up to be women who cannot say they have desire. Who silence themselves. Who cannot say what they truly think. Who have turned pretence into an art form. (2014: 33; original emphasis).

Adichie points towards how affect emerges and in fact encapsulates intergenerationally transmitted etiquettes of femininity, such as the closing of the legs<sup>55</sup>. Shame and guilt are handed on to subsequent generations of girls without a subject or an object of those feelings, or even the need to define the origin and direction of those feelings, which are directly passed on as pre-set elements of 'being born female' and becoming-a-woman. In the performance 'white woman' dressed as 'white man' is conscious of the layers of masculinity she puts on; she starts at the superficial: the garments, fake penis, and facial hair, and moves on to adapt learned elements of movement and posture. She subconsciously drops out of the role, sits down like a woman, and then has to gather herself to again act like a man. Even so, pieces of the puzzle are still missing: she still feels like a woman, 'she hasn't arrived yet'. She requires the presence of 'black woman' to enter into relation with her and feel the surge of affects that this relation induces in her to fully 'arrive' to white masculinity. At that moment the two bodies are reorganized and act as conduits for the flow of affects, whereby a new situation is created and communicated.

This account further illustrates why social research, and the Sociology of the Body in particular, needs to engage with the meanings attached to racialized and gendered bodies beyond the familiar cultural inscription, representation, and stereotyping paradigms, and to capture the works of affects. Through my performance works, I intended "to think together the production of affects with the production of code, information, ideas, images and the like" (Hardt 2007: xii). As this example of the closing of the legs demonstrates, the disciplining of the body is already engulfed in intergenerationally transmitted affect to uphold ideals of femininity and the maintenance of codes of generally accepted feminine behaviour. Disciplinary power is a

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<sup>55</sup>According to Diane Torr, other everyday gestures that women repeat subconsciously and across many countries include nodding the head while listening to another person, and constantly saying 'sorry'. Since the workshop, I am more aware of these and have noticed them in myself and other women: we say sorry even if another person collides with us in the street, causing us to drop our groceries or breaking all the eggs in the box.

“lived practice” (Woodward 1997: 79) that permeates and controls bodily experiences and thoughts alike.

### **Discourse, Representation, and Affect: I Love Black Men (2011)**

I staged *I Love Black Men* in a studio that I designed to resemble a classroom. There were only two people present during the performance: the performer and me. I took the role of the instructor and remained invisible throughout the video that records the performance. *I Love Black Men* critically examines the construction of 'white woman' through testing assumptions of racialized hyper-sexuality and sexual desire grounded in the fetishization of the black male body and provides a direct way to speak out against objectification and categorization. Central to the piece is the relationship between cultural inscription and how it 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. Through a direct and clean black and white aesthetic, and employing 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” (2008: 72).

In the nature/culture binary, whites are placed in 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, socio-cultural differences between populations were explained by behavioural practices and physical attributes of the body. The body became “the totemic object” and 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, 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 further explores how the performance of any identity is deeply embedded in the sense of self and allows for the more profound, intersubjective, affective processes to coalesce with the image of stereotyped white femininities on the surface of the white female body. This very conflict between the visual, external, culturally inscribed surface and the affective inner sense of the self is at the heart of the performance<sup>56</sup>.

### **Tropes of Representation of Ideal White Femininity**

This piece works with 'tropes of representation' (Hall 2013: 219), the interweaving of femininity and masculinity with race and sexuality. In its re-coding of white femininities as being in the process of always being made and remade, *I Love Black Men* enters the racialized regime of representation. It operates with stereotyping as a representational practice and situates the white female body as a site for exposing and challenging the discourse that posits an elemental attraction of white women to black men.

In the discursive trope described by Frankenberg, 'white woman' is essentially racialized and sexualized (1997). I chose to work with this image since it has proven to be particularly persistent<sup>57</sup> across centuries, different locations and contexts, and underlies a range of political and ideological positions that continue to directly affect everyday, intersubjective affective encounters up until the present. It is also particularly useful, as the relational nature of the categories of 'race', gender, and sexuality becomes very clear and evident, as it establishes an ideological relationship between all members of 'the trope-ical family'. It represents white femininities as 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 Skeggs argues, “by the end of the nineteenth century femininity had become established as a (middle-)classed sign, a sign

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<sup>56</sup> “Representation is a complex business and, especially when dealing with 'difference', it engages feelings, attitudes and emotions and it mobilizes fears and anxieties in the viewer, at deeper levels than we can explain in simple, common-sense way” (Hall 2013: 216). My interest in *I Love Black Men* is not in the viewer but in the affective states of the performer who enacts stereotypes of white femininity.

<sup>57</sup> In Vron Ware's words, the trope of 'white woman' was “one of the recurring themes in the history of colonial repression” to the point where it “has passed into the realm of common sense” (1992: 38; 10).

of a particular form of womanhood” that was “always coded as respectable” (1997: 99). It is this “particular form” (1997: 99) of white, middle-class femininity that I investigate in the performance pieces *I Love Black Men*, and in *The Chamber of White* in the next chapter. According to Skeggs, middle-class women could prove their femininity, the “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”, which include the components of femininity as “silent, static, invisible and composed” (1997: 100). As Skeggs argues, the performance of these respectable white femininities was “never a given” for working-class black or white women, whose bodies were coded as sexual and thus distanced from the ideal (1997: 100). “This dynamic of representation is not 'women' as a sign but femininity as (dis)simulation, a mask of non-identity, a bodily submission 'to ideas about herself'” which arguably is more difficult to achieve for working-class women (Skeggs 1993: 204). I explore the affective embodiment of this discourse and the bodily submission of this ideal white femininity in *I Love Black Men*. I 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.

Previous research on white women has similarly used the construction of respectable, white femininities through this racist discourse of the sexually pure, vulnerable 'white woman' and the fantasy of the predatory 'black man' as an analytical tool (Hall, C. 1992; Ware 1992; Frankenberg 1993; McClintock 1995; Dyer 1997; Harris 2000). Catherine Hall and Vron Ware both looked at white femininities as a historically constructed concept. They discussed this familial racist discourse that ties female sexuality and femininity to ideologies of 'race' and class in its historical context (Hall, C. 1992; Ware 1992). Ware argues that different types of dominance and power were legitimated by this ideology of white womanhood that had an effect on everyone, in particular 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” (1992: 7). Ware shows how this was used to evoke particular responses from the white public and influenced the wider social and political climate. She 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<sup>58</sup>. 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” them 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 Byrne conducted with white women in London (2006: 86). In contrast, Mica Nava argues that white women were indeed allured by the presence of black men, driven by an “attraction of otherness in Great Britain in the 1950s and 1960s,” (2007: 91). I would argue that these conceptualizations are characterized by a failure to attend to the experiences and the role of the white female body in shaping this discourse. With my performance pieces, I 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—that 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 'ideal white femininity'. Attempts to subvert the discourse have been found in previous research on white women. Frankenberg 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

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<sup>58</sup>Ware states that “fear ... is a factor in its own right” (1992: 7); and highlights the ways in which sensationalist journalism feeds into this racialized image of white femininity and the fear and feelings of danger that surround it, thereby perpetuating the stereotype and the political ideologies and positions that derive from it. She emphasizes that the meanings of these images change if the narrative is changed; there are a wide range of possible readings of images of black and white women and men “in any society ... where there are social hierarchies based on race and gender, let alone class” (1992: 11).



helpless 'white woman' (1992: 42). 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 (1992: 42). In a more recent study of 'white woman', Hilary Harris uses Frankenberg's model of the relational 'tropic-ical family' to analyse “genuinely” antiracist performances of whiteness<sup>59</sup> (2000: 183). She claims that “antiracist whiteness must perform new relations with the subjectivities, the ideologies, and the material legacies of those historical relations” (2000: 184). Similarly, the emphasis on creating new relations out of historical ones is also at the centre of *I Love Black Men*.

## Relationality

I understand whiteness as inherently relational (Parish 1997; Frankenberg 1997; Gunaratnam 2003). I contend that it is not a singular phenomenon but is always experienced in relation to and involves affective meaning-making processes. Most important for my thesis is when whiteness is viewed as relational, “as a process, not a 'thing', as plural rather than singular in nature” (Frankenberg 1997: 1). This relational approach to whiteness allows performances of white femininities and their affective entanglements to be studied as continuing negotiations of historically specific relations in time and space, that in turn affords the imagining and remaking of these power relations with a strong feminist and anti-racist take. Relationality is also a central concept in studying affect<sup>60</sup>. Besides a focus on bodies and embodiment, my primary interest in working with affects in conceptualizing whiteness is that affects point to the relational element of subjectivity, to processes that connect. Affects are passed between subjects, self and other, and through these relations sustain our sense of self (Blackman 2008).

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<sup>59</sup>Harris investigates four performances “of contemporary resistance” in a film, a performance by a black artist, and another by a white stand-up comedian, as well as her own performance in the classroom of “professor-as-antiracist-white-woman” (2000: 184). The performances that Harris analyses are: “the performance of 'the wife' in Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (1998); ... the sole white woman of the 'LA Riots' in Anna Deavere Smith's *Twilight: Los Angeles 1992* (1993); and ... the one-woman show of stand-up comic Kate Clinton” (Harris 2000: 184).

<sup>60</sup>“Affective practice also places relationality at the heart of its explanations [...] The focus is on the ways in which affective habits and associations are acquired. There are inevitably carried forward to new relational fields in all the ways in which past practice sets the contexts for present practice” (Wetherell 2012: 155).

*I Love Black Men* works with this relational approach to racial difference and affects that are “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 relationality that have defined her historically and are performed and made to work into the present. These relations and performative tropes give meaning to and embody the essence of 'white woman': her respectable purity (of her body and mind, heart and flesh), her innocent, unquestioned monoracial heterosexuality (“the cradle of whiteness” as Dyer put it (1997: 140) and her reproductive imperatives. These tropes can, however, also serve as means for her 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 from one another. Focusing on the sexual aspect of all relations, *I Love Black Men* disrupts the imposed structures through which we relate to the world. By simultaneously making visible the politics of 'race' and sexuality, the performance builds family outside of traditional 'tropic-ical' models based on the reproduction of hegemonic white heterosexuality. *I Love Black Men* engages in critiques of historical relations and in the refiguring of the set of ideologies, structures, and practices that are institutionalized across multiple identifications. The performance presents an imperative to scrutinize all gender formations and other constituents, not just those deemed unorthodox or marginal.

The performing white female body is at the centre of the piece. The naked woman could be perceived as an object of sexual desire. In making public her nakedness, *I Love Black Men* renders her body as visual subtext in the construction of the sexual desire which is attached to the fetish of the black male. Her whiteness is made visible through her

appropriation of the blackboard. She “is thrown against a sharp white background” in order for her “to feel most white”, to paraphrase Glenn Ligon<sup>61</sup>. The visible and invisible markings of her 'race', gender, and sexuality are at once skin-deep and hidden from sight. The woman's nakedness could suggest she takes pleasure in her own body, but it could also be argued that as the performance evolves, her body is taken away from her, and turned into a sign of dis-possession. She is stripped off 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 the 'tropical' construct, 'white man' establishes and justifies his power over 'black man' by the need to safeguard vulnerable 'white woman' against a savage desire that 'white woman' is purportedly unable to regulate on her own. 'White woman' seems unable to take control of her 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 attempts to break this very complementarity between 'white woman' and 'white man', to go beyond a simple rendering of a good/bad binary between the two.

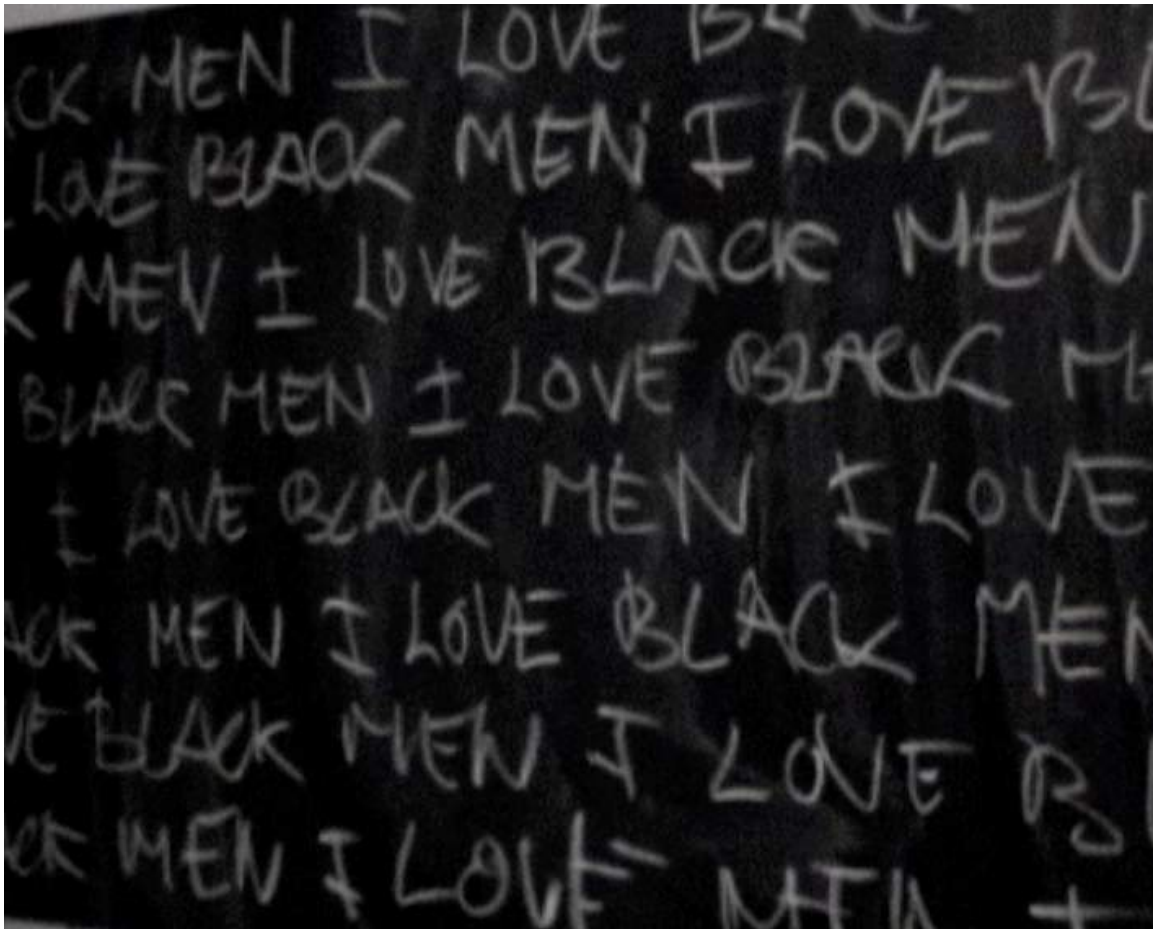
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<sup>61</sup> Glenn Ligon is a contemporary, American, Conceptual artist. Often employing text-based work, Ligon explores ideas of racial identity, sexuality, and violence through the intertextuality between literature and visual arts. Sourcing material from both historical and invented texts, Ligon is best known for his hand-stenciled painted and neon art portraying a series of phrases that, when exhibited in the museum or gallery context, prompts the viewer to read them in a new way and make connections between American history, racism, homophobia, and Ligon's own personal affect. He frequently uses the repeated language taken from well-known writers such as Zora Neale Hurston, Ralph Ellison, and Richard Pryor to tell visual stories of ambiguous and unsettling nature. “My job is not to produce answers,” he once explained. “My job is to produce good questions.” Born in the Bronx, NY in 1960, he graduated with a BA from Wesleyan University in 1982, going on to participate in the Whitney Museum of Art's Independent Study Program in 1985. Ligon has garnered widespread critical acclaim for his work, including mounting solo exhibitions at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Studio Museum in Harlem, and the St. Louis Art Museum, among others. He lives and works in New York, NY.

Available at: <http://www.artnet.com/artists/glenn-ligon/> [Accessed 1 June 2018].

She could be seen as having 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 on the chalkboard. Moreover, the act of repetitive writing 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 piece makes painfully clear the notion that whiteness is performative—that one has to act-out discursive conventions to become it. Repetition as an aesthetic strategy has been used by Glenn Ligon, who employs a similar aesthetic in *Four Etchings* (1992). I discovered this artwork by Ligon after I developed *I Love Black Men*. Here, too, 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.





*Figure 15. I Love Black Men (2011)*

Working against the invisibility of whiteness, *I Love Black Men* firmly secures a place for whiteness in the racial palette. Whiteness is palpable, the specificities of identity constitution and normalizing tendencies at work are made tangible through the appropriation of the use of the colour white that gains its meaning only in relation to and against the black. The performance piece whitens 'white woman'. Her whiteness is simultaneously asserted and undone, she is inescapably coloured in the racial hierarchy. 'White woman's image remains visible to the viewer, but her voice is not heard—only the sound of the chalk, 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—who, it could be argued, is there in order to establish their power, not only by making her write but also through their freedom of being watched. The instructor's authority increases with the struggle of the woman who is burdened with performing the act.

### **Cultural Inscription and the White Female Body**

Text, sight, and sound lie at the core of the performance. My performer<sup>62</sup>, a naked white woman, holds a piece of white chalk and repeatedly writes a single sentence on a blackboard. I designed the setting to resemble a classroom, and, taking the role of the teacher, I instructed her to write the sentence "I LOVE BLACK MEN" on the blackboard. Written in the first person, this simple text is employed as a way to make her enact perceptions of her 'race', gender, and sexuality *inscribed* on her body—on the body of '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 T. Minh-ha 1989, quoted in Jones 2010: 198).

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<sup>62</sup> Because of her nudity she would like to remain anonymous, a request I honoured with the cut of the video, and by covering her face with her hair.

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). It was the body, “bodily difference and bodily hierarchy” that were the foundational idea behind the invention of 'race' (2002: 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” (2002: 51). Although the body of 'white woman' was considered less evolved than that of the 'white man', due to 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 (Roberts 1994, quoted in Ahmed 2002: 53).





*Figure 16. I Love Black Men (2011)*

## **Affects of the White Female Body**

In *I Love Black Men*, the body of '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. There is a complex relationality at work between corporeal-affective and cultural inscription practices. My argument is that performances of white femininities have an affective charge, induced by—but involving more than—visual discourse and racial regimes of representation.

I suggest that the way in which the performer is made to embody received ideas about 'white woman' indicates how stereotypes are perpetuated, and how they affect us at the very core of our personality, in our 'flesh'. 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 through the very corporeal reactions of the white female body. Stereotypes are made to come apart and their assurances are gradually fading. Fantasies of sexual desire and the myth of the sexualized 'black man' that continue to haunt the collective imagination are re-viewed and unearthed through the body's engagement with this myth. 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; Woodward 1997: 79 in Blackman 2008: 28). 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 fleshy materiality that is lived and experienced by subjects positioned within cultural norms, power structures, and restraints. I contend that acknowledging the working of affects allows us to conceptualize the white female body beyond the limiting focus of the external surface or appearance. Thinking through

the interplay of political, social, cultural inscriptions and constructs with the materiality of bodies, their felt orientations, and lived relations to the world is made possible. This “somatically felt body” (Blackman 2008: 30) is open to affect and to be affected and is continuously changing as a result of this dynamic relationality with the inside and outside.

I suggest that the affects that surround 'white woman' are not arbitrary. Their nature and display are determined by the unfolding of the historical relations of the members of the 'tropical family', and by the power structures and systems of dominations of white patriarchy. I contend that the affective charge of white femininities does not belong to 'white woman' or to the performer performing 'white woman'. It belongs 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. They happen in relation to others: 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 (2004a: 10).

At the end of the performance, nonetheless, the affective charge of white femininities seems to become internalized by the performer, herself a white woman. A complex act of embodied affective positioning is thus taking place: the transformation from a performer tasked to perform an act into a woman with her own histories, feelings, ideas and subjectivity:

We see, in other words, an affective–discursive practice emerging along with complex acts of subject positioning rather than, say, an emotion moving to ‘land’ on one individual. This is joint, coordinated, relational activity in which affect and discourse twine together (Wetherell 2013: 363).

## I LOVE

The performer struggles under the affective charge of white femininities. 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 where racial and sexual differences are exhausted, forcing us to ask what they 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, exhaustion from the process by which the discourse becomes internalized and thrown back again into space. 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 could be interpreted as a release from the fixing of boundaries, and as an invitation to include everything which previously did not belong. The piece 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 white femininities seem to be pulled apart. In the process the figure of '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. And the commitment to the continuing family project of whiteness seems to have been broken, the reproduction of itself and its most pivotal trope, 'white man'. In *I Love Black Men*, I envisaged a new public body for white women, and the potential of performing new relations.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I introduced affect as an important part of the processes of subject formation. I argued for conceiving whiteness and anti-racist white femininities through their affective dimensions. Through my performances I demonstrated that the white female body is not a fixed entity, a static and inert object shaped by discourse and cultural influence through the mind, but is in process, mediated through the lived experience of corporeality and affect. I used the concept of the 'somatically felt body' to

focus on the aliveness of the body in order to think about the role of the social and cultural in ways more complex than the interactional models of influence and inscription otherwise suggest.

Focussing on corporeal experience and on the process of how the white female body is made through affective performances, we can think beyond the interaction of mind and body, the individual and social. Through using affective practice as an analytical apparatus that emphasizes affective relationality and embodied meaning-making it becomes possible to contemplate how the mind/body and individual/social binaries are thoroughly interconnected. I showed the affective impact of the discourses on 'race' and gender, and the racialized representational practice of a particular stereotype. I demonstrated how not just the discursive but also the affective dimensions of whiteness are always intertwined. I worked through these two performances, demonstrating that “affect cannot be neatly and surgically separated from discourse and representations” (Wetherell 2013: 357).

This chapter lead to a point at which I began to identify the need to work directly with affects entangling white femininities. Consequently, the following chapter is based on artworks that created performative situations in order to evoke affective responses to 'white woman' and the white female body. In *I Love Black Men* I argued that the affect of whiteness is empty, a vacant space ready to be filled. In the artworks discussed in the next chapter I address the empty, vacant space of white affect and fill it with an array of affects: shame, disgust, hope, loss, desire, and so on.

## Chapter 5. The Performance of White Affect

In this chapter I investigate how white affect is performed. I explore this in *The Blush Machine* and *The Chamber of White*. I argue that in *The Blush Machine* the affective connections triggered through collective and personal experiences of white femininities reveal the fundamentally relational and embodied nature of subjectivity and, in the process, create 'white woman' as a figure of shame. By exploring the affective connections and movements between performer and participant in *The Chamber of White*, I demonstrate how the performance effectively enacts white affect and how 'race' emerges as an event (Saldanha 2007). I argue that in these performances participants are enmeshed in complex ways in which affect circulates, rendering the production of 'white woman' a figure of shame and anti-racist white femininities as affective performances profoundly intercorporeal and intersubjective experiences. I trace the performance of affect in both settings, in the closed spaces of dense affective fields created in them. By working with the concept of 'body schema'<sup>63</sup> (Featherstone 2010) I suggest an engagement with the affective and sensory experiences of bodies beyond only the visual in the making of white femininities.

I show how for researcher and participants white affect provide a basis for a complex mode of identification and how it creates new modes of relationality. In the first part of the chapter, I base my arguments on *The Blush Machine*. I use blushing, this inherently bodily intensity to explore the possibility of an embodied connection and relationality in the production of subjectivities. Through focusing on coexistence and drawing out the significance of how any performative action is never singular or isolated but rather an engagement with the world in which it takes place, I explore what it means for the production of the self when the interplay between the embodied experience of the individual subject and the wider social norms and pressures are based on a sense of non-belonging and shame.

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<sup>63</sup>“The non-visual sense of the body, the haptic and proprioceptive feelings from the body – not just senses of hearing, smell and taste, but also touch and sense of inner body movement. This also points to the importance of synaesthesia, of the way the senses work together to produce not only our perception of the world, but the way we sense other bodies when we encounter them in everyday life, or through various media” (Featherstone 2010: 195).

Pursuing this line of thought further I argue that white female bodies are accountable for more than subjective processes. From the first part of the chapter to the next (from *The Blush Machine* to *The Chamber of White*) I move on to open up the discussion of the constitution of the self towards the constitution of whiteness as a product of affects. Within the intercorporeal and intersubjective affective milieu of the performance event, I show how *The Chamber of White* visually and affectively enact the experience of whiteness. The performance makes affects of anti-racist white femininities public, and thus creates a memento of the affective experience of whiteness rather than simply retelling it.

### **Affecting White Woman**

My theorization of white affect has grown out of the two performances I discuss here, in which I directly worked with tropes of 'ideal' white femininities (Skeggs 1997, see Chapter 4) and with affect understood as an inherently relational bodily openness and permeability and a movement or circulation between bodies. In *The Blush Machine*, my focus is on bodies not as “singular, bounded, closed and fixed, but rather open to being affected and affecting others” (Blackman et al. 2008: 16) and on the role of affective experiences of bodies in creating embodied subjectivities. In *The Chamber of White*, I focus on the circulation of affects and on the power of the researcher and participant to create worlds through their relating to each other. In this performance I work with Hardt’s definition:

They [affects] illuminate, in other words, both our power to affect the world around us and our power to be affected by it, along with the relationship between these two powers (2007: ix).

In the remaining part of this section, I elaborate on this conceptual framing. First, I overview recent conceptualizations on the role of bodies in creating subjectivities and then provide a brief account of my theoretical approach to understanding and work the movement of affects.

This research foregrounds subjectivity as a concept that refers to those “experiences and desires which although constituted through historical and discursive processes are

experienced as emanating from a felt interiority” (Blackman 2011: 183) because of the emphasis of this approach on the interrelation of the discursive and the affective. In *The Blush Machine* it is within this emphasis on bodies, and on the relationality and connection between bodies, and bodies and worlds, that the affective mechanisms are put to work to determine processes of identification and the creation of subjectivity. Following debates on the limits of cultural inscription models of subject formation, which claim that “bodies are never simply stabilized effects of the subject-positions that precede them” (Blackman et al. 2008: 17), I argue that *The Blush Machine* contributes to an embodied view of subjectivity. The problems of cultural inscription approaches to the production of subjectivity are the target of much research on affect, which aim to remedy the relegation of bodily matters to being only mere effects of discursive practices. It is now argued that “subjectivity is always embodied subjectivity” (2008: 17).

The body must in any case contribute to any coherent understanding of subjectivity because, as Merleau-Ponty (2002) observed, it is the means by which there is any world for us at all (2008: 18).

It is this framework that my own work adds to, where the focus of bodies shifts to “what bodies *do*, and what relational connections change and alter bodies as they move and sense in the world” (2008: 16). In an effort to move subjectivity away from notions of singularity and fixity, I focus on the relational aspects of embodied subjectivity to “open[s] up investigations of subjectivity to a complex realm of affectivity that is little known or understood but is *felt* in a very real and profound way” (2008: 20; emphasis original).

I contend, however, that a concept of subjectivity that uncovers the personal and private feelings and affective states while leaving the discursive practices out of analysis will fall short when we try to make sense of the production of racialized and gendered subjectivities, and the stability and continuities that these constructs entail. As I have argued in the previous chapters, I use affective practice as my tool of analysis as it ties together affective and discursive practices in embodied meaning-making. In what follows I demonstrate firstly, how blushing as a bodily intensity creates my own embodied subjectivity and that of my collaborator as white women in Bolivia (where we



developed and staged *The Blush Machine*). *The Blush Machine* shows how our understanding of ourselves as white women ensued from the felt connection and relationality in the moment of blush we experienced many times during our stay in Santa Cruz and how we used this particular affective experience to create the character of 'white woman' in the video. Secondly, this piece reveals how the collective performance of the participants in the performance event create 'white woman' as a figure of shame through the act of performing the movements of shame and other affects.

In studying whiteness visual practices are argued to be central in racializing processes “in which subjects are positioned as visible and invisible within racialised schema” (Byrne 2006: 16; Back 2010). I make use of the concept of the 'body schema' to frame the development of subjectivity as a fundamentally embodied and intercorporeal process. From *The Chamber of White* I argue that the visual, external image and visual perception *is only one element* in the schematic whole, which needs to be reckoned with to understand the workings of sensory and affective practices in the production of raced and gendered bodies:

The non-visual sense of the body, the haptic and proprioceptive feelings from the body—not just senses of hearing, smell and taste, but also touch and sense of inner body movement (Featherstone 2010: 195).

The body schema enables a more holistic sense of the body and multi-dimensional aspects of embodied subjectivity: “a flexible, plastic, systemic form of distributed agency encompassing what takes place within the boundaries of the body proper (the skin) as well as the entirety of the spatiality of embodied motility” (Hansen 2006: 38). In both performances, whiteness is made visible amongst non-white and white bodies through the activation of visual, haptic, sensory and affective practices.

In order to capture the movement of affects, the concept of affective practice is useful when understood as:

[S]omething that can be encountered as a pre-existing given—and at that point it may feel as though we are entering a 'zone' or an 'atmosphere'—but it is also something that is actively created and needs work to sustain (Wetherell 2012: 142).

As such, affective practice is understood not merely as a “movement of signs” but “a moment of recruitment and often synchronous assembling of multimodal resources, including, most crucially, body states” (2012: 159). This assemblage is “onto-formative, meaning that it constitutes its subjects and objects” through the participation of the “emoting body” that makes it affective as opposed to other social practices (2012: 159).

In *The Chamber of White*, I wanted to create a dense affective field of whiteness where visitors entered and became “caught up” in (Blackman 2007/2008: 29). I designed the Chamber to offer the visitor available figures, discourses, tropes, sensory experiences and affective possibilities (i.e. those that exist beyond only shame as in *The Blush Machine*) in relation to which they could position themselves. In both performances I aimed to establish a complex web of connections of “the body to other practices, techniques, bodies [...], energies, judgements, inscriptions and so forth that are relationally embodied” (Blackman 2007/2008: 29).

### **Bodies in Shame: The Blush Machine (2013)**

I began to explore the performance of affects around white femininities through a large-scale multi-media performance piece that focused on shame. Staged in Bolivia, in a country with a majority of non-white population<sup>64</sup>, *The Blush Machine* works with the white female body in its affective permeability. It is exposed as a material and conceptual emptiness, that takes its shape and acquires its meaning through affective practices and the performance of the movements of shame.

I developed *The Blush Machine* during an artist residency at Kiosko Gallery, in Santa Cruz de la Sierra. I was invited along with Polly Card<sup>65</sup>, a filmmaker friend of mine to

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<sup>64</sup> Bolivia is inhabited mostly by Quechua (45.6 %) and Aymara (42.4%), minorities include 37 indigenous groups (0.3% average per group).

Please see: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics\\_of\\_Bolivia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_Bolivia) [Accessed 1 June 2018].

<sup>65</sup> Polly Card is a British producer who lives in California. She specialises in creating visual media for education, art and communities. Currently Learning Media Coordinator at San Diego State

advance my explorations on the white female body and shame in one of the country's few, and Santa Cruz's only contemporary art gallery. As an experienced filmmaker and producer, Card directed and produced the video for *The Blush Machine*, while I provided the theoretical background and the design of the performance event. While Kiosko Gallery is well-known amongst Bolivian and Latin-American artists and has international relations, the experience of being confronted with contemporary art seemed to be a new and exciting adventure for the locals who became, not just informants and interviewees of the research, but active and engaged participants of the final performance event. It was through their affective flow that they produced the affective figure of 'white woman'. The specific location with its particular practices, and the interpretations and affective responses that the participants brought to every stage of the process, from the initial interview phase throughout the final enactment of the piece, were imperative in exploring subjectivity as relational and embodied, as being in constant flux of being made and remade within everyday social relations with others.

### **White-Hot Shame**

I arrived in Bolivia with Card as two white women, with our sociologically informed interest in shame and with the determination of using our time in Santa Cruz to create art that examines anti-racist white femininities and the workings of shame in only one month. We were soon drawn into the complexities of our identifications, and into the depths of 'white-hot' shame which we registered at the most visceral levels during our entire time there.

I was interested in shame for what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick called “the double movement” that shame makes: “toward painful individuation, toward uncontrollable relationality” (2003: 37). Shame has a prominent place in the literature. Sedgwick and Adam Frank revived the work of psychologist Silvan Tomkins on shame (1995). Shame

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University, she mentors students and works with faculty to design and develop award-winning instructional media. This year she served on the California Arts Council panel 'Arts and Public Media' Program, won the Enterprise Video Award presented by Sonic Foundry and an Award for Excellence, at the Videographer Awards and Hermes Creative Award for her educational films. She worked as a film and radio Producer with the BBC for 8 years and freelanced for various clients including The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, The Spanish Ministry of Education, European Union, Runnymede Trust and Lord's Taverners. Polly is currently working towards a PhD in Education.

Available at: <http://www.pollycard.com> [Accessed 1 June 2018].

is also a central theme in psychoanalysis and sexuality (Pajaczkowska and Ward 2008) and in queer theory (Sedgwick 1993; Munt 2008)<sup>66</sup>. Shame has also been extensively discussed by Ahmed in relation to nation building in Australia (2004a). I don't align with the basic emotions theory of Tomkins (1962) and the division of affects in neatly separated discrete affects<sup>67</sup>. Indeed, *The Blush Machine* proves that although it initially focussed on shame, a range of other affects emerged that were highly interpretative and context-specific and messed up a distinct feeling of only shame. I nevertheless started my explorations with the work of Tomkins and the reading of his work by Sedgwick and Elspeth Robin because while Tomkins pursues the question of how exactly affects work in the body, he is equally interested in what affects do to the self and to society (Probyn 2005). In Probyn's words: "Tomkins' true interest lies in what the affects understood as biological do within and to the social" (2005: 27)<sup>68</sup>.

### **A young girl smiled at her and asked her why she was so pink**

For Tomkins, interest in shame at both the political and intellectual levels is that "shame strikes deepest into the heart of man ... Shame is felt as an inner torment, a sickness of the soul" (quoted in Probyn 2005: 14). Here, the working of shame is linked to interest. As Tomkins explains: shame "only operates after interest and enjoyment has been activated and inhibits one or the other or both. The innate activator of shame is the incomplete reduction of interest or joy" (quoted in Sedgwick and Frank 1995: 134). Shame thus presupposes and promises interest, which is captured most visibly in blushing: "Blushing is the body calling out its interest" (Probyn 2005: 28). In her review of psychological accounts of the embodied flow of affect, Wetherell explains blushing as

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<sup>66</sup>*The Blush Machine* was preceded by a performance I developed in Brazil, called *Freeing Up Shame*, which looked at shame and sexuality. This work does not form my analysis as it does not focus solely on white femininities.

<sup>67</sup>Tomkins distinguishes between eight discrete affects: surprise-startle, interest-excitement, fear-terror, distress-anguish, enjoyment-joy, contempt-disgust, shame-humiliation, anger-rage, and understands these 'basic affects' as innate bodily responses: "Affects are sets of muscle and glandular responses located in the face and also widely distributed through the body, which generate sensory feedback which is inherently 'acceptable' or 'unacceptable'. These organized sets of responses are triggered at subcortical centers where specific 'programs' for each distinct affect are stored. These programs are innately endowed and have been genetically inherited. They are capable of simultaneously capturing such widely distributed organs as the face, the heart, and the endocrines and imposing on them a specific pattern of correlated responses" (1962: 243 – 244).

<sup>68</sup>Probyn saves calling shame 'innate' and universal from essentialist and ethnocentric contestations by pointing towards the areas of investigation that Tomkins's shame theory opens up. According to her, "the acknowledgement of innate affects provides a way to understand both how certain phenomena are universal to humans and also how they differentiate in their causes and expressions at an individual level and within social groups" (2005: 29).

follows:

During a burst of sharp emotion, the body pumps out a wide range of somatic signals. Many of these are initiated in the brain stem and driven by the autonomic nervous system (ANS), such as changes in blood flow resulting in blushing or blanching, changes in heart rate and in breathing rate (2012: 29).

Blushing and bodies were our medium and the material we used to create *The Blush Machine*. The lived experiences and theories on blushing were our departure points. We used our bodies as raw materials with which participants could shape their trajectories of affective experiences and encounters with shame. We were interested in blushing for its revealing qualities of the sometimes unknown and unappreciated investments and interests, and for its 'double movements'. We started off by going to the main plaza, the social and cultural centre of Santa Cruz. It is a lively place, with nonstop music and dance performances, markets, people selling fresh orange juice and hot coffee and all sorts of food and goods. The plaza is embraced by the main church of Santa Cruz, an art museum and an elder's club. It is a well-preserved and lively meeting place of all ages, the place to meet locals, collect stories and observations. We went there one afternoon with a banner and a camera. 'When did you last blush?' was the question we wrote on the banner. Two tall white women asked an intimate question of the locals who we didn't know. We felt shame immediately. Not because of the reactions of the Santa Cruzians who approached us curiously and with the most open hearts possible, but because of our growing awareness of our bodies and of a tangible sense of being out of place.



*Figure 18. Research for The Blush Machine, When did you last blush? Santa Cruz, Bolivia (2013)*



*Figure 17. Research for The Blush Machine, Santa Cruz, Bolivia (2013)*



*Figure 19. Research for The Blush Machine, Santa Cruz, Bolivia (2013)*



*Figure 20. Research for The Blush Machine, Santa Cruz, Bolivia (2013)*



*Figure 21. Research for The Blush Machine, Santa Cruz, Bolivia (2013)*



We blushed. We blushed during our entire time there—when we went to the market, restaurants, shops, walked the streets of the city, where tall white European women are easy to spot. Our project heightened our sense of shame and made us more aware of our being out-of-place, our bodies distinct amongst the locals<sup>69</sup>. Our blushing whitened our bodies, which were the bodies of 'white woman'. The bodies which became the material for the telling of stories of generations long gone and of the present. But these were not just bodies. They are the bodies of the white female of an estranged other, living in the in-betweenness of the home and the unhomely, continuously negotiating the openings of her body through which her subjectivity is transgressed. Following Lingis (2000), Wetherell states that “emotions make the body visible” (2012: 27). Indeed, our whiteness and femininity were made visible through our blushing with shame. The very visibility of our white female bodies was that of our shame. In the burst of affects that blushing so vividly captures, in that moment of affective connection, “a solid entity” (Flax 1993: 94)<sup>70</sup> appeared to form. Our subjectivity got webbed together from whiteness and femininity as racial and gendered possibilities, the only ones available for us there, in Bolivia, as Hungarian and British women with pale skins, European histories and bodies. It was in moments of blush, when our subjectivities as white women came together, to be dissolved and reassembled again and again in our blushing in the many social interactions during our time there. These were the moments and episodes that we subsequently used in the various elements of the performance.

Our blushing could be understood as revealing not only the inherent relationality of our embodied subjectivities but also how our bodies connected and were immersed in the flows of social interactions and formations<sup>71</sup>. Blushing allowed us to think about the role of the body in sociality that we then tried to excavate in the design of the performance.

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<sup>69</sup> Please see the video on the attached USB for situations of shame/blushing.

<sup>70</sup> “The processes of subjectivity are over-determined and contextual. They interact with, partially determine, and are partially determined by many other equally complicated processes including somatic, political, familial, and gendered ones. Temporary coherence into seemingly solid characteristics or structures is only one of subjectivity's many possible expressions. When enough threads are webbed together, a solid entity may appear to form. Yet the fluidity of the threads and the web itself remains. What felt solid and real may subsequently separate and reform” (Flax 1993: 94 quoted in Wetherell 2012: 120).

<sup>71</sup> “This is a useful way of thinking about the body in social practice, a flow immersed in other flows. We can begin to ask about the process of meshing as the flowing body connects with the unfurling flow of social interaction, the composition of social spaces, and the comparatively glacial flows of individual life trajectories and social formations” writes Wetherell (2012: 31).

I suggest that that through its focus on how shame constitutes white female subjectivity, *The Blush Machine* pulls back the white female body into the visual frame of whiteness. The performance challenges the invisibility of whiteness through shame. The white female body was made visible through its very own shame of non-belonging. The skin and the face, the surfaces of the flow of shame and the bursting of blush were placed at the visual centre of the artwork. The main character in the video, 'white woman' and the white female body was put in real life context to untangle how shame works in particular social spaces and contexts, which were already gendered, the place of the home and of the market. The narrative of the video was entirely based on the stories, reactions and bodily responses we have received to our question and our being-there. As our research for the performance evolved it became clear that the type of shame we were dealing with is the shame of non-belonging, the shame of the white stranger who will never fit.

### **Creating White Woman as a Figure of Shame**

*The Blush Machine* operated at two levels. In the first research phase we recorded answers to our question of 'When did you last blush?' on film and in writing<sup>72</sup>. We synthesized the material we collected in various formats: in film interviews, written answers, and generally by 'hanging-out' with the locals, the gallery staff and friends we made during our stay in Santa Cruz. We worked with these data and bodily information (sound, tone, feeling states, sensations, affective outbursts) that we gained through the answers and other situations, like our presence at the market or walking on the streets, when we opened ourselves to affective responses to our bodies and being-there in the city. We used these materials to produce a video and to feed into the design of a sensory and immersive performance installation, where the video was then shown.

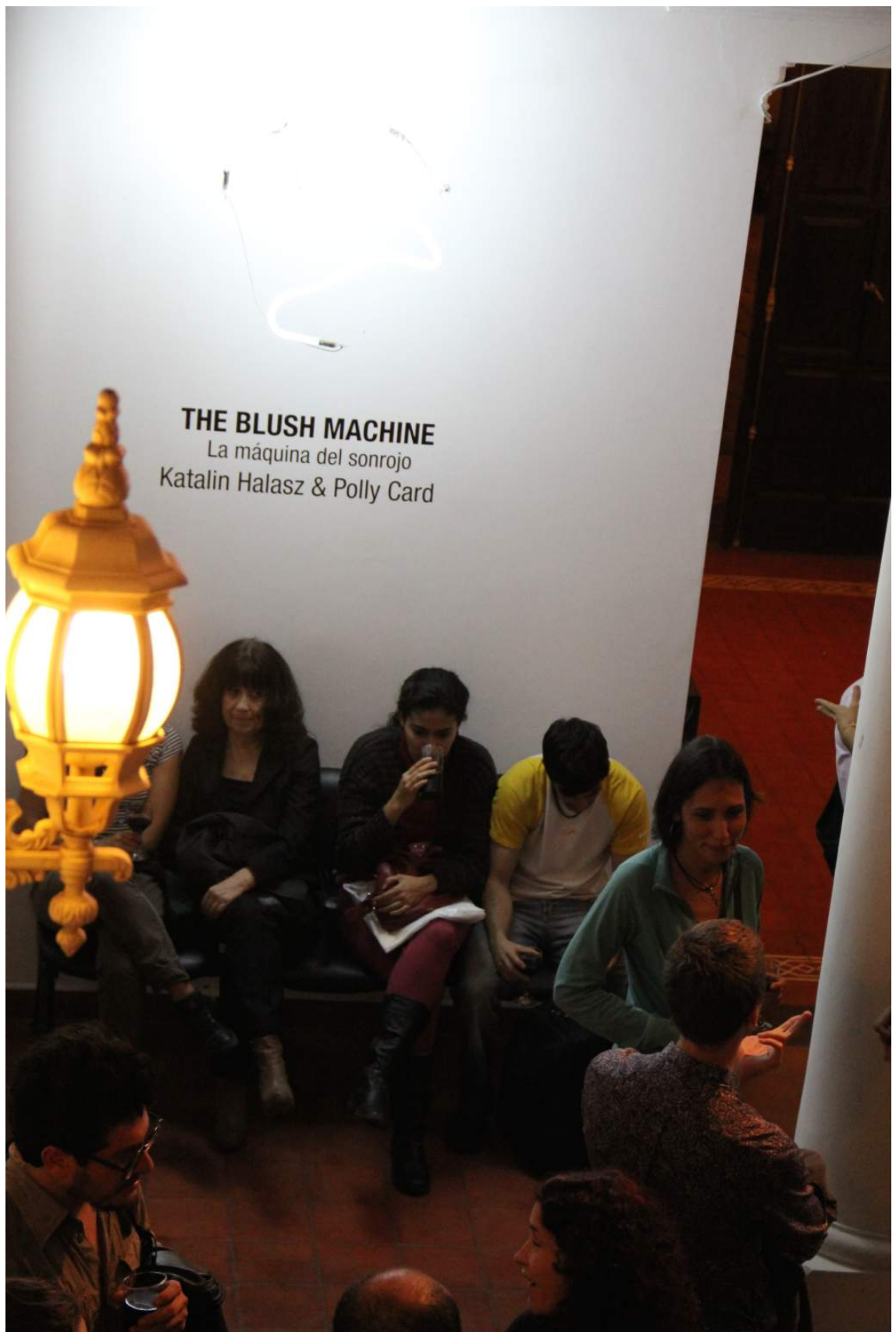
The second stage consisted of the experience of the installation. The video was presented to visitors, who were invited to engage with it by simple gestures and movements. The video was an integral part of the installation, which consisted of different elements and was realized as a promenade performance—the audience was invited to enter an experience consisting of three rooms, physical and virtual spaces of encountering and performing shame. Before entering the gallery, the viewers were handed out a card, with a welcome note and a word of introduction of what they might

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<sup>72</sup> Please see Appendix 5 for some sample written answers.

experience in the rooms. Faces of Santa Cruzians and the face of 'white woman' were projected on the large white walls of the gallery space, enveloping the viewer.

In the first room only 'white woman' could be seen, distantly smiling and watching, her gaze was directed straight at the audience.



*Figure 22. Visitors outside the gallery waiting to enter, Kiosko Gallery, Santa Cruz (2013)*



*Figure 23. Visitors outside the gallery waiting to enter, Kiosko Gallery, Santa Cruz (2013)*

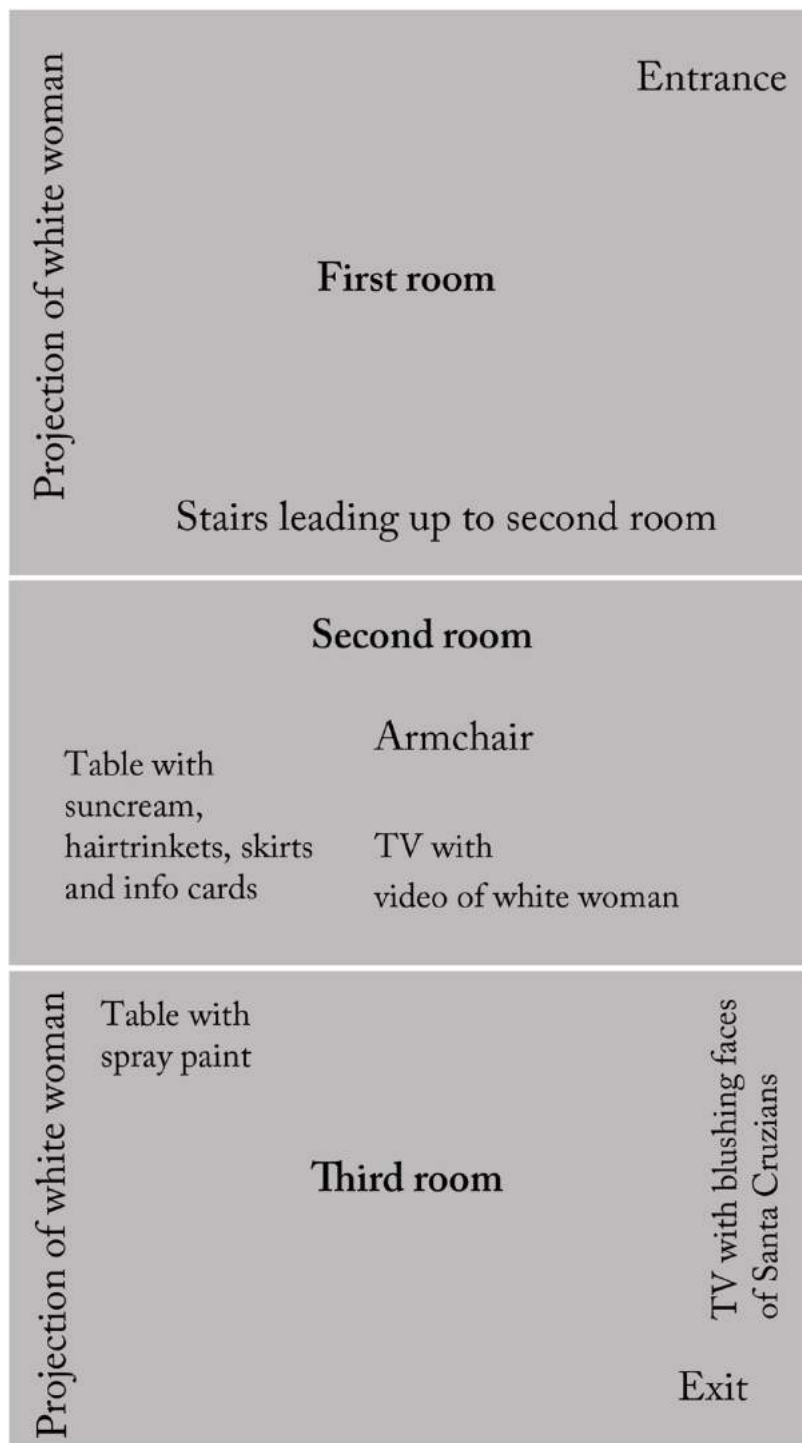
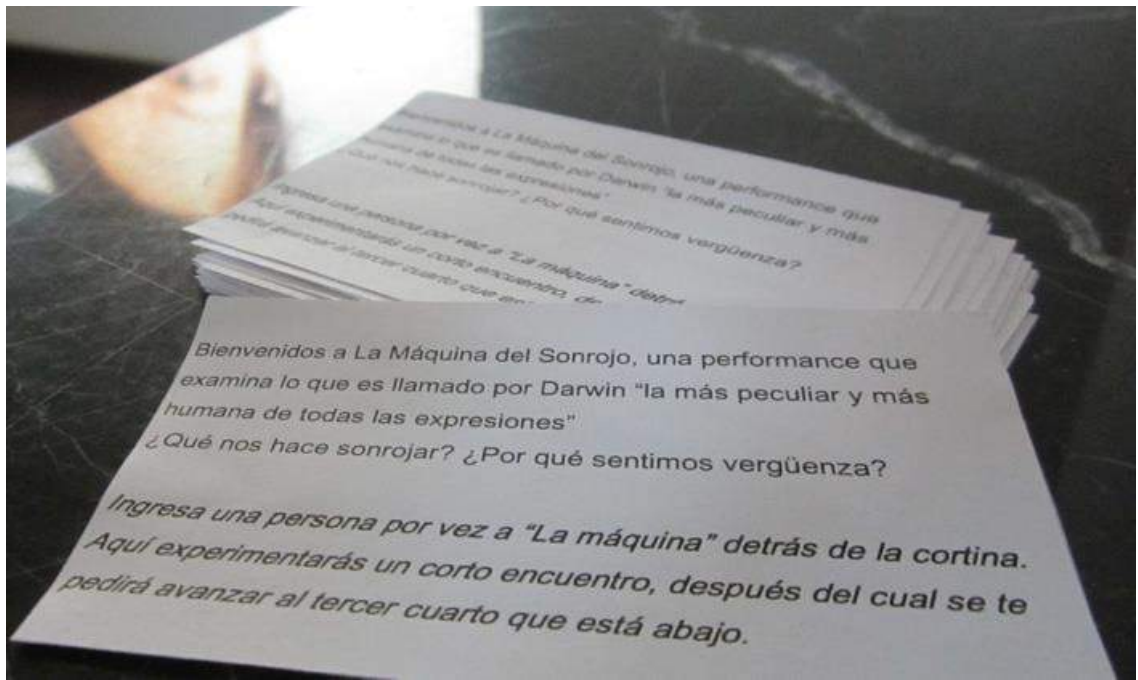
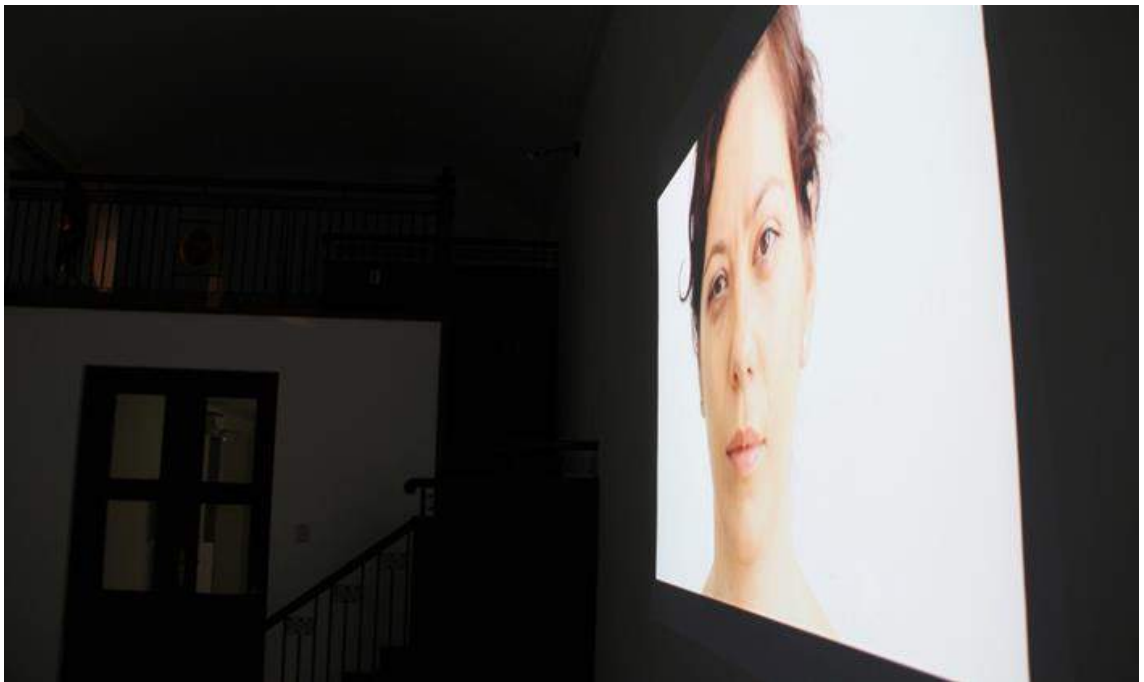


Figure 24. Map of *The Blush Machine* at Kiosko Gallery, Santa Cruz (2013)



*Figure 25. Information card*



*Figure 26. First room*



*Figure 27. Visitors facing 'white woman' in the first room, waiting to enter the second room*



In the second room where the installation was set up, only one viewer was let in at a time.

The installation was made for one visitor at a time so as to create a direct and inescapable interaction—intimate and confrontational. A self-contained space (a closed room) was specifically conceived for the encounter. Inside the space for action and contemplation, an interactive experience awaited the participant, who was instructed to watch the film and follow instructions as they appeared on the screen: touch objects and sense emotions along with 'white woman'. Inside the room a TV, a chair and a table with a sun lotion, a skirt and hair trinkets were set up. The viewer was ushered in the room and invited to sit down and put on the headphones. Further instructions appeared on the screen and on a second card that was laid out on the table.



*Figure 28. Second room, where the film was shown*



*Figure 29. Second room. Table with Bolivian skirts, hair trinkets, sun cream and an information card about the third room*

At the end of the film, the viewer was asked to take one of the second sets of cards which contained further information about the third room.

In the third room the viewer was encouraged to leave her reflections, thoughts, and feelings behind—spraying words, phrases, drawings on a big white sheet where the face of 'white woman' was projected. 'White woman' had changed. Her face was pink with blush. Directly opposite her, were the faces of Santa Cruzians who offered their most personal experiences of shame on film. Their faces were captured in a moment of blush and put together in a tapestry of smiles and giggles. They talked about the last time they blushed. The audience was invited to enact their emotional journey throughout the piece and created a joint painting of marks and traces of shame. Words sprayed on the blushing face of 'white woman' included “girls”, “identification”, “live”.

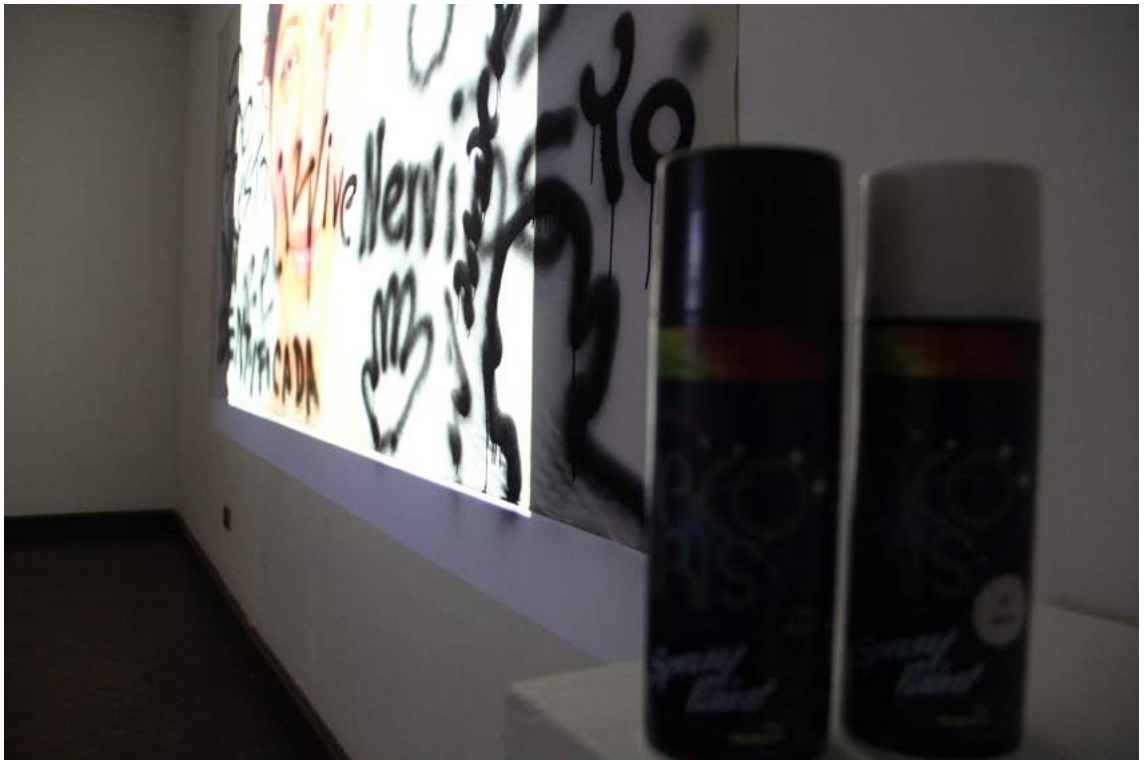
A cabinet and a non-space, performative, installation-based and conceptual, material and immaterial, *The Blush Machine* generated its own, immediate and undisturbed situation where the viewer could perceive herself in new ways and was invited to become an active participant in the installation. In the performance, the body of the participant became the site of aesthetic investigation. Besides depicting shame and blushing as a realm of bodily experience, the participant had to feel it directly through all manners of sensory vibrations: touch, smell, movement, sight, and hearing. The actual body and the collective performance of the participants were required to complete the movement of shame and to create the work of art—to produce 'white woman' as a figure of shame. In the affective space that we created in *The Blush Machine* whiteness became an embodied reality through the very affects that were produced and entangled the figure of 'white woman', who has emerged out of histories, concepts and representations to an enacted, felt and visible corporeality.



*Figure 30. Third room. Blushing 'white woman' is facing Santa Cruzians, whose faces are edited in a collage and whose voices are heard through loudspeakers*



*Figure 31. Face collage in the third room*



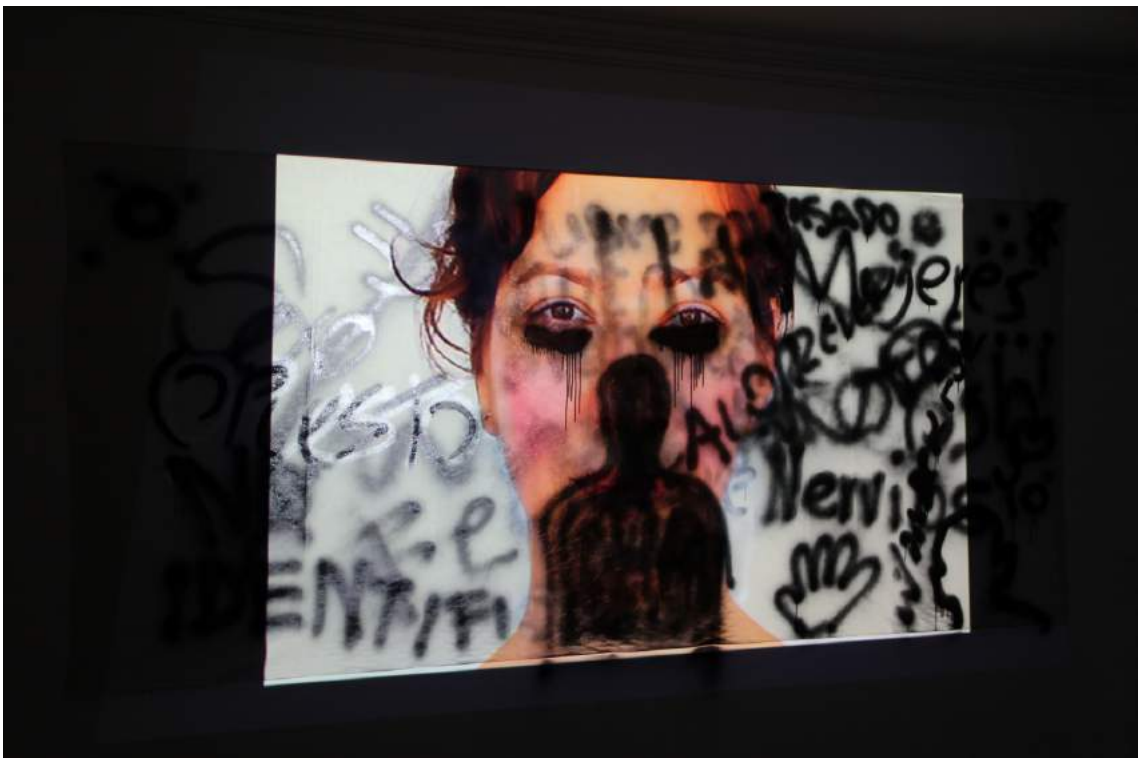
*Figure 32. Spray cans laid out on a table next to the blushing face of 'white woman' in the third room*



*Figure 33. Visitor is spraying over the face of blushing 'white woman' in the third room*



*Figure 34. Visitor is spraying over the face of blushing 'white woman' in the third room*



*Figure 35. Final canvas of blushing 'white woman'*

Although in *The Blush Machine* I focused on shame, a range of other affects surfaced. Desire, longing, sadness, surprise, joy and so on entangled with 'white woman'. It became clear that affects in real life are enmeshed and even in a clear flush of shame there are already other affects at work. Realizing this, I designed the next performance *The Chamber of White* (similarly a closed space of dense affects) in a way that that would not be constrained by focussing only on one affect but allowing for a variety of affects evoked by white femininities to circulate.

## The Performance of Affective White Femininities: The Chamber of White (2014)

I staged *The Chamber of White* during four days of the one-week long Roskilde Music Festival in Denmark, in 2014. In this piece, I performed interchangeably with my assistant Louise Jensen. Roskilde festival featured a significant art programme<sup>73</sup> in a designated area of the festival, where the performance programme was shown as part of a major installation called The Performance Sense Laboratory.

The curatorial concept for the performance programme focused on how “to activate the sensuous through different, yet related, performance-artistic approaches which all subscribe to an interactive and immersive performance art tradition”<sup>74</sup>. Each performance group was asked by the curator to explore different ways to “evoke the sensuous and poetic mode of being and being together in the otherworldly space”<sup>75</sup>. Visitors entered the Performance Sense Laboratory, a giant installation consisting of a big reception area and ten rooms, through a gate in the shape of a circle and were greeted and escorted by 'Evokers'. Performers prepared the visitors for their journey through the Laboratory and evoked their senses (hence the name 'Evoker') through different exercises, like binding the visitors' eyes and letting them touch and taste different objects, a feather, a piece of chocolate, laying them down and whispering poetry in their ears, and so on. Before letting visitors move into the rooms, Evokers asked the visitors to fill out a form as 'Human Research Objects' to chart changes in their emotional states as they went through the Laboratory. At the exit, visitors were asked again to fill out the form, which included simple questions, e.g. What mood are you in? Some possible answers were also provided on the form<sup>76</sup>.

Despite its playfulness and fairy-tale like design, where wandering around in different mystic and dreamy worlds could make the visitor feel like Alice in Wonderland, the Performance Sense Laboratory had a profound purpose which all of the artists shared.

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<sup>73</sup> Other performance artists in the art programme were Lilibeth Cuenca Rasmussen and her staff, Melanie-Jame Wolf and Ana Berkenhoff from Savage Amusement, and Gry Wolle Hallberg, Anna Lawaetz and the performance crew from Sisters Hope.

<sup>74</sup> Please see: <http://sensuous.dk/?p=939> [Accessed 1 June 2018].

<sup>75</sup> Please see: <http://sensuous.dk/?p=939> [Accessed 1 June 2018].

<sup>76</sup> Unfortunately, I wasn't able to get hold of any completed sample forms.



Surrounded by the buzz of a prestigious music festival with a long tradition<sup>77</sup>, Evokers and other performers aimed to create an atmosphere of 'the otherworldly space'—each room provided visitors with a different immersive experience, as they were let in one by one, or in groups of no more than 2 or 3. By experiencing each room one after the other, audience members were “shifting from one affective zone to the other” (Wetherell 2012: 140). The ten “intimate parallel-universal”<sup>78</sup> rooms were designed individually, each with a distinctive fiction and character, according to the instructions of the artists performing in the respective room.

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<sup>77</sup> The first Roskilde Festival was organised in 1971. On the night of the opening of The Performance Sense Laboratory, The Rolling Stones opened the Festival.  
Please see: [www.roskilde.de](http://www.roskilde.de) [Accessed 1 June 2018].

<sup>78</sup> Please see: <http://sensuous.dk/?p=939> [Accessed 1 June 2018].

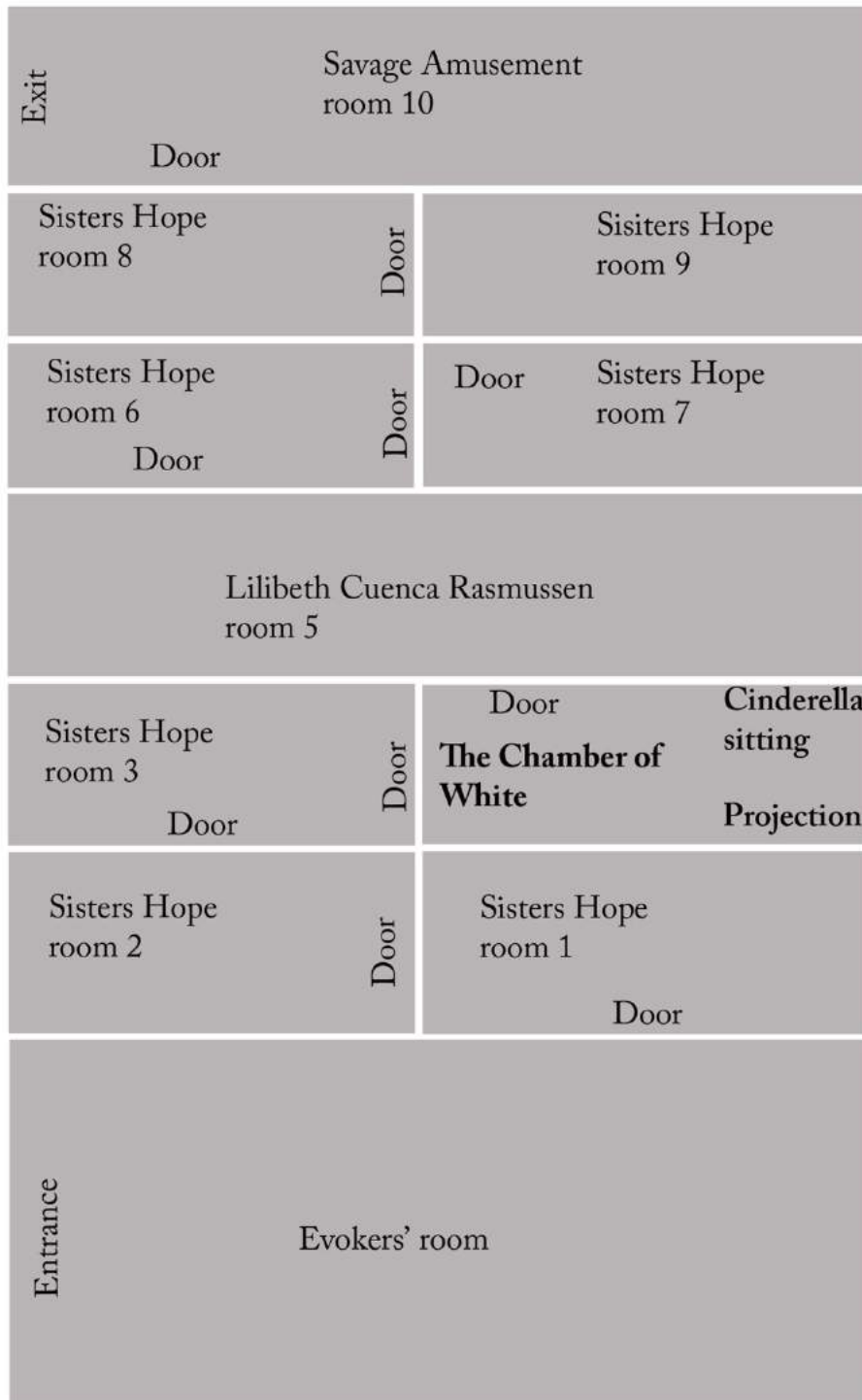


Figure 36. Map of *The Performance Sense Laboratory*, Roskilde Festival, 2014.

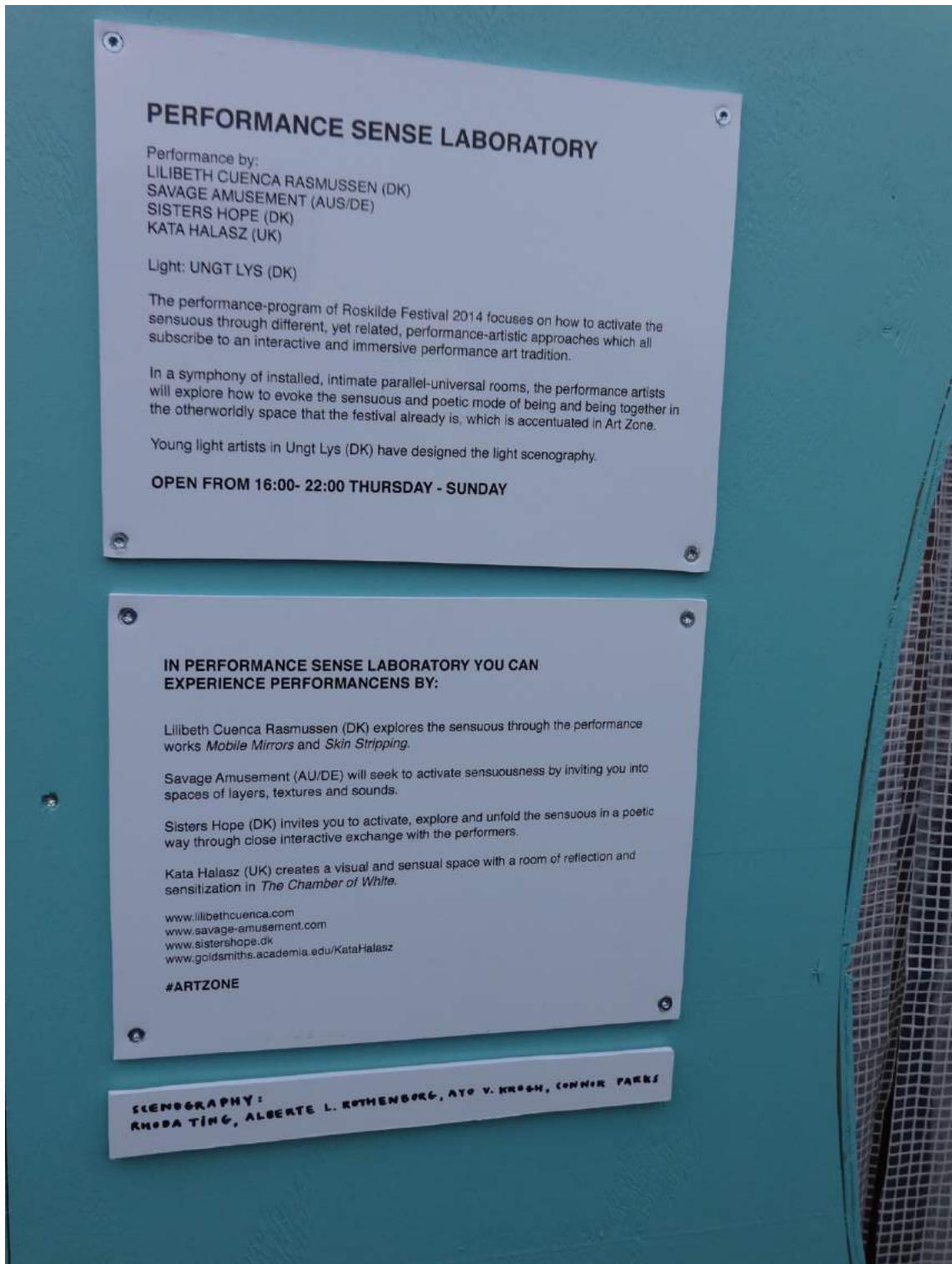


Figure 37. Information card next to the entrance of The Performance Sense Laboratory



*Figure 38. Visitors outside The Performance Sense Laboratory waiting to enter*



*Figure 39. Evokers having a meeting outside The Performance Sense Laboratory*



*Figure 40. A visitor is filling out a form with the help of an Evoker at the entrance of The Performance Sense Laboratory*



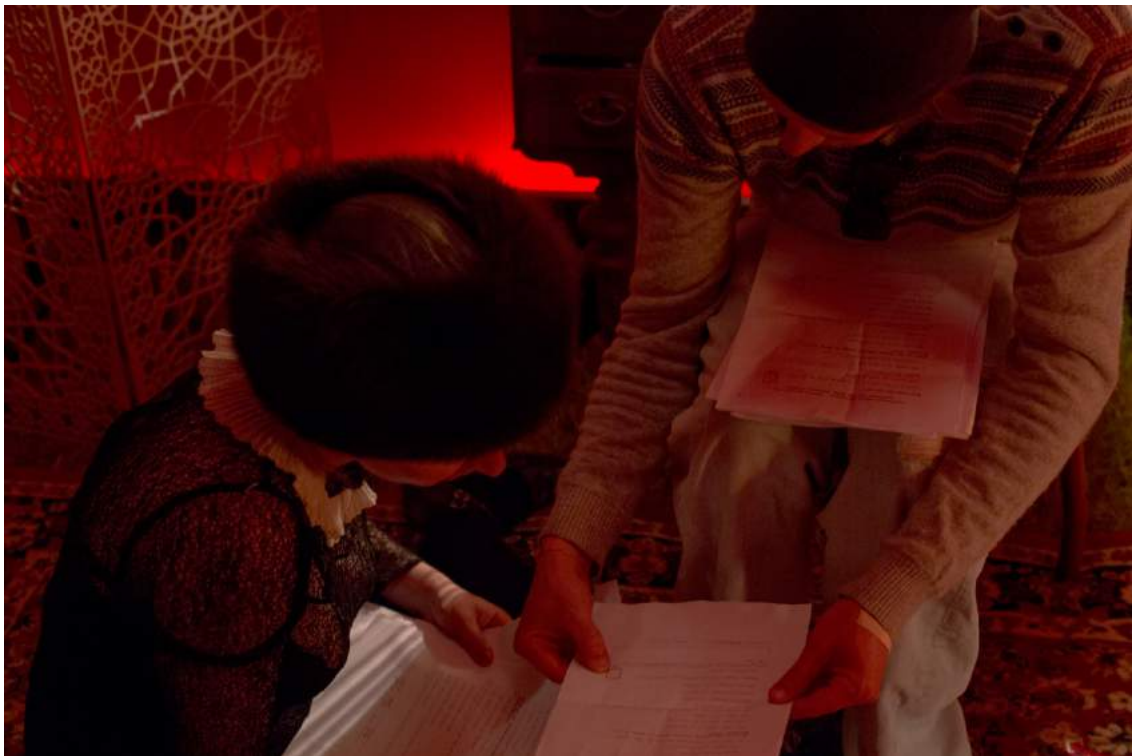
Figure 41. Evokers' room (photo by Diana Lindhardt)



Figure 42. Evokers' room (photo by Diana Lindhardt)



*Figure 43. Sisters Hope, room 1 (photo by Diana Lindhardt)*



*Figure 44. Sisters Hope, room 2 (photo by Diana Lindhardt)*



*Figure 45. Sisters Hope, room 3 (photo by Diana Lindhardt)*



*Figure 46. Lilibeth Cuenca Rasmussen, room 5 (photo by Diana Lindhardt)*





*Figure 47. Sisters Hope, room 6 (photo by Diana Lindhardt)*



*Figure 48. Sisters Hope, room 7 (photo by Diana Lindhardt)*



*Figure 49. Savage Amusement, room 10 (photo by Diana Lindhardt)*



*Figure 50. Savage Amusement, room 10 (photo by Diana Lindhardt)*

## The White Room at Performance Sense Laboratory

My contribution to the Performance Sense Laboratory was a video performance that I designed as an installation. My room was painted white and I had burning white fluorescent light installed on each wall of the room. Unless the light was switched on, which was the case on only two occasions, the room remained cosy and intimate in the dark, lit only by a projection. A soundscape connected all of the ten rooms that made up the Performance Sense Laboratory; silent music was played from one of the walls in my room. A video was projected in the opposite corner of the entrance (including, among others, images of culturally iconic 'white woman' characters). Me and my assistant interchangeably performed Cinderella, a central figure in the video and in the performance. In the room, there were only two people present at a time: the visitor and Cinderella. Beans and earth were flowing from the wall where the film was projected down to the floor; it was here that performer and visitor sat facing each other and the projection, thereby creating a continuum between the projected images and the performance. Similar to *The Blush Machine*, I devised *The Chamber of White* for one individual at a time, in order to create a direct interaction. In the Chamber however, Cinderella as the central figure was also present in the room with the visitor: not only as a projected image in the video but as a living white woman performed by me and my assistant.



*Figure 51. The Chamber of White, room 4 (photo by Diana Lindhardt)*



*Figure 53. The Chamber of White, room 4 (photo by Diana Lindhardt)*



*Figure 54. The Chamber of White, room 4 (photo by Diana Lindhardt)*

## Entering Cinderella

*It is the third day now, the start of the long 6 hour shift. The air inside the house is sticky and foul-smelling. It got filled with the odours of the hundred and fifty visitors per day, which so far makes three hundred, plus the performers, 340 people breathing, sweating, touching, feeling, I count in my head. My head is heavy, my body lump, I keep stroking my belly while I sit down, check the equipment and take up my position as Cinderella and try to get in the zone. In the zone of engagement, where I reach out to whoever comes in. I am weak, energy is leaking from my body down on the earth around me. The six hours ahead is like the highest mountain, I can't think of it now. 'It is for you, for you', I start my mantra, 'for you little girl inside me, and for you little girls out there'. I am seven months pregnant, I keep the light in my body in the dark room underneath the dark clothes. I close my eyes and straight up my back, massage my tights and calves, and clean my head. Soon the bell rings and the visitors enter the house. I still have some minutes to arrive in here. I hear the two performers in the room before mine, they have their first visitor escorted to them. I open my eyes and wait. These are moments of extreme concentration and tension; my body tightens up. I never know what is going to happen, I am excited and nervous, my body is a fireball throwing sparks around me.*

*Then an Evoker opens the white curtain and asks me if I am ready to receive the first visitor. His appearance calms me immediately, I feel safe and ready. He returns with a pretty blonde girl in her mid-twenties. A young, beautiful, long-haired White woman—this festival has so many. She is respectful and cautious. I smile at her and offer the cushion next to me. She sits down and puts up the headphones curiously. She is aware of her body, the edges and corners, it takes some time until she finds a comfortable position. She hasn't adjusted herself yet, I try to help her by moving my body as well, we are both finding our place in the room and in close proximity to each other. She is close, maybe too close for her liking but she doesn't want to move away now, I think she doesn't want to upset me. There is only room for a hand between us, I can smell the taste of her breath. It is sweet which doesn't surprise me. I take long deep breaths and she starts to follow me. We are breathing together now. I press play and the video starts to roll. I look at her, she stares at the screen, her mouth opens. Her sweet breath infuses the space between us again, I inhale her sweetness. I start playing with the beans and the earth but decide not to touch her, she seems to be absorbed by the images, at least she does not move an inch. Then I try to connect with her again, I move my hand in front of the projector, the shadow of my fingers letting go of the beans appears on the screen. I let some beans fall on her.*

*As I look down I realize she is even closer to me now, there are hardly 2 inches between her leg and mine. We both must have moved closer to each other. I cover both our legs with beans while she watches the video, her mouth still open. We are a mermaid now, two torsos grown out of a sack of beans. Finally, the video comes to the end and she looks at me. 'May I just give you a hug?' she asks me and hugs me strongly. I wish I could just stop here, for a long time, and when the hug has to come to an end, just cut to another footage. I say, 'Take care' and release her, beans are falling down as she stands up. She leaves the room fast, I can only catch the curtain move behind her. I stare at the curtain for a long time while my mouth opens.*

I wrote up this excerpt based on the notes I took while I performed *The Chamber of White*. Following from *The Blush Machine*, in this video performance I intended to further explore the concept of embodied subjectivity and the performance of white affect. Here I wanted to focus on one aspect of the work—the affective connections that are triggered between performer and individual audience members through the deployment of several artistic strategies that enable a profoundly intersubjective and intercorporeal experience of white femininities. I explored the fundamentally relational nature of world-making and self-making by attending to the complex movements of affects. In what follows I trace the affective transactions between performer and visitor and argue that for both performer and audience members the performance provides a basis for a complex mode of identification. In turn, this offers new modes of relationality and interconnectedness, even if only within the confines of the performance and during the time of the encounter.

I structured the work around its engagement with four primary sources that it pulls out of time and puts into conversation with each other. Blending elements of personal experience with fiction, cultural tropes and archetypal characters, abstraction and real-life events, *The Chamber of White* works with four artistic strategies that are its material sources for creating an affective experience of anti-racist white femininities.

The first source is the video projection, which comprises images of 'white woman' and icons of white femininities including cultural figures like Cinderella, the personification of the purity of the white female; the cartoon Betty Boop, with its history of racism<sup>79</sup>; and Marilyn Monroe, the epitome of the white blonde bombshell<sup>80</sup>. These archetypes of 'white woman' are cross-referenced with my artworks: the re-enactment of Howardeena Pindell's *Free, White and 21*; the binding of breasts from Diane Torr's *Man-For-A-Day* workshops and my subsequent re-enactment of Adrian Piper's *The Mythic Being (Cruising White Women)*; and footage from *The Blush Machine* and *Freeing Up Shame*, along with other cuts of women dancing and resting.

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<sup>79</sup>On racism in the cartoon Betty Boop please see: <https://www.allure.com/story/true-story-of-betty-boop> [Accessed 1 June 2018].

<sup>80</sup>See Dyer, R. (1986). *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*. Basingstoke: Macmillan; Handyside, F. (2010). Let's make love: Whiteness, cleanliness and sexuality in the French reception of Marilyn Monroe. In *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 13 (3) 291-306.



The figure of 'white man' also appears in the video, in violent scenes of riots from the 1960s and 2011, and as the oppressor of 'white woman'. But also, I show 'white man' as the intellectual superior who seeks to understand and redress his own actions through words and scholarship, through his own inaccessible white male activity. The video includes photos of library shelves with books on whiteness written overwhelmingly by white men.

The second material source for this performance-installation consists of the interviews I conducted with Natalie, Amanda, and Rosemary. Instead of using quotes from the interviews or actual situations that the women described, I tried to build into the piece the affective episodes of some of their life histories and the interviews themselves: the sadness of Natalie looking down at her hand when saying “this see-through skin”, the disappointment in Rosemary when she realized that her beauty and whiteness were more attractive for some black men in the anti-racist movement than her expertise and skills, and the anger of Amanda about the fact that she was not able to include an analysis of 'race' in her feminist work.

The third source is the performance of Cinderella, who works on understanding the meaning of the video. She continues selecting and mixing black, white and brown beans. She is forced to work until she can make sense of the world which is structured around 'race' and gender, femininity and masculinity, whiteness and its power. She is a labourer of whiteness, stirring together the heaps of beans she selected by her constantly working hands. She invites the visitor to help her, to take part in creating and destroying classification and categorization. The live performance connects the visitor with the images projected on the wall. The normative figure of 'white woman' and the white female body are simultaneously experienced by the visitor as visual and haptic. And the performance is the site where the visitor is encouraged to negotiate the shifting between body image and 'body-without-an-image', the viscerally felt body that is not reducible to its image (Featherstone 2006). Cinderella has a body that is in progress, opened up to be affected and to affect in the encounter with the visitor.

The fourth source is the narration—quotes from Aimé Césaire, Audre Lorde, and my own words that hold the video and the performance together and offer a connection beyond histories of racism and sexism in which we are all entangled.

The installation responds to these materials and creates an affective zone of engagement with these primary sources. The elements I chose to put together are marked by the particular affective circuit I call white affect. A self-reflexively subjective archive of moments of encounter with white femininities are assembled and transformed through the aesthetic strategies of creating connections between past and present; inviting new connections to be made between different historical figures and events; reframing these histories and their legacies and thereby highlighting how they are made relevant today; calling into question knowledge produced about bodies by reading their surfaces; and finally enacting complex fields of viscosity and affectivity in order to generate feelings of co-extensivity and belonging or non-belonging.

Creating a visceral relation was an integral part, indeed the desired aim of the performance. I created a safe space for exploration not through subversive artistic means but through an affective engagement of performer and visitor in their intimate proximity. Performance is unique in the unmediated 'realness' of living bodies (Phelan 1993). From my research I would, however agree with Kavka's (2008) notion that it is the feeling of intimacy, rather than the unmediated physicality of the performer's body which is the locus of the affective intensities experienced within this performance setting. Because of this, I had to carefully present the complex and ambivalent entanglements between truth and fiction, fantasy and history, always in response to the actual affective state of the individual audience member present at that moment. The narrative of the piece had to be relatable and accessible to the audience and allow for an intersubjective and intercorporeal connection to be made between performer and visitor on a distinctively affective register. The context of the music festival meant that the audience was made up overwhelmingly of white youth in their late teens, early twenties and thirties; this posed further questions on the intelligibility of the work for this demographic, and on its perceived relevance to their lives and their current affective state of being while at a music festival. When I arrived at the site and sat down to face my audience I immediately felt insecure about how the work would fit into the world of the music festival—a world which did not seem to exist beyond its gates, made up of music, dance, alcohol, drugs and of letting go of anything serious or unsettling.

The predominantly positive reception of the piece however soon swept away my worries. I received many 'thank you's from older women who seemed particularly appreciative of

the subject matter. A young girl also commented “very inspiring” before leaving the room. Many visitors directly engaged with the beans and the earth on the floor, touching the beans, playing with them, laying down on the floor, striking the earth beneath them. I received many smiles, nods, light tapping on the shoulders with grateful expressions. Some visitors expressed their awkwardness not knowing what to do, in which case I silently pointed at the pillow next to me, or let beans fall on their hands.

The few occasions where the visitors left the room without watching the video to the end or engaging with the performer became opportunities for me to consider questions on the boundaries of intersubjectivity and the limits of affective relation and circulation. Without exception, the visitors who seemed untouched by the work and left the room without watching the video until the end or engaging with the performer were white males. Drawing on the work of Stephen Reicher (2001), Wetherell explains the lack of affective attunement and the limits of affective action as the result of a deficiency of shared identification and social identity. Reicher defines social identity as “a model of the self in social relations, along with the actions that are proper and possible given such a social position” (2001: 200, quoted in Wetherell 2012: 148). In this sense, white men’s lack of a shared social identity and identification with the subject matter of the artwork and the ways in which it was displayed and performed likely limited their affective engagement with the performance. The action that seemed proper for them was to leave. It must be noted, however, that the majority of white men did watch the video to the end and engaged with the performer.

Affects produced in the social encounter are always unpredictable; we can never know their impact they will have on us in advance. The closed space of the Chamber and the intimate and confrontational design of the one-on-one performance heightened the density of affects in the room, which at times got thick and heavy. The affective fields of whiteness were created together by the visitor and Cinderella, as both continuously reacted to the other’s bodily, affective and intellectual states. Whiteness thus emerged as an event (Saldanha 2007) that was initiated, shaped and communicated by the visitor and Cinderella through their bodies’ engagement with each other. Complex processes of negotiations took place, and often developed into a joint narration of the situation with both visitor and Cinderella adding their ongoing thoughts about what might count as an appropriate bodily response to the other. These evaluations were bound up with

bodily reactions that preceded or followed movements of hands, legs, and body, and which signalled the ongoing thoughts and affective states of the visitor and Cinderella as part of a continuous interaction. The potentiality of the unexpected encounters where affects meshed with evaluative reflection made the bodies present permeable, open and porous, and thus enabled the renegotiation of power. My own power as the performer who framed and led the situation, and the power of Cinderella and her white femininity were at once strengthened or dissolved and handed over in a constant movement between the two individuals present in the Chamber at any given time. The concepts and ideas of white femininities that Cinderella carried in her body were made available for the visitor to shape, form, add to or leave untouched.

In most cases *The Chamber of White* created new models of relationality. The video performance placed the bodies of Cinderella and visitor at the forefront, and invited audience members to engage in different affective states. It offered visitors the chance to map themselves onto a white and heteronormative narrative of the world. The video performance evoked whiteness with a distinctive gendered dimension. The affective dominance of white normativity was simultaneously asserted and weakened. Performer and visitor actively created a world for each other through the discursive and affective resources they were drawing upon. According to Muñoz, the affect of whiteness is underdeveloped and flat (2000) (see Chapter 1). In his view “the affective performance of normative whiteness is minimalist to the point of emotional impoverishment” (2000: 70). *The Chamber of White* proved otherwise. Together, performer and participant entered an alternative affective register of whiteness: shame, guilt, desire, and longing superseded otherwise strict confines of identity politics. A sense of connection between performer and visitor did not form by identity, but instead by the circulation of affects.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I further developed my theorization of white femininities as affective performances. *The Blush Machine* and the *Chamber of White* demonstrate how white femininities produce affects, body movements and excess, risks, and changes over a period of time, in turn inciting responses, actions, and movements from others. In other words, whiteness turns into something that involves the production and circulation of affects. White femininities involve multiple and sometimes contradictory affective

tendencies, capacities or feeling states. From fleshy, corporeal experiences affects move through different sites in social encounters and contribute to the creation of embodied subjectivities.

I have argued that affects make 'white woman' visible. These two performances challenge the invisibility of whiteness. In the particular geographical, social and cultural settings in which they were set it became possible to investigate the workings of affects in the making of white femininities beyond visual practices and representations. I demonstrate how the embodied knowledge evoked in the performances (e.g. the touch of the Bolivian skirts in *The Blush Machine*, the feeling of beans falling on one's lap in *The Chamber of White*) draw attention to the embodied and the affective, and thus allows for thinking about whiteness and femininities as processes which are more complex than mere representative tropes.

## Conclusion: White Affect

*I am just saying that there's a role for us. That if we work together ... If we work only in silos of isolation ... of representation ... if the only thing that counts is the colour of your skin or the place of your birth in order to argue for a right or a ... yes, a right, because that's a nice summary of everything that you might argue for, then you're not going to, it's not gonna work. Because society is still racist. Society is still discriminatory. Society is still exclusionary. You need a larger base to make a change and you need a mixed base to make change so that others can see you're in it. And that's something that I think I've come to realise more and more, is the necessity of accepting that the way that our world has developed, the sense of needing to find self, an argument of self-interest, in order to create an altruistic action, is critical. That this is the world we're living. It's highly individualised. It's highly ... inward, selfish looking ... there isn't a strong sense of cohesion and solidarity. The idea of society is different for those at the top than it is for those at the bottom and their interests are not the same. That you're more polarised now than we've ever been before. I mean I think we are as polarised as in the days of segregation. But it's around wealth. And wealth is classed and raced. And gendered. And that's our world, now. We can continue to fight against that, but, actually, to make the things that need to happen, happen for the sake of the lives today rather than for the sake of the lives down the road, we also need to change that now, and to do that we need to have everyone come together. And people need to be able to see themselves in that. Right? And if you're into your self-interest groups, in recognisable groups on the basis of skin or place of birth or gender, it's not going to work.*

*Dorothy, 2014*

Learning from the various manifestations of white femininities in anti-racist contexts, this conclusion seeks to relate some of the findings of this research to how anti-racist white femininities are performed affectively. This chapter revisits key ideas of how white bodies take part in producing whiteness through the concept of white affect, before moving on to offering some concluding remarks on performing an artful sociology. I close by discussing the politics of this research. In the second part of this concluding chapter I think about whiteness as system of power and privilege and the ways in which affective whiteness can offer an alternative to politics based on racial representations and essentialist identity positions. I do this by drawing on a recent controversy around *Open Casket* (2016). The painting depicts a young black male victim of lynching in the US in 1955, and was made by Dana Schutz, a white woman. It was exhibited at the 2017 Whitney Biennale. The heated debate that erupted shortly after it was shown focussed on issues of racial representation and the positions from which to speak about racism, power and privilege. I discuss these topics that were thrown up in the controversy with a view of explicating the timeliness and urgency of the themes that this thesis has engaged with and proposing affective whiteness as a vision of a post-racial future.

## White Bodies

With this thesis I wanted to continue the conversation on 'race' and racism by focussing on whiteness. Claudia Rankine states: “Given that the concept of racial hierarchy is a strategy employed to support white dominance, whiteness is an important aspect of any conversation about race” (2017).<sup>81</sup> I wanted to continue the conversation about 'race' in a way that would place white bodies into the context of racism. “Bodies are different. Finally, this is coming to bear on theory” proclaims Saldanha before lamenting on the apparent lack of engagement with the materiality of 'race': “the bodily differences we call race have been relegated to the discursive realm.” (2007: ix)

Beyond the overwhelming theoretical reluctance by academics to take the embodiment of 'race' seriously, I would argue that there has been a shift in recent years to talking about 'race' and racism by referring to *bodies*, instead of individuals, communities or populations for instance. The bodies under scrutiny tend to be always black or non-

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<sup>81</sup>Claudia Rankine on the website of the Racial Imaginary Institute, a Manhattan-based organisation that aims to curate dialogues around white supremacy in American society. Available at: <https://theracialimaginary.org/about/> [Accessed 1 June 2018].

white bodies (see essays in the collection *Making Race Matter. Bodies, Space and Identity* (2005) by Claire Alexander and Caroline Knowles as an example). In this thesis, I proposed a theoretical framework in which white female bodies can be considered as racial bodies and where their affective dimensions are explored.

A central argument of my thesis is that in order to understand how whiteness gets produced, we need to reckon with white bodies and their affective dimensions. Reviewing the literature on whiteness I started with the contention that white bodies present a conceptual paradox: characterized invisible in accounts which understands whiteness primarily as power, privilege and normative presence (McIntosh 1988; Gallagher 1994; Dyer 1997) but hypervisible for black communities (hooks 1992; Gilroy 1993; Bhabha 1998; Ahmed 2004). Thus, the power of white bodies lies in that they can escape racialization: they are white for some but lack a racial colour for others. As I have pointed out, these discussions focus on the external surface of bodies, the corporeality of the racialized white body eludes these debates (Alexander and Knowles 2005). Social constructivism and cultural inscription models have muted the white body, relegated it to a canvas to be written upon. Its material, vital, dynamic, affective qualities have been flattened out. I argued that in order to form an understanding of how white bodies take part in racializing processes we need to begin from a theoretical position that recognizes their corporeality while also allowing for incorporation of how social discourses and power relations have shaped it. Conceptually, accounting for the materiality of white bodies involves appreciating that the physical and social dimensions of bodies are constantly interacting not as separate entities but in complex relationality (Grosz 1994). Consequently, bodies have as much power over racializing discourses as they are formed by them. This idea of the thinking and feeling body is captured by the 'somatically felt body' and its affects (Blackman 2008). I employed these concept in this research as conceptual tools to place an emphasis on how white female bodies enter into relation with other white and non-white bodies in the social world and how they are continuously changing as a result of this relation. Subject formation in this framework is an inherently embodied process. Through a focus on the affective intensities of white female bodies it became possible to explore the ways in which bodies respond to racializing discourses and take part in the construction of meaning.

This thesis provides an in-depth investigation of how the white female body participates



in the production of racialized discourses and in affective practices entangling the figure of 'white woman'. I explored affective and sensory processes, which need to be reckoned with in racialization processes, in line with a materialist conception of whiteness. Careful attention has shown that the bodies in this project are not invisible, insensitive, or flattened-out canvases to be inscribed with images and ideas of white femininities.

## **White Affect**

I wanted to change the terms of the conversation by which whiteness is understood by revealing how disembodied concepts of white normativity, universality, privilege and power are entangled with bodily intensities, and how white and non-white bodies are shaped by a relational process of affecting and being affected. Whiteness in this thesis emerged as a racial category, i.e. unstable, socially situated and relational. I worked towards de-centring whiteness as a “mythical norm” (Ahmed 2004c). I developed the concept of white affect as *a conceptual framework to understand the production of anti-racist white femininities as affective performances of 'race' and gender that unfold in the lived realities of everyday life.*

With its focus on intersubjective and intercorporeal encounters, this thesis demonstrates that anti-racist white femininities emerge as racialized and gendered relational constructs that are fluid, unstable, plural, historically contingent and socially located, and are constantly negotiated (and renegotiated) in affective movements between those present in the interaction. Unpacking the tense affective entanglements between the category of 'white woman' and the social relations that are produced around this representative figure, this thesis developed the concept of white affect as a new way of analyzing the production and contestation of situated and relational identities at both subjective and societal levels.

Working with the concept of affective practice I explored the circulation of affect in real and constructed anti-racist situations. My argument throughout the thesis was that the production of white femininities needs to be understood as ongoing performances of affective practices, where affective practice means embodied meaning-making (Wetherell 2012). In Chapter 3 I explored life histories of eleven anti-racist and feminist white women and analysed their responses in relation to common themes of

the whiteness literature: whiteness as invisible norm (McIntosh 1988; Gallagher 1994; Frankenberg 1997; Dyer 1997; Back 2010; Muñoz 2000, Ahmed 2004c), invisible racial colour (Dyer 1988; Ahmed 2004c), and racial identity (Miller 1992; Allen 1993; Frankenberg 1993; Hardiman 1994; Martin et al. 1996; Hurtado and Stewart 1997; Nakayama and Krizek 1995). The interviewees' life histories and contemplations during the interviews confirmed that the women did not understand whiteness as a racial identity for themselves, but they questioned its meaning and what such an identity could consist of. The unstable relationship between white as a skin colour and a racial category was demonstrated by the accounts where converting to Islam or belonging to a white cultural or ethnic minority led to experiencing hate and exclusion. For most of the interviewees, whiteness acquires meaning when encountering a non-white person, and in relation to histories of racism and their own privileges, which motivated them to work in anti-racism. In order to understand how their affective experiences took part in shaping their sense of self I then focused on how the respondents were perceived in anti-racist contexts and the meanings that got attached to their white bodies through affective practices that got activated in intersubjective encounters. Their accounts show how highly context-specific affective practices are. Through this focus on the affective circulation between white and non-white bodies, it became possible to demonstrate that the white female body is not a passive recipient of power and privilege that is inscribed on it, but active and central in producing meaning through its very corporeality.

In the second part of the thesis, in Chapters 4 and 5, I analysed how social discourses are embodied affectively in four performances which placed the figure of 'white woman' at the centre. From the first two performances, *Cruising Black Women* and *I Love Black Men* I argued that the production of white femininities and the figure of 'white woman' cannot be adequately explored without contending with affective practices that assemble around white female bodies. Both performances investigated affective practices as corporeal responses to a particular white stereotype that posits a sexual attraction between 'white woman' and 'black man'. This stereotype has been traced back to colonialism and endured over centuries with often fatal consequences to black men and black communities (Hall, C. 1992; Ware 1992; Frankenberg 1993, 1997; McClintock 1995; Dyer 1997; Harris 2000). From my performances I showed that inhabiting or rejecting this discursive construct is mediated through the lived experience of bodies and analysed affective practices as responses to this stereotype in order to demonstrate that

the discursive and affective dimensions of whiteness are always intertwined. From the argument that I developed from *Cruising Black Women* and *I Love Black Men* on the centrality of affective practices of bodies in producing whiteness I moved on to explore more closely how affect circulates between bodies, white and non-white. The interviews demonstrated that the women did not see themselves white unless in the presence of a non-white person. I wanted to explore what happens in those intersubjective and intercorporeal encounters, the ways in which bodies enter into relation and affect each other. In *The Blush Machine* I was interested in how a sense of self as a white woman can be shaped by the affective dimensions of social actions and focused on the relational aspects of embodied subjectivity. I demonstrated that 'white woman' as an identity construct is a conceptual emptiness that only takes shape and acquires meaning through affective circulation in situated social practices. In *The Chamber of White*, white femininities were performed affectively by those present in the encounter, in the affective movement that was created through their bodies' engagement with each other. Whiteness emerged as an 'event' produced in the affective practice within the installation room, in which visitors moved in and out, meeting with and relating to the performer. From my performance pieces I showed how various performances of particular sets of ideas on 'race' and gender, personal histories, interpretations of histories of racism and the role white women play in systems of whiteness got recruited together with bodily intensities to create specific affective practices of white femininities.

Affect implies a relationship and a movement between bodies. My interest in approaching whiteness through affect lies in a curiosity about exploring how bodies relate to each other affectively. I have argued that white bodies need to enter into relation with black and other non-white bodies in order to affectively racialize whiteness. The interview material also shows that whiteness acquires meaning when white bodies enter into relation with black or other racialized bodies. When white bodies meet, whiteness is not felt or acted upon, unless it is directly evoked and addressed, situations which I tried to simulate in my performances. There are some critical consequences to bear in mind when considering the tendency that white people see themselves as white/raced only in situations where they interact with non-white people. Firstly, beyond the contention that racial seeing based on colour can easily be destabilized, visual practices of 'race'-making for white people work only in the presence

of a racialized other. Secondly, this also presents the conceptual limits of affective practices that I employed in this thesis: my focus was not on “official national affect” (Muñoz 2000: 69) but rather, I chose to zoom in on everyday intersubjective social interactions. At the intersubjective and intercorporeal level—similarly to visual practices—affective practices of white femininities do not produce whiteness in cases when there isn't a non-white person present. Whites do not perceive themselves as white—do not construct an embodied meaning of their own whiteness—when they are not in the presence of a non-white person or made to do so explicitly, as was the case in my performance works.

Consequently, what we need is further work which develops affective practice as an analytical tool for understanding the making of whiteness, a framework that also takes into account the experiences of people of colour and investigates the dynamic and mobile character of affect at different levels of social interaction. My research is inherently partial, as I have investigated whiteness and white femininities through the participation of activist white women. My ongoing research plans include expanding on my theoretical proposition of 'race' as affective performance by conducting research involving women who identify themselves not as white. Furthermore, although I followed the lead of 'strategic essentialism' as proposed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) and worked with whiteness and blackness strategically, my work is also limited by these notions and does not include a richer diversity of life experiences and how we might re-imagine conceptualizing 'race'-making beyond the trap of an inherited language restricted by notions of blackness and whiteness. Working within the tradition of materialist accounts of difference, I intend to build a body of research that refocuses on the corporeal and material processes and interactions of social life and works towards abandoning essentialist racial categorizations.

### **Performing an Artful Live Sociology**

With this thesis, I continued conversations around topics that are difficult to talk about and I evoked difficult emotions and affects around these topics. Through artistic research methods, I demonstrated some ways in which *sociology can feel more*, in order to more thoroughly explore the entanglements of embodied states and the semiotic (Wetherell 2013). I searched for methods that would allow me to directly access

embodied experience. What I discovered was that art practice can “point us towards modes of bodily experience, emotional work and multi-sensuous being that otherwise slip past”, as stated by Hawkins (2011: 472). The bodies of this research were considered not primarily as texts that could be read and analysed (Stoller 1997). Instead, I demonstrated that the sensuous epistemologies of bodies can be accessed through performing an artful live sociology and thus expanding traditional sociological methodological approaches. As Becker writes, there are many ways to 'telling about society' (2007). My aim was not to fix bodies on these pages, much less to tell a story about them. Rather, by employing performance art as a means of investigation I wanted to pay close attention to the senses and to affects as processes that connect and produce relations between self and other (Blackman 2008). Through this artful approach I was able to make bodies knowable in new ways that do not require words and language as a means of accessing lived experience and demonstrated that meaning resides in the body as a whole (Willis 2000). By combining interviews with performance art, it was possible to establish a relationship between different ways of embodied meaning-making, between the telling of life histories and the affective intensities of social actions. These research encounters were not only telling about a specific segment of our social world, but presented a collective creation of social realities, even if only for the time of the encounters (Law 2004). The new realities produced and performed in the interviews and performances were mutually constitutive of an anti-racist vision that has driven this research as a whole. The artfulness of this research is expressed not only in the art forms – the installations, performances, videos, exhibitions – that I produced during its course, but in attending to the performative and affective dimensions of art: to the ruptures, movements and transformations that have been enacted by the participants and the researcher. In these performed social situations whiteness was not only a difficult topic to talk about but an embodied reality.

### **Artistic Research Methods**

Through using artistic research methods, I contributed towards working with affect in empirical social research and brought to the fore those bodily experiences that otherwise might 'slip past'. I was able to develop and test the concept of white affect because of my choice to use artistic research methods. These enabled me to consider my field of study in ways that were not possible through semi-structured interviews alone. “Much of the

world is vague, diffuse or unspecific, slippery, emotional, ephemeral, elusive or indistinct” writes Law (2004: 2). As he argues, social research is not well equipped to capture this rich texture of the social world, and “talk of 'method' still tends to summon up a relatively limited repertoire of responses” (2004: 3). Finding ways of knowing the elusive, slippery, emotional and messy aspects of embodied experience require new ways of thinking, relating, practicing (Law and Urry 2004). Back and Puwar also argue for expanding not only the social researcher’s repertoire to be able to capture that which is elusive but crucially for the researcher to also be able to attune to this dimension of human experience (2012). This thesis demonstrated that using artistic research methods can offer the sociologists new ways of knowing with a rich potential to get closer to these corporeal intensities. An imaginative engagement with artistic research methods can re-enchant vision, sound, smell, taste, and outbursts of anger, rage, pain, pleasure and desire as fundamental details that make up the richness of the social world (Law and Urry 2004). Multimedia performance installations that were designed to activate the senses and produce affective relations enabled this research to capture and explore some of these intense aspects of human experience and translate it into social research. Through excavating the artful and performative dimensions of artistic research methods this research created a dialogic connection between sociology and art as distinct forms of knowledge production and contributed to the expansion of 'live sociology' (Back and Puwar 2012).

### **Whiteness as Systems of Power and Privilege: Open Casket (2016)**

As I write this conclusion, a heated debate and protest is going on about a painting by a white female painter of a murdered black teenager that was on display at the 2017 Whitney Biennale in New York. Dana Schutz<sup>82</sup>, the artist in question, painted a portrait of the badly beaten Emmett Till, who was lynched by two white men in Mississippi in 1955<sup>83</sup>. The painting with the title *Open Casket* (2016) was created based on

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<sup>82</sup> 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> [Accessed 1 June 2018].

<sup>83</sup> 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

photographs from 1955. It depicts Till lying in an open funeral casket. The photos of Till in his casket had been published in Black magazines on the wish of his mother, Mamie Till-Mobley, who wanted to “let the world see what I have seen” (Berger 2017).<sup>84</sup> By not allowing the authorities to bury his body as soon as possible, Till-Mobley’s response to the beatings and murder of her 14-year-old son by two white men was to literally and metaphorically open his casket to the injustice and violence that black men are repeatedly subject to in the US. The controversy around the painting touches on the themes addressed in this thesis: a white woman’s cultural appropriation of a racial stereotype, the lived experience of these stereotypes resulted in much suffering and pain for black men, black women and black communities (and in this case, the death of a black youth); the positions from which to speak about white racism, power and privilege; performances of racial and gender subjectivities; white and black bodies in structures of racism, representation, and, affect, which all seem to converge on the surface of *Open Casket*.

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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).

<sup>84</sup>“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 claim that a white artist cannot represent and speak for black people is one of the cornerstones of the debate and the site where much of the rage is directed. “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). She insists that white artists cannot understand and represent black pain; they are incapable, she argues, of treating it as a subject matter that goes beyond “profit and fun” (in Petty 2017). In her view, the artwork is evidence of white insensitivity. In the days following the opening, artist Parker Bright protested in front of the painting, blocking its view; he wore a t-shirt with the words 'Black Death Spectacle' written on it. The fact that other works in the show but by black artists depicting racial violence were excluded from the discussion demonstrates that the politics of racial representation is as prevalent today as it has been for decades. This is especially the case with the painting *The Times That Ain't a Changing, Fast Enough!* by black artist Henry Taylor, which shows Philando Castile dying in his car after being shot by police. Although its subject matter is similar to *Open Casket*, Castile's painting was not discussed in the debate.

As Schutz herself explained, she was compelled to paint Till in his coffin as a response to the police shootings of unarmed black men over the summer of 2016 and the ensuing Black Lives Matter Movement (in Helmore 2017). Violence and racial violence, in particular, was one of the key themes of the 2017 Biennale as a whole. As Christopher Y. Lew, one of the show's co-curators explained, many of the artists exhibited “were seeking an engagement with what was happening on the street” (in Goldstein 2017). The current violence directed against black men in the USA<sup>85</sup> has its historical antecedent and continuity, of which the lynching and murder of Emmett Till is a gruesome example. In her essay about the 'multicultural melodrama' around the painting, artist Coco Fusco makes a similar connection. She 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).

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<sup>85</sup>Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Freddie Gray, Tamir Rice, Philando Castile among others (in Goldstein 2017)



This history that a white woman painter tapped into to engage with is not only the history of black communities in the US, but is a global history. The problematic politics of racial representation continues to the detriment of a more productive discussion on 'race' that is very much needed. In addition to 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 presuming “an ability to speak for all black people” (2017).

For me, the painting represents the challenges for a white woman to enter the discussion on 'race' and racial violence. In particular, that the meanings and histories attached to white femininities that are *inscribed* on her white body were the cause of the pain and suffering in the first place. But this history is also her history as a white woman and as a person living in a white female body; in this respect, the painting can be seen as her inclination to express her heightened awareness of injustice and how she positions herself in relation to it. The painting could be about the shame and pain of a white woman realizing what whiteness has done to Emmett Till, and to black people or on anyone designated non-white by whites—a white shame that, according to Black, white artists cannot correctly represent. By continuing the discussion along racial lines of representation we close the door to any meaningful engagement with the histories of racism, past and present, that are needed in order to imagine a better future. As Rankine explains, it is not about the race of the artist, but her “positioning in relation to the material” that should determine the painting’s reception (2017). I would argue with Fusco that speaking from essentialist positions on black and white racial identities, as Black has done, pre-empts a conversation about the actual subject matter of the artwork. Where I believe the discussion ought to have focussed is not on the whiteness of the artist herself, but the whiteness of the art world, its institutions and decision-making processes. Whiteness, as a systematic exclusionary force and privilege determines who is granted space and visibility to exhibit work. Schutz has been granted both, whilst black artists who have been raising similar issues for some time continue to be side-lined, ignored or even erased.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> An example of side-lining black artists in the UK is the fact that since its inception in 1987, Lubaina Himid was the first black female artist who was awarded the Turner Prize in 2017.

## Affective Whiteness

“If we work only in silos of isolation, of representation, if the only thing that counts is the colour of your skin or the place of your birth [...] it's not gonna work” said Dorothy, one of the respondents with whom I conducted an interview for this research (2014). I have chosen to open this concluding chapter with her words because they have resonated with me long after our discussion; they convey to me a sense of commitment and strength to not run away from difficult issues. She and the other women I interviewed taught me that, as white women, we have an important role in anti-racist and feminist efforts and cannot leave the fight for those in minority positions alone. If only black people fight the cause, we are never going to win. As Fusco argues:

The argument that any attempt by white cultural producer to engage with racism via the expression of black pain is inherently unacceptable forecloses the effort to achieve interracial cooperation, mutual understanding, or universal anti-racist consciousness (2017).

This is not to claim that white people can know what it is like to live as an oppressed minority in the USA or in Europe or anywhere else. Rather, we need to seek out and establish those platforms on which we can explore these critical issues through empathy and mutual openness to each other. Art can be one of these platforms, as the painter and the curator have argued. Lew explained that the violence that is prevalent in many artworks at the Biennale is “not just violence on its own”, but that it is “set within other aspects of the human condition and human experience—violence and death is there, but so is love, unity, self-preservation, and self-care. The strands of violence are there, but they're also set alongside a *restorative sensibility*” (in Goldstein 2017; my emphasis). Schutz makes a similar point in the updated label to her painting that was installed in response on the controversy (see Figure 6. 2). There, she writes about the affective registers where we can reach out to each other, alluding to motherhood that connects her with Mamie Till-Mobley, and her sorrow and rage of her after the death of her only son.

The heated discussions around *Open Casket* underline that contrary to academic utopias, we are not post-race, we have not “moved beyond race and racism in some way or the

other” (Sharma and Sharma 2012). Lynching, this extreme form of violence against black men, might be a foremost US history, but other forms of violence and hostility against non-white people and communities is a present reality for minorities in the US and also in Europe. In our contemporary neoliberal, capitalist societies, socio-economic and political inequalities happen along racial lines, i.e. along visible physical differences between populations and peoples, based on a 'us-and-them' ideology where 'us' is a starkly delineated whiteness protected by wealth and increasingly closed borders, immigration control and racial profiling justified by the global threat of terrorism, a term adjustable enough to include anyone at a stroke of a (white) hand. Racist populism and radical right political movements are proliferating in Europe and the numbers of acts of racist and xenophobic violence against Roma, North and Sub-Saharan Africans, Muslims and Jews are increasing (Halász 2009; 2013).

And while theorists envision a future beyond 'race' (Gilroy 2000; Ware and Back 2002), anti-racist organizations are struggling 'to keep race on the agenda' of the political tables in the European Union and its member states (ENAR 2010). But the reality is that 'race' has slipped off the political agendas in Europe to be replaced by diversity, social inclusion, integration and multiculturalism, a trend that was paralleled by a dispute over the post-racial in academic debates in the last decade (St. Louis 2002; Lentin 2014; Paul 2014). As “the discursive frame for race talk now” (Sharma and Sharma 2012), the post-racial seems to have emerged as a term to collect imaginaries for a future of a more just society. Whether the end of 'race' for Gilroy (1998), or the 'pre-race' for Gunaratnam and Clark (2012), or the advent of a 'thousand tiny races' for Saldanha (2006), the post-racial points towards a vision of life where racial divisions are eliminated or their detrimental effects repudiated. In an attempt to cut through the various uses of the term, Sharma and Sharma propose that “counter-intuitively, post-race can offer the possibility of the return of racism as a 'master-narrative' in conditions of its critical disavowal” (2012). It is this line of race-thinking that I affiliate with: I contend that racism is real and needs to be addressed as such to effectively counter it.

Following Sharma and Sharma that the “post' in post-race is about the critical affirmation of proliferation of racism in a contemporary neoliberal order that claims to have gone beyond the racial” (2012), my own addition to the 'post-talks' is the endeavour to use “race's creativity and virtuality” as Saldanha has previously proposed

(2006: 21). My aim with this thesis, the written text and the artworks, is to work towards a vision of what whiteness *can be*: a critical and rigorous assessment of racism at every level of social organization and systematic deconstruction of its own hegemonic position of racist actions. A whiteness that seeks to establish the conditions for others to acquire the same level of political, economic, technological wealth and productivity. This utopia is another in the various post-racial imaginaries that nonetheless resonates with anti-racist scholarship and practice, both political and artistic. It is a view of a performative and affective whiteness, where whiteness itself is working towards the material conditions of its disavowal through a felt connection and empathy toward others. My work in this sense forms an anti-racist practice predicated on the wish to surpass stabilized racial formations, to allow for the leakage of identities through the essentialist discursive categories of whiteness and blackness, and work with and against the affects that assemble around whiteness.

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# Appendix 1: Interview Guide

## PERSONAL BACKGROUND

DOB, nationality, relationship status, children, persons they live with, class, country of origin, country of residence

## RACE, GENDER, ACTIVISM

Can you tell me about the first time you became conscious of race differences/of your own whiteness?

How and when did your awareness of race/gender come about?

Did you think of yourself as white at any point in your life?

Any memories or direct experience, any incidents when racial/gender differences had a strong impact on you? At home, school, neighbourhood, friends etc.?

Did your awareness of race/gender change as you grew older?

Reasons for starting to work on anti-racism? Any particular?

Your awareness and understanding of the issues before working in anti-racism?

## SELF

You work on anti-racism not as a minority ethnic person – has it made a difference?

Is there a feeling of sameness or difference with your colleagues?

Is there a feeling of common cause with your colleagues or are there very different motivations of working in the field? Do they matter a lot?

Are you conscious of being a white woman at your work? Are you made conscious of by your colleagues?

Have you got any particular responses or reactions to you as a white woman?

Has your work shaped your sense of self, the way you see yourself and the ways in which others see you? In what ways?

Has your work made you think of your own cultural background?

Do you see yourself belonging to an ethnic or cultural group?

Do you see yourself as a racially or ethnically defined person?

## OTHER AREAS OF LIFE

Do issues of race/gender come up in your daily life?

Have you had any interracial relationships?

Do you have friends across differences of race/gender?

Do you talk about race/gender with your friends and family?

# Appendix 2: Interview Consent Form

Annex 2 to Ethics Form submitted by Katalin Halasz

white privilege and the dismantling of it (1) through a sociological analysis of what it entails and how it is constructed and (2) by visual art practices. Undertaking this research in the academic field of visual sociology is important as it enables the translation of social analysis into visual arguments and thus allows for reaching wide audiences within and beyond academia.

## CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

The Department of Sociology, Goldsmiths College, University of London attach high priority to the ethical conduct of research. **Alongside this form, you should read the Information Sheet and/or listen to the explanation about the research provided by the person organising the research.** If you have any questions regarding the research or use of the data collected through the study, please do not hesitate to ask the researcher. We therefore ask you to consider the following points before agreeing to take part in this research:

- This research is being undertaken for the purposes of a postgraduate dissertation
- The research will be conducted by Katalin Halasz
- Where the research involves an interview, this will be recorded.
- All data will be treated as personal under the 1998 Data Protection Act, and will be stored securely.
- Copies of transcripts and other data collected through the research will be provided to you, free of charge, upon request.
- Anonymity will be maintained and it will not be possible to identify you from the resulting dissertation
- If you decide at any time during the research that you no longer wish to participate in this project, you can withdraw immediately without giving any reason.
- You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep and refer to at any time.
- By signing this form you assign copyright of your contribution to the researcher. This excludes visual data supplied by you.
- Feedback will be provided to all participants at by the end of the project.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of the research, please contact the department's ethics officer Dr. Michaela Benson ([Michaela.benson@gold.ac.uk](mailto:Michaela.benson@gold.ac.uk)).

I confirm that I have freely agreed to participate in ***The Making of The White Woman*** research project. I have been briefed on what this involves and I agree to the use of the findings as described above. I understand that the material is protected by a code of professional ethics.

Participant Signature:

Name:

Date:

I confirm, for the project team, that we agree to keep the undertakings in this contract.

Researcher Signature:

Name:

Date:

Appendix 3: Sample Answers to the Question We Asked for The Blush Machine: "When was the last time you blushed?"

13

POR FAVOR AYÚDANOS CON LA INVESTIGACIÓN PARA NUESTRO PROYECTO EN IDENTIDAD Y MEMORIA

CONTESTANDO ESTA PREGUNTA:

¿CUÁNDO FUE LA ÚLTIMA VEZ QUE TE SONROJASTE?

RESPUESTA:

Hace un año y medio.  
Cuando celebre mis cumpleaños, en la cual  
mis amigos me dieron una sorpresa.

**KIOSKO**

OPEN DAY 'La máquina del sonrojo'

Kata Halasz & Polly Card / Hungría / Inglaterra

Inauguración 05 de Abril, 20:00.

Muestra del 05 de Abril hasta el 12 de Abril

Lunes - Viernes en horario de oficina. Ingreso libre.

36

POR FAVOR AYÚDANOS CON LA INVESTIGACIÓN PARA NUESTRO  
PROYECTO EN IDENTIDAD Y MEMORIA

CONTESTANDO ESTA PREGUNTA:

¿CUÁNDO FUE LA ÚLTIMA VEZ QUE TE  
SONROJASTE?

RESPUESTA:

anoche me reñe con la chica

que quiere tanto ella se

llama ley la que está conmigo

# KIOSKO

OPEN DAY 'La máquina del sonrojo'

Kata Halasz & Polly Card / Hungría/ Inglaterra

Inauguración 05 de Abril, 20:00.

Muestra del 05 de Abril hasta el 12 de Abril.

Lunes - Viernes en horario de oficina. Ingreso libre.



38

POR FAVOR AYÚDANOS CON LA INVESTIGACIÓN PARA NUESTRO  
PROYECTO EN IDENTIDAD Y MEMORIA

CONTESTANDO ESTA PREGUNTA:

**¿CUÁNDO FUE LA ÚLTIMA VEZ QUE TE  
SONROJASTE?**

RESPUESTA:

Cuando me caí delante de mPax cortej?

# KIOSKO

OPEN DAY 'La máquina del sonrojo'

Kata Halasz & Polly Card / Hungría/ Inglaterra

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