

From Yancy to Morgan

I'm stringing together a few thoughts in the following ten minutes interrupted by quotes from two texts– The first text is 'Whiteness as Ambush and the Transformative Power of Vigilance' by George Yancy and the second is 'Why we Get Off: Moving towards a Black Feminist Politics of Pleasure' by Joan Morgan.

I'm sifting through film and video work over the past few years – works that attempt to think through how an I is felt, where an I is placed and displaced, where a group might form or fall apart – within the work or around it. Alongside this sits conversations and practice with Gail, Shama, Samia, Michelle, members of the WOCI Reading Group and an ever-widening circle of women black, brown and white.

What follows is a scramble of thoughts that I have attempted to periodically cohere into some kind of formalised structure but what I fear I'm left with is a series of half sentences and non sequiters – please bear with me...

[disclaimer]

I'll begin with a recurring conversation around temporalities that began with the disruptions, repetitions and returns of the political campaigns of Justice for Domestic Workers, a self organised group supporting migrant domestic worker rights, that continues with the paradoxical experience epitomised in the Women of Colour Index, held at the Women's Art Library, Goldsmiths – a collection of practices collated by Rita Keegan and consigned to an archive. A collection of women who continue to make work, speak, exist. Whilst considering linear historical time, disruptive cycles and overlapping temporalities, I read in the Helen Molesworth article that Melissa sent me, a call for a double sense of time. Double time, double sight, double thought, double

And so with George at my side I point towards 'The temporal as racialised'

- a political and existential urgency for the immediate undoing of the oppressive operations of whiteness. The presentness of race.
- Racism as embedded within one's embodied, habitual engagement with the social world, weaved within the unconscious, impacting everyday mundane transactions.

The coding of brownness speaking on whiteness, in a white space, under the regulatory power of whiteness.

And so originally what I had said here was Fred on Dana echoed George in a demand for 'Deeper critical work that examines how social encounters or social transactions with bodies of colour challenge or complicate the white self and create conditions ripe for whiteness as ambush'. And then for that time for those who had assembled at Alison Jacques, I had wondered out loud does George's repeated use of the word white and whiteness prick the audience here in this

space. I considered meting it in a more regulatory fashion – so as not to come on too strong, too soon. The farcity of this text is that I am tired of talking about brownness – and the litany of aggressions that brown figurations seem to attract - like flies to shit. So I wish to reframe this and attend to your whiteness – which probably is the same thing.

//I added this bit in for the LUX talk//

But for this second, or third time depending on whether I decide to read this once or twice this weekend, I decided to go back because so many people wanted to know what Fred said. In the tweet where Hannah transcribed Fred for Hannah - here's what he actually said:

I've seen films in which people try to do it and still folks got mad. because because there's just no, like- remember that film *Monster's Ball*? I think that was a film about how white dudes - it's trying to give us a model for how somebody white could stop being white and it was messy and there was all kinds of bad shit about it that didn't work and all kinds of offensive forms but I was giving it credit for the attempt and I thought that it was trying to go deep and what it went deep into was in fact the profound failures and impossibilities of normative white subjectivity in other words it went deep into its own shit. But when you do this kind of weak kind of thing where you say 'well I'm a mother too' that's not deep enough. that's not deep enough. it's not - it's not that the whole question of motherhood, like motherhood stops at the level of this very simple kind of identification. well what does it mean to be a mother? think deep and hard, ok, about your own relation to motherhood, about the radical impossibility of ever actually enacting the figure or the performance of the mother. maternity is deep and possible, the figure of the mother is impossible and pretty much disastrous, right? and everybody knows this.



h n n h p r a t e r @hnnccnll · Apr 4

Replying to @nanpansky

fixed some typos :) (Moten's talk is here & the bit on the painting comes in the Q&A about an hour in vimeo.com/210810210?ref=...) pic.twitter.com/b08VwpQXme

If this were an accurate performative reading there'd be an anecdote, a fictional embellishment, an outrage or perhaps nowadays more accurately - a musical interlude –

Back to George -

'White supremacy is displaced from the present and reassigned to the past through a temporal logic of white dislocation. - This temporal displacement involves the investment in a narrative of white innocence. This functions to shift the emphasis away from how one is implicated in present structures of white power.'

We attend the Radical Black Art Working Convention Revisited at Nottingham Contemporary on the 18th and 19th March 2017. The convention accompanies the exhibition *The Place is Here* curated by Nick Aikens and Sam Thorne. An expanded version of a presentation Aikens curated at the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven in 2016 titled *Thinking back: A montage of Black Art in Britain*.

We want to know how does the institution respond to the demands of this work? What does this institution look like?

Who does it serve?

How do the actions of the individuals running this organisation belie the politics inherent within the work? A denial and a disavowel

The demand

- To disarticulate whiteness from those juridico-political, economic, institutional, aesthetic, and other locations, that will resist disarticulation to ensure the maintenance of white power

'As whites attempt to undo power and privilege, they find themselves confronting a world in which whiteness is not only around them but also working through them.'

Being ambushed by one's own whiteness

'Making my subjectness an object of a disciplined and potentially displaceable attentiveness' (HS)

I'm still trying to understand that last sentence but I can say in this moment for sure that I see my own identity as configured through a continual process of becoming, latent despite the social logics that attempt to fix, mute and place- I'm conscious of this increasingly as each week my stomach swells further towards a full 9 months of gestation.

'An antiracist white identity is what is reclaimed and constantly refashioned. But even here, the notion of cultivating a certain kind of identity must not be reduced to a form of apolitical aesthetic self-fashioning. There is the reality of the larger racist social processes to which one is inextricably tied; hence, the importance of sociogeny, where one does not lose sight of the social in its constitutive role in the formation of the individual.'

- The possibility of being ambushed by unexplored layers of one's whiteness is always there'

//Hence, as the body of color (mine?) enters various racialized spaces (here?), one must valorize the cracks, one must valorize the experience of ambush.

In other words, one strives to disrupt the hail of whiteness. One is at once an expression of whiteness, but its possibility for cracking, disrupting, and resignification renders problematic such an expression.

This is how power works; it shifts even as one attempts honest efforts to resist it.

As Alecia Y. Jackson notes, 'I am produced through certain power relations, but I am also a site for reworking those power relations so that something different and less constraining can be produced'

This is more an addendum than a continuation of the talk - a nod towards the speculative or propositional motive of the gathering

A sense I've been trying to articulate for some time against an oppositional politics that I have at times described as 'ancestral' borrowing from Gail, perhaps

complicit, or fugitive, but right now what I want to aspire towards is a politics of pleasure.

In why we get off Joan moves between the black female subject towards diasporic, non binary, transnational identities. My own reading here is to place the brown female body within this matrix – a body that codes Pakistani, British Asian, Northern, Muslim, never an essential body and incapable of speaking for the totality of brown experience.

"who is this emergent subject and from where does (s)he speak?" I'd like to add how is she felt?

Deterritorialized and reconstructed in situational ways "never complete, always in process and always constituted within, not outside representation'.

I wish to position desire, agency and brown women's engagements with pleasure as a viable theoretical paradigm. My sister Farah or my sister in law Safia who within the sanctity of their kitchens talk skiing, further education, muslim sisterhoods, colourism and sex.

'How can deepening our understanding of the multivalent ways black and brown women produce, read and participate in pleasure complicate our understanding of black and brown female subjectivities in ways that invigorate, inform and sharpen a contemporary feminist agenda?

I set this against a backdrop of desexualised hypereroticised sexuality –
Passive, submissive, chaste, exotic,
a victim of domestic abuse

In the reparative work against these figurations
Joan argues around an overreliance on Black Feminist Thoughts most trenchant theories—Kimberley Crenshaw's "intersectionality," Patricia Collin's "controlling images," Audre Lorde's deployment of the erotic, Higginbotham's 'respectability politics', Hine's 'Cultural Dissemblance'.

'Bequeathing them the sanctity of dogma and rendering them impervious to the changes of time, we've often failed to re-interrogate these venerated interventions with the temporal, cultural specificity reflected in contemporary ethnic heterogeneity, queerness and the advent of digital technologies and social media'.

Which brings us to
Erotic agency

And an engagement with the erotic as both deliberate and expansive

Joan (and my) interest is in a capacious casting of the erotic that includes black and brown women's variegated sexual and non-sexual engagements with deeply

internal sites of power and pleasure —among them expressions of sex and sexuality that deliberately resists binaries.

I am interested in erotic space that: looks at the constructions of Black and Brown female subjectivities cognizant of autonomous sexual desires. (And ask) how do Black and brown women use culture to explore sexual desire that is spiritual, intellectual, physical, emotional, and fluid so as to avoid splits or binaries that can freeze radical sexual subjectivities?

'In other words, with Joan, I want an erotic that demands space be made for honest bodies that like to also fuck.'