Whiteness is as Whiteness Does:
An Examination of Ideological Whiteness in Art

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULLFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTERS OF APPLIED ART
in
VISUAL AND MEDIA ARTS

EMILY CARR UNIVERSITY OF ART + DESIGN

2012

ABSTRACT

This paper considers how the ideology of Whiteness is reflected in visual art. I examine how my visual practice flows out from my grappling with the contentious ideology of Whiteness. By considering how I may navigate such a discussion, I take two approaches. It is necessary to step back, as much as is possible, to provide critical distance. At the same time I consider my own subjectivity and lived experience as a source of knowledge. These two approaches reinforce the ideas I have chosen to highlight in this paper: interpellation, and embodiment.

Additionally, both a clinical approach and lived experience are reflective of two streams of work I have produced throughout the MAA research period. I discuss four projects: *dollhouse*, *The Cleaning Girl and the Boarder*, *Scope*, and *Skin Tags*. I ground the discussion of these projects with an examination of the ideas of interpellation as discussed by philosophers Louis Althusser and Slavoj Žižek. To support an embodied position I explore the arguments of cultural theorist Sara Ahmed, as well as historians Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison. To provide context for these theories and my work, I also discuss, among others, selected projects by artists William Pope.L, Jenny Saville, Wangechi Mutu, and Izhar Patkin, as well as a collaborative project by Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy.

Several complications are also considered and in particular how the idea of normalcy is connected to the way Whiteness is constructed. These approaches on the ideas of subjectivity, embodied orientation, interpellation, and normalcy frame the discourse on the ideology of Whiteness in this paper.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Gerald Steadman Smith who encouraged me to pursue an art education – even though I was in my 40s, Glen Lowry who first proposed to me the very real possibility of pursuing a graduate degree, and my supervisor Diyan Achjadi for her steady support, direction, "skypability," and probing questions. I would also like to acknowledge Randy Lee Cutler and Jesse Birch for pointing me to two specific texts, as well as Kristina Lee Podesva for seeing the humour.

More importantly, I wish to thank my partner Scott Goebel – for *everything* – , along with my children Brent Göebel and Nicholas Goebel, who both inspire me to believe in possibilities. This thesis is for the three of them.

Dei Gratia.

It is only when we have looked into the eyes of the beast that we can see what is inside.

p.s.

For positive social change to occur we must imagine a reality that differs from what already exists. […] Activism is the courage to act consciously on our ideas, to exert power in resistance to ideological pressure--to risk leaving home.

Gloria Anzaldúa, "(Un)natural Bridges, (Un)safe Spaces," 5

INTRODUCTION

My inclination is to understand the position that I speak from. Although this understanding is far from complete, it is however, hopeful. The main undertaking at the outset of my research was to find a way to discuss the ideology of Whiteness[1] without reproducing it. In many ways this issue remains and continues to influence the direction of my research. From this struggle a more specific question arises. How is the ideology of Whiteness reflected in visual art? Especially, how is it also reflected in my work? This prompts a parallel question. How does one navigate and deconstruct such a conversation? For if the dialogue of racial equality is to continue and mature, then the burden for such a discussion cannot rest on the shoulders of a few, but must also be taken up by those who are unaccustomed to talking about it (hooks, "Overcoming"). In light of this, and to provide a necessary grounding, I discuss some of the complications for this kind of dialogue.

Throughout the paper it should be understood that wherever I use the terms "White," "Whiteness," "Black," "Blackness," "non-White," or "Other" that I am referring to cultural and ideological constructions. I am never using these terms to imply a catchall that speaks to the experience of an entire group of people. Nor, am I referencing a real thing. Additionally, Darren Lund and Paul Carr explain their use of the capitalized usage of "White" and "Whiteness" in their article *Exposing Privilege And Racism In The Great White North: Tackling Whiteness And Identity Issues In Canadian Education* (2010). They state, "We use a capitalized form of White and Whiteness to distinguish it from the name of the color, and to mark it as a racialized and socially constructed category [...]" (229). For this paper I have adopted the same policy, but

1 For an excellent discussion on the troublesome usage of the terms "White," "Whiteness," and "non-White," as well as "Black" and "Blackness," see: Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997) 8-14. (Dyer does not capitalize the terms; see para. 2 of this page.)

when quoting, I use the form that appears in the original text.

Since my project is chiefly concerned with the reflection of the ideology of Whiteness in visual art and how I navigate this conversation, explaining the complexity of the many discussions surrounding the concept of Whiteness, and the history of its origins is beyond the scope of this paper. There are many who have done important work on the topics of racism and the construction of Whiteness[2]. From sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois who wrote *Darkwater: Voices From Within the Veil* (1920) an auto-biographical book about the experience of racism in the US, to sociologist Ruth Frankenberg, who wrote *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (1993) about the nature of how Whiteness is constructed. Straddling the recent turn of the century is post-colonial and critical theorist Homi Bhabha, who has contributed to the dialogue with ideas regarding the diverse and fluid nature of identity constructions. In recent years, there have also been several exhibitions[3] dealing specifically

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2 For a more extensive understanding of the construction of Whiteness, in addition to the writers noted in this paper, see the following: W.E.B. Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices From Within the Veil* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920); James Baldwin, "On Being 'White' … And Other Lies," which appeared in *Essence* Apr 1984: 90-92; Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997); Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Translated by Charles L. Markmann (New York: Grove, 1967); Ruth Frankenberg, "White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness" (1993), a portion of which can be found in *Critical White Studies*. Edited by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1997) 425-31; and bell hooks, "Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination." can be located in *Cultural Studies,* Edited by Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992) 338-46.
Other key texts include: Adrian Piper, "Passing for White, Passing for Black" (1992), which can be found in *Critical White Studies*. Edited by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1997) 425-31; and Toni Morrison, "Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination" (1992) which can also be found in *Critical White Studies*. Edited by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1997) 79-84. Additionally, see Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010) for an extensive historical account.
For post-colonial discourses see: Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2004); Irit Rogoff, *Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*. Cambridge (Massachusets: Harvard University Press, 1999); and Trinh T. Minh-Ha, "Questions of Images and Politics" (1986), can be located in *Art and Feminism,* Edited by Helena Reckitt and Peggy Phelan (New York, NY: Phaidon Press, 2001) 245-246.

3 Suk Ja Kang Engles and Tim Engles co-curated *After Whiteness: Race and the Visual Arts* at I Space Gallery at the University of Illinois in 2003. Tyler Stallings curated *Whiteness, a Wayward Construction* at Laguna Art Museum in Laguna Beach CA in 2003. Maurice Berger curated *White: Whiteness and Race in Contemporary Art* at the Center for Art and Visual Culture, University of Maryland Baltimore County in 2004.

with the topic of ideological Whiteness. There are many systems of thought that shape individual identities and impact the way a person interacts with the world around them. These ideologies also collectively have an effect on what I make as well as the methods and methodologies I utilize to make work. I have specifically chosen to narrow the focus of this paper to the ideology of Whiteness in particular, since it is often overlooked by those unfamiliar with the way in which it influences behaviours and perspectives.

In order to address my questions I am taking up two main concepts. They are "embodiment" and "interpellation." As important as it is to navigate this conversation with critical distance, it is also relevant to consider embodiment and, with it, subjectivity. It is impossible for me to claim a universal understanding of the experience of Whiteness for Whites, nor the perception of Whiteness for those who are non-White. However, I do have access to my own narrative as an individual whose lived experience includes White privilege[4]. Therefore, I also turn to feminist and queer theorist Sara Ahmed's perspective on how interpellation is experienced relative to the "orientation" of one's body. Ahmed explains that White bodies are oriented away from, rather than facing toward Whiteness. In order to better understand an embodied approach I focus on historians Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, who explore the nature of objectivity and its relationship to subjective experience[5].

I discuss the notion of interpellation as described by philosopher Louis Althusser. His idea of hailing in regard to ideology is helpful to understand the relationship of the individual to ideologies. In support of Althusser's interpellation I also turn to philosopher and cultural

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4 "Privilege" is a problematic word. By definition it also signifies a right or immunity. When used in the scope of this paper it should be understood as a special unearned advantage that is exercised/enjoyed at the exclusion of others, rather than the notion of an inherent right. Peggy McIntosh in *White Privilege and Male Privilege* (1988) also discusses her discomfort with the term "privilege," since it conveys the idea that it is something one would want. She instead suggests using the terms "unearned advantage" or "unearned entitlement" (12-14). See also: "Privilege." *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary.*

critic Slavoj Žižek who notes, "[…] the idea that we live in a post-ideological society proceeds a little too quickly: cynical reason, with all its ironic detachment, leaves untouched the fundamental level of ideological fantasy, the level on which ideology structures the social reality itself" (Žižek *Sublime* 27). In other words, ideologies continue to organize what happens in society and it is therefore important to consider how interpellation functions.

Ahmed's notion of embodiment along with Althusser and Zizek's thoughts on interpellation form a significant part of the dialogue on Whiteness for me. It is as I contend with the concepts of Whiteness that my work flows out from my encounters with those ideas. Not as illustrations, but as visual responses to them. My work follows a general logic rather than a specific medium or set of supplies – taking what is at hand, re-contextualizing, using low-tech materials, employing a diverse set of skills – in response to a particular idea. Just as I have chosen to highlight embodiment and interpellation, my MAA research work can also be divided into two main types. Work that incorporates some aspect of my lived experience and work that takes a more clinical approach.

In light of the discussed theories I examine how the ideology of Whiteness is reflected in the visual art of William Pope.L, Jenny Saville, Wangechi Mutu, and Izhar Patkin, as well as a collaborative project between Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy. Their particular projects are not directly related to my works, yet they are linked by how the construction of Whiteness is addressed in their work.

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5 The discussion on embodiment and objectivity/subjectivity I provide in this paper are most helpful to me. However, there is a vast discourse on embodiment that should be noted. Some additional selected works are: Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*. Translated by Dorion Cairns (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1977); Michel Foucault, "Utopian Body." Sensorium: Embodied Experience, Technology, and Contemporary Art. Edited by Caroline A. Jones (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2006) 229-34; Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" (1988) found in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader,* Edited by Amelia Jones (London: Routledge, 2010) 482-92; and Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," which appeared in *Feminist Studies* 14.3 (Autumn 1988) 575-599.

In grappling with the ideology of Whiteness there is indeed a risk that I will get it "wrong;" however, there is also a need to expand and grow this particular conversation. By studying the theories relevant to understanding racial constructions and how those theories are reflected in art, it is my hope that through text and visual art, that my work contributes to this dialogue.

DANGER!

There are several notable complications to taking up this subject.

I have been told that I am brave and courageous for tackling this topic. This is just one way in which the ideology of Whiteness rears its ugly head. I am seen as being "good," since bravery and courage are positive qualities. Dyer in *White* (1997) says, "though the power value of whiteness resides above all in its instabilities and apparent neutrality, [it] does carry the more explicit symbolic sense of moral [...] superiority" (70). Since the ideology of Whiteness contains a false notion that Whites are good, the kind of guilt a White person is able to engage in when recognizing collective wrongs (such as European colonialism for example) becomes a display of "fine moral character" (11). This kind of demonstration in turn reproduces the construction of Whiteness. Guilt becomes an expression of what Whites are – moral – and, by implication what others are not. Sara Ahmed in "Declarations of Whiteness: The Non-Performativity of Anti-Racism" (2004) explains, when "institutions as well as individuals 'admit' to forms of bad practice, […] the admission itself becomes seen as good practice."

Dyer also lists several other potential problems that can arise for Whites studying Whiteness. The first he calls the "green light" problem (10). This occurs when Whites, who have always talked about themselves, have now been given the go ahead to continue talking about themselves. Then there is what he calls "me-too-ism" (10): a type of collective narcissism where Whites see themselves as part of an exclusive group that is also in need of special considerations. At the same time, me-too-ism carries with it the implication that identifying as White is no different than belonging to any other group. As Ahmed explains, the notion of "me too [...] allows the disappearance of the privilege of whiteness […it] neutraliz[es ...] hierarchy" (Ahmed "Declarations"). In other words, if Whites are just

another group without special privileges, then hierarchy is effectively diminished.

Ahmed in “Declarations” adds that the statements made by Whites in order to declare their affirmation of anti-racism, do not actually function in any meaningful way. Like Dyer, Ahmed lists several positions Whites may take. For instance, Dyer calls his project one of “making whiteness visible” (4). To which Ahmed responds, “the argument that whites must see whiteness because whiteness is unseen can convert into a declaration of not being subject to whiteness or even a white subject (‘if I see whiteness, then I am not white, as whites don’t see their whiteness’).” Likewise the confirmation, “I am a racist,” is followed by the statement, “I am ashamed of my racism.” These both work with the same logic of recognizing one's status in Whiteness; if I admit I am a racist and I also feel guilty about it (a “good” thing) then I am no longer a racist since racists are incognizant of their racism. White guilt demonstrates “that Whites mean well.” Additionally, if I say, “I have studied Whiteness,” then I must not be racist because racist people are ignorant.

In summary, Ahmed argues that the speech act of saying “we are anti-racists” does not mean one actually is. If Whites admit to being bad, then they show they are good. If someone says, “I know I am White,” it does not imply a full comprehension of the meaning carried with the ideology of Whiteness, or even that it is a constructed notion.

EMBODIMENT

Since lived experience demonstrates that the construct of Whiteness continues to function, it is important to consider the manner in which I am using the pronoun "I" throughout this thesis paper. As stated in the Introduction, I cannot make a claim regarding the experiences of all people constructed as White. There is a need for critical distance to analyze and contextualize, but that should be coupled and informed with knowledge gained through my own experiences. In turn, my observations should be tempered and interpreted through theoretical engagement.

Philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) states, "All my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world" (ix). Writing in *The World of Perception* (1945), he asserts the value of the personal experience affirming, "science provides only abstract representations [...], which do not constitute 'absolute and complete knowledge'" (15). In other words, formulating theories about how Whiteness functions as a systemic construct may seem to elucidate, but without experiential knowledge the theories remain academic. Therefore, consideration of lived experience is crucial. Additionally, Daston and Galison in *Objectivity*[6] (2010) contend that "scientific seeing" occurs at the place where "body and mind, pedagogy and research, knower and known intersect" (369). They state, "Objectivity is not synonymous with truth or certainty, precision or accuracy […] objectivity can even be at odds with these: an objective image is not always an accurate one"

6 In their book *Objectivity* (2007) Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison describe three kinds of scientific observation (truth to nature, mechanical objectivity, and trained judgment), which have all been, or still are understood as objective looking. However, they show that no matter how hard the scientific observer tried to remove their biases, that this in turn becomes a kind of subjective looking. Using the format of atlases they trace the history of objectivity and show how the atlas images reveal subjective choices based on the knowledge, culture, and collective sight of the atlas maker.

(372). Namely, scientific seeing is subjective because it is dependent on the researcher's own level of knowledge, their experience of phenomena, and the abilities of their own body. So, for my research purposes and practice it is important to understand that I am taking into account my own experience, which informs my knowledge about Whiteness.

In "A Phenomenology of Whiteness" (2007), Ahmed suggests that an approach to examine Whiteness, is through a lens of phenomenology. She begins by explaining how a body is oriented, and that this orientation is important to understanding a person's lived experience. The body has a point in time and space and it is from there that the world "unfolds" for that particular body (151). Ahmed describes the orientation of Whiteness in that "race […] becomes a social or bodily given, or what we receive from others as an inheritance of [colonial] history" (154). She continues:

> Such an inheritance can be re-thought in terms of orientations: we inherit the reachability of some objects, those that are 'given' to us, or at least made available to us, within the 'what' that is around. I am not suggesting here that 'whiteness' is one such 'reachable object,' but that whiteness is an orientation that puts certain things within reach. (154)

According to Ahmed there are specific objects (and privileges) available to Whites because of the orientation of their bodies in relation to the ideology of Whiteness. Whites are able to move around their world with particular objects within reach that seem natural, normal, and at home.

For example, the recent release of the movie *The Hunger Games* (2012) demonstrates how deeply embedded the idea is that Whiteness is a "bodily given" (Ahmed, "Phenomenology" 154). *The Hunger Games* movie is based on a book with the same title published in 2008 by US-born author Suzanne Collins. One of the characters in the

novel, Rue, is described as having "dark brown skin and eyes" (Collins 45). Rue is a girl who befriends the protagonist in the story, Katniss. Rue and Katniss support and help each other to survive during the death games that they are caught up in. Later in the narrative when Rue is killed, Katniss mourns her death. In early 2012 when the movie version was released several readers of the novel posted their thoughts about the film version on their Twitter accounts[7]. While some readers may have overlooked Rue's description and were surprised to see Rue played by a Black actress, many posted responses that exposed their disappointment and/or disgust that the character is Black. Some suggested that finding out Rue was Black after watching the film made her death less sad, and one wondered why all the good characters were Black ("Hunger Games Tweets"). As expressed by these people publicly, being White seems natural, they assume that White is what normal is, to the point of overriding the printed text of a book as the story unfolds for them.

When I began my research, I may have been caught up in the notion that somehow the point of my project is to dislodge Whiteness, as if I can somehow *do* something to Whiteness. Ahmed writes, "we can get stuck [...] endlessly caught up in describing what we are doing *to* whiteness, rather than what whiteness is *doing*" (emphasis mine) ("Phenomenology" 150). When Whiteness is reified, or reproduced, as she points out, it is not because we do something to Whiteness, but because it is something Whiteness does.

For example, my work *dollhouse* (2010) is a large doll's house. The house itself consists of two halves that are each three feet wide by one foot deep; each half sits on a sawhorse cut from raw, rough-cut two by fours. When the two halves sit on top of their

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7 The controversial tweets were first noted collectively on a weblog called *Hunger Games Tweets*. See: "Hunger Games Tweets" on Tumblr. Follow up articles responding to Hunger Games Tweets also appeared on Jezebel and in The New Yorker. For commentary on the tweets see: Dodai Stewart, "Racist Hunger Games Fans Are Very Disappointed." at *jezebel.com*; and Anna Holmes, "The Book Bench: White Until Proven Black: Imagining Race in Hunger Games: The New Yorker" at *newyorker.com* (*The New Yorker,* Conde Nast).

respective sawhorses the height then reaches fifty-four inches. The two sections are positioned to face each other so that a person can walk between the open halves.

Figure 3.1. Joyce Lindemulder, *dollhouse*, 2010. Wood, screws, nails, bolts, paint. Dimensions variable.

The distance between the two is set so that two people moving through the space at the same time might find it somewhat uncomfortable. The layout of six rooms in one half mirrors the other, so that if one were to push the two halves together they might form a complete house. The house features nine variously-sized windows cut into the walls, as well as a front and a side door. When the dollhouse is open the interior of the rooms are exposed, as well as the cross-section of roof trusses, floor joists, and wall framing. The interior of the rooms and the exterior of the house are painted white.

Television historian, Jonathan Bignell in *Postmodern Media Culture* discusses the thinking of literary critic and philosopher Walter Benjamin in relation to the role of toys as "a site where the intimate exchanges between child and object produce [...] and communicate

[...] culture" (116). Toys become a way to prepare children to "become a consumer of meanings" (116). In the most basic way, *dollhouse* is easily understood as a stand-in for a toy, and a site for the creation of meanings where scenarios are acted out or imagined by children and/or adults.

Other artists have also worked with dollhouses. Jennifer Linton's work, *The Disobedient Dollhouse* (2009-10), is a mixed media installation consisting of a large area of gallery wall covered with Victorian-style wallpaper that includes large insects in the pattern. A small-scale dollhouse hangs just off center within the field of wallpaper. The house is constructed from thin board, and the interior furnishings and figures are made entirely from lithographed paper. Linton reveals that her childhood experiences with dollhouses were places where she could act out her fantasies about motherhood and domesticity (Linton). As a child, she regarded the dollhouse as an idealized site, but now understands that her childhood fantasy is contradictory to the reality of being imperfect (Linton). For instance, Linton renders a typical Victorian scene by subverting expectations. In her dollhouse a bird-headed woman sits at the piano, vines grow in odd places, a girl soothes a bird baby, and snakes slither on the floor. Linton's project exposes the fantasy of an ideology that promotes the notion of normalcy.

My intention in the case of my work *dollhouse*, is to understand the white paint as glossing over, covering imperfections, and hiding wood stains. Or looking at it another way, the white paint points to what the ideology of Whiteness does, which is to set itself up as clean, normal, and perfect. However, the paint simply covers and acts like a whitewash. The imperfections still exist, since they are merely covered. The exposed fabrication of the struts and joists of *dollhouse* call to mind the idea that Whiteness is a construction. Nonetheless, reflecting on my aims for *dollhouse*, and while considering Žižek's notion that traditional

critique of an ideology simply works to expose parts of it that are meant to stay hidden, challenges my thinking for this work (*Sublime* 26). A development for me, with *dollhouse*, is that it is not enough to simply unmask and expose what the ideology of Whiteness is – a fabrication – but rather to push forward to probe what it does.

In "Passing for White, Passing for Black" (1992), artist and philosopher Adrian Piper points out that often Whites are motivated to confront racism by what they think they can *do* for Black people (428). A current example of this is the recent viral video called *Kony 2012*, produced by the organization Invisible Children. While the stated intention of the Whites[8] who made the video is to "help end the longest running armed conflict in Africa," the video confirms Piper's assertion that Whites are moved by focusing on what they can do ("What We Do"). It is the *doing* here that is important. In trying to do something, a person who is White would still remain in a privileged position, the position of socially perceived and lived power. Homi Bhabha in "The White Stuff" (2007) also addresses this issue. He explains that the position of Whiteness cannot be unseated by "raising the 'gaze of the other'" because Whiteness assumes ownership of knowledge, and social influence and control. As with the Kony video, it is Whites who implicitly attest to have the tools, the power, and claim to know what to do in order to capture Kony, rather than submit to Ugandan knowledge of a complex situation.

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8 The executive team for the organization Invisible Children, which produced the *Kony 2012* video, consists of three White men: Jason Russell, Ben Keesey, and Chris Carver. The entire US Team of the organization is also predominantly White ("Our Team"). See: Invisible Children, http://www.invisiblechildren.com/our-team.html Several responses to the video quickly pointed out that the piece (and the intentions of the producer) failed to take into account the current situation in Uganda, nor what the Ugandan people understand the problem as, nor how they see themselves as problem solvers. See: Rosebell R. Kagumire, "My Response to KONY2012" (7 Mar 2012) on *YouTube*; Kate Cronin-Furman and Amanda Taub, "Solving War Crimes With Wristbands: The Arrogance of 'Kony 2012'" (8 Mar. 2012) at: *theatlantic.com* (*The Atlantic*. The Atlantic Monthly Group); Arturo R. García, "StopKony: Activism Or Exploitation?" *Racialicious*. (8 Mar. 2012) at *racialicious.com*. Eventually, White producer Jason Russell became the focus of media attention. See: James Marshall Crotty, "Kony 2012 Filmmaker, Jason Russell, Becomes The Spectacle: Lessons In Atrocity Tourism." (20 Mar. 2012) at: *forbes.com* (*Forbes*. Forbes Magazine).

If I shift my focus to what Whiteness is doing, rather than what I can do *to* Whiteness (such as expose the construction as in *dollhouse*) then I am able to orient myself to a specific finite time and place (strict religious upbringing, immigrant parents, female body, White body, etc.). I am able to look at what objects are within my reach and how the ideology of Whiteness "lags behind" me (Ahmed, "A Phenomenology" 156-157). Ahmed explains this idea further when she discusses habits. Using Bourdieu's notion that habits can become unconscious, she explains, "if habits are about what bodies do, in ways that are repeated, then they might also shape what a body can do" (156). Ahmed ties this to the idea of Merleau-Ponty where "the habitual body does not get in the way of an action: it is behind the action" (156). She says:

> I want to suggest here that whiteness could be understood as 'the behind'. White bodies are habitual insofar as they 'trail behind' actions: they do not get stressed in their encounters with objects or others, as their whiteness 'goes unnoticed.' Whiteness would be what lags behind; white bodies do not have to face their whiteness; they are not oriented towards it, and this 'not' is what allows whiteness to cohere, as that which bodies are oriented around. When bodies 'lag behind', then they extend their reach. (156)

In other words, any place where the ideology of Whiteness dominates is a space where Whites are able to move without stress. Since Whiteness extends out from White bodies those spaces are constructed by Whiteness. The implication is that Whites can generally function without being required to think about their Whiteness.

In *White Baby* (1992), American artist William Pope.L, as part of the Cleveland Performance Arts Festival, entered a performance space with a pink-coloured doll dragging behind him and said, "I am being chased down the street by a little white baby with no

clothes on. It is a nice baby. A little white baby. I do not like it; yet I am tied to it. Now I want to hide from the little baby. Instead I pull it along the neighborhood like a little doggie" (Bessire 23). It is the idea of Whiteness trailing behind a body I apply here, except in this case Pope.L is Black. Where, as Ahmed suggests in "A Phenomenology," Whites are generally not aware of Whiteness trailing behind them, Pope.L makes it clear he is very aware of the Whiteness that "lags behind." The doll in *White Baby* is the signifier for the subject whose Whiteness extends out into the spaces it inhabits. Hence, Pope.L's observation that he cannot hide from the doll, but that instead he has to "pull it along like a little doggie" (23). The doll creates a point of pressure and restricts what Pope.L's body can do (Ahmed 161). In a sudden turn during the performance Pope.L disrupts the whole scene by throwing the doll, which was still tied around the neck, so it was hanging and swinging from a pipe that was attached to the ceiling, calling into question the apparent restriction on his body.[9]

I provide an example of lived experience to clarify how this kind of restriction functions. During the Seventies the town I grew up in, Brampton, Ontario, was predominantly White, but many new immigrants were moving to the Toronto area city from India and Jamaica.[10] At the time I was almost 18 years old and I had a boyfriend. "Owen" was Black. One Saturday I took the town bus to visit Owen at his place and we decided to go out for a walk. It was a spring day and it was beginning to feel like summer outside. We went

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9 Between 1882 and 1932, there were 4,608 victims of lynching in the United States. Of those, seven in ten were Black ("George H. White"). There was no specific federal law against lynching, even though the NAACP campaigned for one, until 1968 (Kennis).

10 Post WWII saw another wave of immigration to Canada (and other predominantly White nations) from Europe, including my parents who came from The Netherlands. Canadian author and broadcaster Pierre Burton once praised Dutch immigrants for assimilating so well into the Canadian culture. See: "Comfort and Fear 1946-1964," Canada: A People's History (*CBC*. Television Series. 2001). Throughout Canada's history, racist government policies restricted various ethnic or national groups from immigration, so that a census in 1951 showed that 97 percent of Canada's population had European origins. In 1967, Canada removed restrictions to immigration based on race or nationality. Today, over half of all immigrants come from Asia. See also: "Canada Immigration Trends," *Canada's Immigration Trends 1851-2006* at: *Canadaimmigrants.com*; and Janet Dench, "A Hundred Years of Immigration to Canada 1900 – 1999" at: ccrweb.ca (*Canada Council for Refugees*).

out holding hands, feeling carefree as we walked along the suburb sidewalks. About ten minutes into our walk a vehicle with three young White men slowed down a little and through the open window the driver yelled at us.

"What a waste!"

I was puzzled and at first I did not know what they meant, until Owen explained it to me.

"They mean," he told me, "that it's a waste for you to go out with me because I am Black."

So, in this case, my body is oriented such that Whiteness lags behind and extends out into the spaces I inhabit. In addition, because of the way Whiteness functions, I am not required to think about this effect. In Owen's case, his body is oriented toward Whiteness. His body does not extend out, but instead "feels the pressure point, as a restriction in what it can do" (Ahmed 161). Here Owen's proximity to a White female body[11] creates a moment where he becomes an object; he is "diminished as an effect of [my] bodily extension" (161).

My work for the MAA graduation exhibition draws on my contending with the ideas of lived experience and orientation. *The Cleaning Girl and the Boarder* (2012) (Appendix A) is a stop motion animation that re-imagines a portion of the narrative in *My Mother Told Me*,

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11 Interracial relationships have not been against the law in Canada, but were discouraged either through social pressure or other means. However, today acceptance of interracial relationships is growing. See: Katherine Arnup, "Close Personal Relationships between Adults: 100 Years of Marriage in Canada." (*Law Commission of Canada*, 2001) 13.
In 1944, Swedish sociologist Gunnar Myrdal published a study, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy,* for the Carnegie Corporation on Whites' beliefs about miscegenation. While Blacks list "intermarriage and sexual intercourse with whites" last on their list for the reasons they want integration, Whites list it first as the reason that they believe that Blacks want integration. Which also begs the question as to the reason such a question was on the survey in the first place ("Timeline"). As an horrific example of the long history of revulsion towards miscegenation, on August 28, 1955, fourteen year old Emmett Till was murdered for allegedly flirting with a White grocery store clerk in Mississippi. See: "People & Events: Lynching in America." *American Experience:*; and "Timeline: The Murder of Emmett Till" both at *American Experience: The Murder of Emmett Till*. PBS, 2003. See also footnote 10.

a work I created for the mid-program MAA exhibition *UponOccasion* in 2011 at Emily Carr University. The original work consists of a narrative that is loosely based on personal memory, and *The Cleaning Girl* additionally incorporates fantasy and fiction into a fragment of that memory.

Figure 3.2. Joyce Lindemulder, *My Mother Told Me*, 2012. Graphite, photo in frame, stained pillow, blond hairs.

The section of the story that is re-imagined from a portion of text in *My Mother Told Me* reads, “I didn’t notice a lot of blacks in our town, but I recall the Chinese boarders that lived in our bedrooms after the divorce – I thought it was strange how you could see their fallen hairs on the pillows”. The set for the animation is a bedroom made from low-tech materials. The figure and the furnishings are created from white paper, while the bedroom walls are constructed from corrugated cardboard.

The story begins with the girl occupied in cleaning the room of a boarder who lives in her mother's house. She is distracted from her work and gazes out the window, masturbates

on the corner of the bed, and imagines black hairs dancing on the boarder's pillow. *The Cleaning Girl* sets memory and fantasy side by side as well as bringing together past and present. I draw upon memories to create the structure of the narrative, and these memories are paired with fantasy, which allow for moments of both humour and disgust to be present in the film. Simultaneously, past memories are brought to the present through the use of live action sequences, such as my hand sloshing water in a bucket and washing a hot plate, and these are mixed with traditional stop motion animation techniques.

Understanding my objective for this method of mixing memory and fantasy requires a brief comparison with the previous work *My Mother Told Me*. With *My Mother Told Me* my approach was auto-biographical. I utilize a memory, in order to draw on lived experience, where I reveal my family's racism (as well as mine), and the struggle to reconcile past views with present ones[12]. However, my inclusion of a personal photograph and memory as a mode of story-telling in this case, could limit points of entry into the work, since it is a personal narrative that others may not be able to relate to.

My purpose then for taking one sentence from *My Mother Told Me* and reworking it with elements of fiction in *The Cleaning Girl* is to allow for more ways to engage with the work. Rather than use a documentary format to deal with the subject of racism, one is presented with the same story, but in a way that permits laughter, even nervous laughter, as in the scene where the dogs hump, or the moment when one realizes that the girl is masturbating on the corner of the bed. In his essay "The Christian-Hegelian Comedy," Žižek puts it so well writing, "Comedy is thus the very opposite of shame: shame endeavors to maintain the veil, while comedy relies on the gesture of unveiling. [...] Which is why the ultimate

12 I discuss the inherent danger of this acknowledgement in Chapter 2 (6-7).

comical effect occurs when, after removing the mask, we confront exactly the same face as that of the mask" (56). The moments in the film where a hairball rolls down the street, or the old woman carries a decapitated bird, and dust balls hide under the bed all work to frame the scene where the girl takes notice of the fallen black hairs. The narrative hinges on this moment.

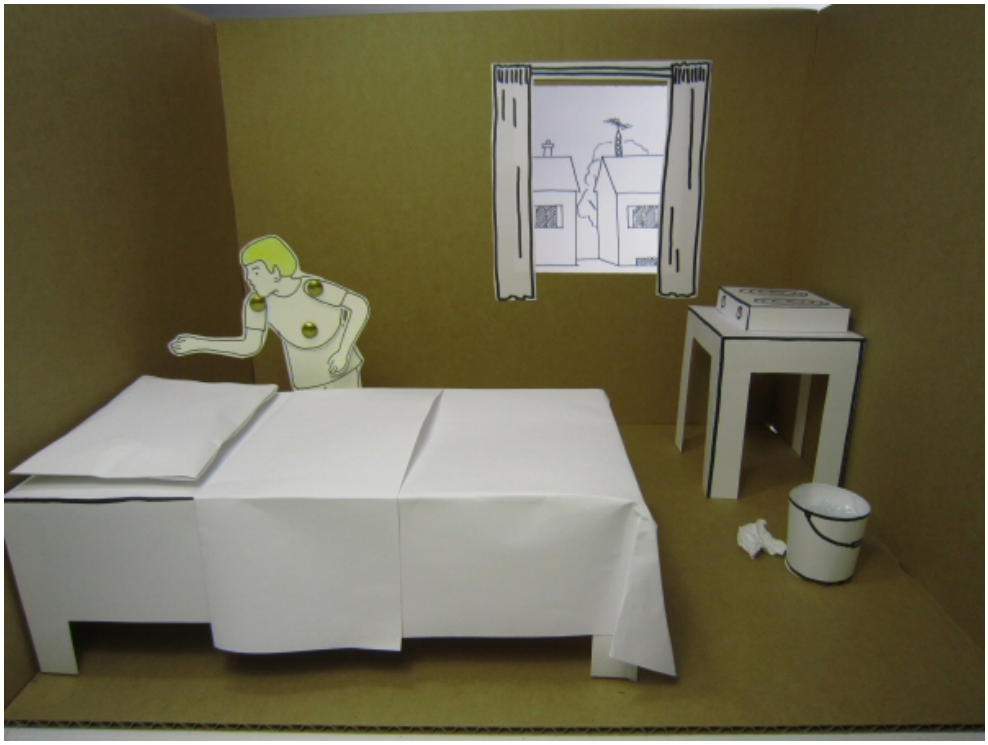

Figure 3.3. Joyce Lindemulder, Still from *The Cleaning Girl and the Boarder*, 2012.

She is taken aback. Since her hair is very light blond, she has never noticed her own hair on her pillow. She becomes viscerally aware of difference; the difference between her and the people who sleep in the upper bedrooms at night. She feels a sense of disgust when noticing the detritus of another person's body. The idea, for the White cleaning girl, that the other person's body is gross is however based on an irrational fear, since her own body produces the same kinds of leavings. What the ideology of Whiteness does is posit her comprehension

of the fallen hairs as an experience of racialization. Her sense of otherness grows not just from a recognition that her body is separate from other bodies, for instance those of her family, and from the realization that the bodies of others are not just unfamiliar, but that they can be differently hued bodies. What the girl thinks of as normal – not seeing hairs on one's pillow – is challenged. To borrow from Ahmed, her orientation away from Whiteness has been suddenly shifted with this awareness ("Phenomenology"156). Whiteness does not dominate in the room rented by the Chinese man, but instead the girl feels a point of stress as she is confronted with Whiteness and her idea of what normal is.

In the Graduation Exhibition, the film is projected onto a white wall in a small room that is open on one side (Appendix B). The projector itself is mounted on the ceiling and the speakers are located above the projected film area behind a dropped ceiling. There is a single chair for viewers who may want to sit. The next time the film is presented I might consider some changes. Because I am interested in the concept of projection onto a "blank, clean, white" surface, the fade from and to black could be changed to fade from and to white, in order to allow visitors to the gallery to realize that a looped film is about to begin, since the projection area would then be continuously be lit. Alternatively, the film could be edited so that the scene at the end loops seamlessly with the scene at the beginning, trapping the cleaning girl in a continuous series of mundane cleaning actions.

NORMALCY

While there are other important ideas[13] connected to the way Whiteness is constructed, the scope of this paper is limited, so for my intentions I discuss just one further. I briefly noted that the ideology of Whiteness carries with it the idea that White is what normal is. About the idea of normalcy, Dyer says, "It has become common for those marginalized by culture to acknowledge the situation from which they speak, but those who occupy positions of cultural hegemony blithely carry on as if what they say is neutral and unsituated – human, not raced" (4). For instance, British artist Mark Wallinger produced *Ecce Homo* (1999) for the Fourth Plinth in London's Trafalgar Square as part of a program to fill a large plinth that stood empty for over one hundred and fifty years. *Ecce Homo* is a cast sculpture of an ethnic European male meant to represent the figure of Christ. Of his sculpture Wallinger states, "I wanted to show him as an *ordinary* human being" (emphasis mine) (Gibbons). In his statement, Wallinger makes no note of the figure's race. He assumes European, or White, as representing ordinary humanity. Consider as well the office of Canada's Prime Minister. The White-maleness of the position remains unnamed (or invisible), unless the possibility of a female, or non-White candidate is being considered. The candidate's sex or ethnicity becomes a point of discussion during the campaign and beyond. It is then that we recognize what the normalized body for that office is: White and male. It is in this same way that Whiteness continues as a non-topic.

In 1981, Israeli-born artist Izhar Patkin created a series of works, titled *Norman*,

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13 These are notions of purity, and cleanliness, as well as the idea of emptiness, blankness, invisibleness, and transparency, along with the concept that Whiteness has no culture associated with it.
For some excellent discussion on these constructs I recommend, in addition to the recommended readings in footnote 4, the following sources: Homi K. Bhabha, "The White Stuff," which was published in *Artforum* 36.9 May 1998: 21-24; David Batchelor, *Chromophobia* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2000); and Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976).

based on a pair of medical models by gynecologist Robert Latou Dickinson (1861-1950) and sculptor Abram Belskie (1907-1988). Dickinson pioneered the use of medical models as teaching aids for students of anatomy, and when introduced to Belskie, understood that his collaboration with a sculptor would result in more sensitive facsimiles. Together they created thousands of models ("Abram Belskie"). In 1945, two of their sculptures, *Normman* and *Norma,* were displayed in New York's American Museum of Natural History. Dickinson and Belskie had modeled *Normman* and *Norma* to represent the average American male and female. For example to create *Normman*, Dickinson and Belskie, dependent on their own subjectivity[14], used balanced measurements obtained from "native white" men in order to present a specimen of a "normal American male" (Berger "Race and Representation"). What these representations do, especially given that they are institutionally sanctioned ones, is state that if one's body does not look like the scientifically constructed models, then one is not normal.

Patkin's response to their models includes a series of eight collages and one pinball machine, which display *Norman* in passive positions such as lying down, crouching, and kneeling. Curator Maurice Berger writes that by positioning the figure in such docile positions that Patkin deprives *Norman* of "his pedestal and fig leaf" ("Race and Representation").

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14 See footnote 6.

Figure 4.1 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed is Izhar Patkin, *Evolution (Norman series)*, 1981. Photo collage, spray paint on chrome coat paper. 94 x 68.6 cm. *Izhar Patkin*. Web. 29 Mar. 2012.

Berger adds that he doesn't believe that Dickinson and Belskie were motivated by bigotry, but simply trying to "determine 'truth'." However, it is a truth that is based on their own subjective belief that a "native white" man exists, and this stems from a racist world view; "The imperative to be normal, to fit in, to integrate into society's mainstream often feeds racial bias," as Berger says, and I believe this is the reason that it is important to continually challenge the notion of what normal is ("Race and Representation").

To navigate this further, consider Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy's *Heidi: Midlife Crisis Trauma Center and Negative Media-Engram Abreaction Release Zone* (1992). The work is a 62:40 minute video that retells the two-part children's story *Heidi's Years of Learning and Travel* and *Heidi Makes Use of What She Has Learned* written in 1880 by Johanna Spyri[15]. The story's English translation is most often published as one volume known simply as *Heidi*. About the project itself Mike Kelley said, "We chose to work with the novel *Heidi* because it offered many opportunities to work with doublings (sic) and polarities which seems appropriate for collaborative work. The novel is a parable of the curative qualities of the 'natural' life and sets up an overt schism between city and country, with urban

15 Unfortunately, I have been unable to watch the film. Various university libraries were unable to assist me. The University of Victoria has rights to screen the film, but only to current students. It is not available on-line.

life depicted as pathological....” (130). The perception that the rural mountains have healing power[16] can be seen in the following text from the novel *Heidi*:

> “My dear, dear uncle! What have we to thank you for! This is your work, your care and nursing—
>
> “But our Lord's sunshine and mountain air,” interrupted the uncle, smiling.
>
> Then Clara called, “Yes, and also Schwänli's good, delicious milk. Grandmama, you ought to see how much goat-milk I can drink now; oh, it is so good!” (Spyri n.p.)

Heidi's cousin Clara, a sickly urban girl, has recovered and become healthy thanks to breathing clean mountain air and drinking pure white milk during a visit to the mountains from the city.

The setting for the film *Heidi: Midlife Crisis*, is a building based on two forms of architecture. One half of the structure is based on the American Bar in Vienna, which was designed by Austrian architect Adolf Loos (1870-1933) who famously wrote, “the evolution of culture is synonymous with the removal of ornamentation from objects of everyday use” (Loos 168). Kelley and McCarthy introduce discord by basing the other half of the building on the classic, highly decorative Alps chalet.

A blogger who goes by the alias of “C Way” has this to say about the film:

> If I remember correctly there was a man and a woman, both were manipulating some kind of mannequin torso, struggling to push what appeared to be sausages down its cavity & (sic) which exited the doll’s anus in some kind of basin of liquid. The adult figures went about their activity with haste & (sic)

16 See Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997) 20-21 for a brief discussion on mountains in relation to White identity.

> focus and urgency, splashing and slipping and wrangling with the doll in this weird pointless (and simultaneously deadly important) ritual of forcefeeding (sic) that sort of resembled midwifery or operating room surgery in its energy and concentrated involvement with the body. It was a weird tangle of fluid and skin and wet that suggested birth, death, defecation, abuse, parental care, discipline, emergency room, [and] horror movie [...]. (C Way)

Kelley and McCarthy's film takes the idea of wholesomeness and destroys any notion that this Heidi is innocent and pure. The film points to the falseness of the purity ideal of the snowy Alps mountains, and the Whites who live there. The way in which these ideals are represented generally in Spyri's novel *Heidi* is countered with abjection. Kelley and McCarthy have effectively exposed the "blank spots" in the construct of Whiteness (Žižek *Sublime* 26). The ideology of Whiteness maintains a false mask where it attempts to be understood as normal and pure, but in reality it is not (Dyer 21).

INTERPELLATION

As numerous others have before me, it is necessary to make explicit my interest in Althusser's idea of interpellation.

Althusser in his essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)” (1972), introduces the notion of interpellation. He suggests, “that ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals [...], or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects” (48). Althusser gives a now well-known example of a police officer shouting out, “Hey, you there!” (48). The action takes place in the public street and the individual after hearing the public call, turns around “one-hundred-and-eighty-degree[s]” and it is through this turning she/he becomes a subject (48). Althusser explains further however, this is not a cause and effect process, but is a simultaneous occurrence. He stresses, “the existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing” (49).

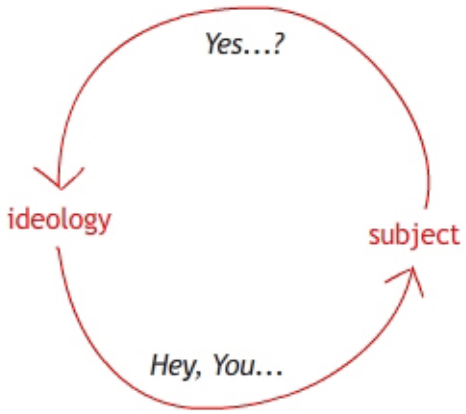

Figure 5.1. Joyce Lindemulder, *Interpellation sketch*, 2012. Digital sketch.

Based on an example Althusser provides,[17] the ideology of Whiteness can be said to do the following: the ideology of Whiteness addresses itself to you, an individual, in order to tell you that you are specially privileged and adds that Whiteness is what normal is; it is a political system that privileges some over others. To demonstrate, in an interview with anchors Jacqueline Milczarek and Dan Matheson on CTV News Express, Mark Plotkin, a US Political Analyst, commented on possible candidates for Republican running mate in the upcoming 2012 US Election. Of note is that none of his descriptors included an observation that a potential candidate is White. Nevertheless, he does point out two candidates who are Hispanic:

> "Congressman Paul Ryan...
>
> ...Rob Portman who is a senator from Ohio...
>
> ...then there are two sort of stolid governors Mitch Daniels of Indiana and somebody right near Washington...Bob McDonald from Virginia...
>
> ...then there are two Hispanic people and they do play identity politics...Susana Martinez governor of New Mexico [and] Marco Rubio from Florida...
>
> ...and Tim Pawlenty from Minnesota, who is as poor as Romney is rich."
>
> ("Choosing a Running Mate")

So, Whiteness in this way can remain unnamed, since White is what is understood as normal, while making a point of difference becomes a matter of discussion.

Althusser suggests that a particular ideology mirrors the subjects and simultaneously the subject mirrors the ideology (54). That is to say, this process is mutually contingent. The ideology cannot remain if there are no subjects who conform to its rules, in essence

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17 See Louis Althusser, *On Ideology* (London: Verso, 2008) 51-57.

reproducing it. Concurrently, the subject is no longer subjectified by an ideology if it ceases to hail, or if the phenomena ends. The result according to Althusser is that "individuals recognize themselves as subjects *through* ideology, thus illustrating how subjects can be complicit in their own domination" (Nguyen). So, in regard to the construct of Whiteness, those whose lived experience is as a White subject, recognize they are White and accept the terms and conditions of that construct.

It is not my aim to provide a thorough analysis of Althusser's theory, although the following should be noted. Media theorist David Gauntlett in *Media, Gender and Identity* (2002) suggests, in summarizing cultural theorist and sociologist Stuart Hall's ideas on Althusser's interpellation, that seeing the individual as uncritical and seduced by an ideology means that the "approach is limited by determinism – it attributes power to grand ideologies and none to individuals" (27). The critique of Althusser and those who follow him (Foucault for example) is that the theory of interpellation is too overdetermined. If Althusser's critics are correct, then the White subject becomes a White subject because she/he fails to recognize the ideology she/he is a part of. What this would do of course is divest the subject of any responsibility.

In order to begin to take this apart, I briefly consider the work of British painter Jenny Saville whose paintings investigate unidealized portrayals of the body. In addition to the themes of feminism, gender, and disruption (or injury) of the body, which are important and present in her work, I aim to focus on how one can read the ideology of Whiteness into her paintings. The ideology of Whiteness contains within it the idea that being White is being normal (Dyer 4). I am fairly certain that if I were to have a discussion about Saville's work with others (especially those who are White), we might completely circumvent the topic of Whiteness. We could talk about body image, surgery, painting, gender, feminism, pain, and

easily avoid the observation that all her subjects are White. The history of Western art includes so many nude White female bodies that it creates a "blank spot" (Žižek *Sublime* 26). It is the reason Whiteness can be avoided as a point of discussion since the way skin is depicted in these images is understood as representing the common Western sign for skin. What the ideology of Whiteness does in this case is render the bodies in Saville's paintings as *normal/normative* bodies.

Figure 5.2 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed is Jenny Saville, *Unflinching: Juncture*, 1994, Oil on canvas. 304.8 x 167.6 cm. Gagosian Gallery, New York. *Christie's*, 2009. Web. 29 Mar. 2012.

The idea that Althusser's interpellation is too over-deterministic is a mis-interpretation of Althusser as he states in his classic example, the individual "recogniz[es] that 'it really is he' who is meant by the hailing" (49). The subject recognizes. Therefore the subject is not rendered powerless. Gauntlett explains that interpellation "allows for hegemonic power to reproduce itself by obscuring traditional forms of repression and incorporating individuals into the power structure. In this moment the person is constituted as a subject – which means that they recognize and acquiesce to their position within structures of ideology" (26). I also turn to Žižek in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989) for further support.

Žižek argues, “they know that, in their activity, they are following an illusion, but still, they are doing it. For example, they know that their idea of Freedom is masking a particular form of exploitation, but they still continue to follow this idea of Freedom” (30). Žižek explains that even through the act of critiquing an ideology, that we remain consciously undiscerning to the way in which ideologies continue to structure power (30). To use Žižek's phrasing it can be said that White subjects know their idea of Whiteness is masking a particular form of exploitation, but still they continue to follow this idea of Whiteness. The very ideology of Whiteness, which functions because there are White subjects, allows those subjects to ignore it since they “know that, in their activity, they are following an illusion, but still, they are doing it” (30). So, it is not that the subject is unaware of the mask, or of what the mask is covering, but the subject actively maintains the mask and it is through this action that the ideology is reproduced.

Scope (2011) is related to these ideas. In 2009, when I first became interested in exploring the ideology of Whiteness, I produced *Glasses*. The work consists of a pair of found prescription glasses with lenses coated in white paint. Not feeling finished with the idea I proposed a similar project of a telescope. *Scope* consists of a viewing device, reminiscent of a telescope, set on a tripod. Although a telescope is normally a round tube, *Scope* is a rectangular construction. The end of the scope that a person looks into has a small knob on each side to accommodate either a left handed or right handed individual, and the direction of the scope can be directed up or down, or to the right and left. Inside the scope, the center lens of three, is painted white.

Figure 5.3. Joyce Lindemulder, *Scope*, 2012. Wood, glass, chrome chain, hardware.

As an object, *Scope* requires further work. It is constructed from the top down: telescope, mechanism that attaches it to the tripod, and finally the tripod itself. I solved visual problems as I worked resulting in a visually heavy turning mechanism at the top and thick chain at the bottom of the tripod. However, the telescope section, mainly constructed first, is unbalanced in relation to the tripod. It is my intention to reconstruct the telescope section.

When a viewing device is used such as a telescope, binoculars, or magnifying glass it is utilized in order to enhance our natural level of sight. Because of this, a person's approach to *Scope* may be with that expectation. Yet, when the subject looks through the glass their vision is obscured rather than enhanced. What they expected to happen is turned around. US-based Artist Jesse Hemminger has constructed a device called *Viewing Device #3 [art viewing device]* (2005).

Figure 5.4. Jesse Hemminger, *Viewing Device #3 [art viewing device]*, 2005. Wood, steel, fabric, casters. © Jesse Hemminger, by permission.

A visitor to an art gallery (where *Viewing Device #3* might be installed) can insert their head into one end of the apparatus and look through the large cone, which opens up onto any art that the user might want to put the device in front of. In Hemminger's case the motivation is to enhance one's ability to look at art, to "focus vision" (Hemminger). In this way *Viewing Device #3* may meet a viewer's expectation in that it concentrates the effect of seeing, but it also restricts a person's ability to see beyond the cone. It creates a particular kind of reality.

My aim with *Scope* is to point to the idea that the ideology of Whiteness interferes with the ability to see clearly. As Žižek points out, even though understood as a construction, the ideology of Whiteness continues to "structure social reality itself" (*Sublime* 27). In other words, my ability to see clearly is determined by the nature of the telescope's construction. In the same way the ideology of Whiteness obstructs one's ability to clearly see it for what it is, and this in turn creates a certain kind of reality. Here I need to be cautious, since I have already pointed out that the White subject's position in relation to the ideology of Whiteness

is one of awareness. So, the obstruction on the lens creates a kind of illusion that is understood as an illusion, but is still followed (Žižek *Sublime* 30).

I return again to Saville. She makes a statement that she “became 'interested in the malls, where you saw lots of big women. Big white flesh in shorts and T-shirts'” (qtd. in “Jenny Saville”). This statement demonstrates an awareness that she is painting White bodies. Her paintings are large and White skin dominates the canvases. Here again is the notion of White, even in its monstrous depiction, as being understood as the standard. Žižek claims that an ideology functions like a mask, or an illusion, and still people follow those ideologies knowing they are a simple facade (30). Consequently, even though the viewer (and the artist herself) is aware that Saville's paintings are filled with White bodies, those bodies are still perceived by Whites as normal bodies and remain unnamed as such.

In thinking about the way certain bodies are normalized, I attempt a clinical approach with *Skin Tags*, an ongoing project begun in 2011, to survey the skin tones represented in Vogue, an iconic fashion magazine. I use a hole punch (5mm and 7mm) to take samples. The parameters for taking specimens are to take one tag from each person represented in the magazine. The fragments are taken only from colour images and must have a visible area of skin large enough to fit the diameter of the particular hole punch. Following surveys also involve the use of a template to draw half-inch circles from the skin, which are then cut out with scissors. The small circles are then glued onto a sheet of machine made rag paper in a grid format.

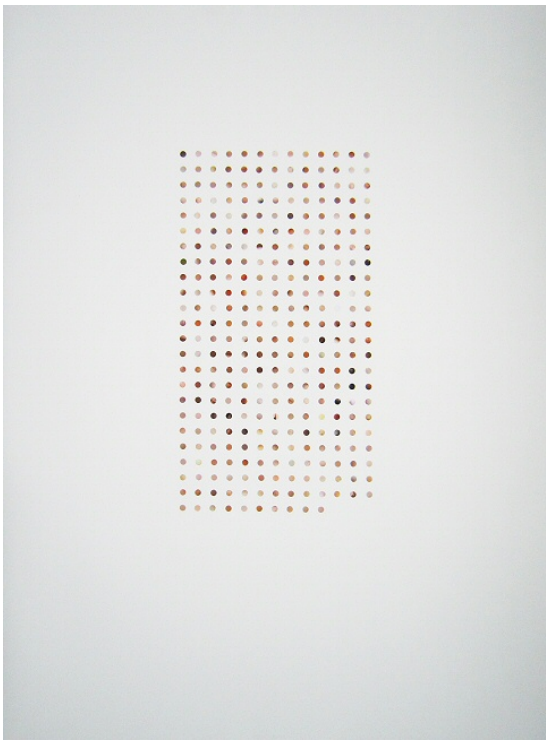

Figure 5.5. Joyce Lindemulder, *Skin Tags (Vogue April 2011),* 2011. Paper on paper, 55.9 x 76.2 cm.

In two earlier iterations of the work I included pieces of skin from any part of the body, including the face. In subsequent versions I chose to leave out any recognizable features. The samples then read in a more ambiguous way. It is not clear whether the portion punched from the page comes from a fold in someone's arm or the fold of skin between two breasts. At the same time, through the act of cutting and hole-punching I work to decontextualize skin from any other association one might have with the way races are constructed. When regarded on their own, the skin tones are no longer judged in relation to the rest of the model's features. Are all the lighter skin tones from Whites, or darker tones from non-Whites? Where does White end, and non-White begin?

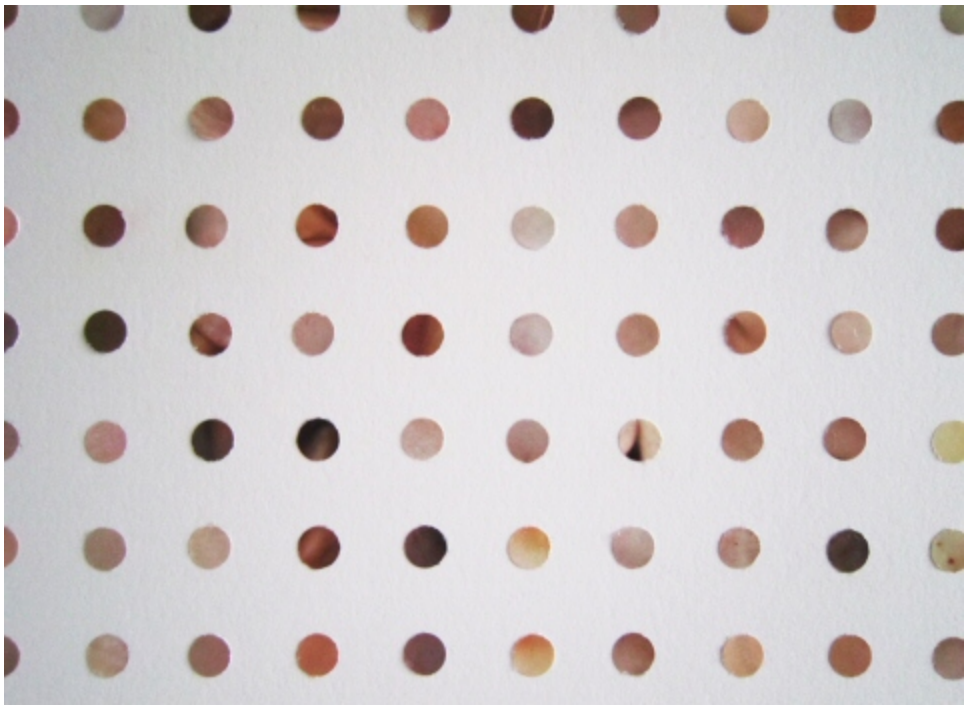

Figure 5.6. Joyce Lindemulder, Detail of *Skin Tags (Vogue April 2011),* 2011. Paper on paper, 55.9 x 76.2 cm.

Additionally, separating a person's skin tone from the rest of their body points to the notion that skin colour also acts as a signifier. US-born artist Damali Ayo suggests that the colour of our skin is one of the first signifiers to others of what our collective history is (Ayo). For instance, as an ethnically Dutch person who is racially coded as White, I carry with me the collective history of Dutch slave ship owners and Dutch colonizers. So, the circles in *Skin Tags* that read as White (or non-White) to a particular viewer may also carry a collective history with them as well.

Although my intention is to objectively and clinically respond to the material of the magazine and the images it contains, my gesture is also a subjective response. To borrow the

Foucauldian term of medical gaze[18], or clinical gaze, a survey is generally conducted by objective looking. It is intended to reveal the "reasoned image," or a detached observation of the Vogue magazine, which Daston and Galison describe as "a self denying passivity" (42, 203). For the objective scientist "truth-to-nature" meant that through painstaking, clinical observation, they could construct (through sketching and drawing to record observations) the one specimen that stands in for all the others that exist in nature (42). However, as Daston and Galison point out, objectivity is contingent on the observer. As they say, "nature, knowledge, and knower intersect in these images, the visible traces of the world made intelligible. […] Ways of scientific seeing are where body and mind, pedagogy and research, knower and known intersect" (53, 369). In other words, what appears to be a medical or clinical type of looking is dependent on my body and my knowledge.

The structure of each of the works, where the skin tags are presented in a grid format, evokes the scientific gaze since each tag is placed in a measured methodical way. Taking a small sample from each representation of a person also elicits the idea of controlled objectivity. Yet, the decisions I make regarding the portion of the model's body to sample is based on my own idea of what "truth-to-nature" is in this case (42). So even a supposedly objective scientific approach becomes subjective. Is it best to sample from the forehead? What if a model is wearing a hat, or has hair covering her/his forehead? What is the next best place to sample a specimen that will stand as a type, or synecdoche, of that particular body, or for the whole of the magazine? In this way *Skin Tags* is connected to the work of Byron Kim's *Synecdoche* (1991-present) and David Adey's *Swarm* (2007).

Both *Synecdoche* and *Swarm* involve the artist choosing to isolate a small part for a

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18 See Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (1963) (New York: Vintage, 1994).

whole, to stand in and represent a larger idea. Kim has created a multi-panel painting where each solid hued panel is based on a single person's skin colour. His samples are based on the skin of friends, family and random strangers on the street. In Kim's case he chose to use the skin tone from a participant's forearm to replicate in each small panel. Working with paper instead of paint, David Adey cuts shapes from various fashion magazines to create large abstracted forms comprised of skin tones. As with Kim, Adey is making a subjective decision on where in the magazine to cut pieces from. Coming together the bits of skin tone also act as a "type," by standing in for the whole selection of magazines that he cut from. On one hand, their work suggests a kind of scientific survey, but on the other both Kim and Adey impose their own subjective standard of scientific seeing based on what and where they choose to sample from.

To explore further, I will investigate how the ideology of Whiteness can be found in the work of Kenyan-born artist Wangechi Mutu. The exhibition *This You call Civilization?* at the Art Gallery of Ontario (2010), featured some of her well-known works, such as *The Ark Collection* (2006) and *Sleeping Heads* (2006).

In an interview with AGO curator David Moos regarding the exhibition, Mutu discusses her feelings about a photographic project called *Women of the African Ark* (2002) by Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher ("Wangechi Mutu", Beckwith and Fisher). The project by Beckwith and Fisher consists of photographic portraits of Black African women. Mutu notes that the images selected for the book and calendars were chosen based on how "traditional" the women looked. If a woman had traditional African earrings on, but was also wearing a t-shirt then the photo was rejected. The impulse may have been to document a

vanishing way of life, but it is also motivated by preserving the idea of an authentic Other.[19] It is a view that implies the Other is historical, unsophisticated, and primitive in contrast to the construction of Whiteness, which carries with it a false notion of purity, beauty, and civilization (Dyer 74-8, Gilman 169, Pilgrim).

Figure 5.7. Wangechi Mutu, *The Ark Collection* (2 of 32 postcards), 2006. Collage on postcards displayed in four vitrines. 100 x 155 x 58 cm (each vitrine). © Gladstone Gallery, by permission.

It was White Europeans who interpreted the lack of dress on the part of African women as sexual, and their tribal dances as "uncontrolled sexual lust" (Pilgrim). It is also the ideology of Whiteness that puts forward the notion of Black women as hypersexual. The early writings of White slave traders, Willem Bosman (b. 1672) and William Smith (1758-1812) who described African women as "hot constitution'd Ladies," contributed to the

19 There is a long history related to the type of photography used for anthropology, where the photograph becomes a tool to establish norms, or difference. See: Mick Gidley, *Edward S. Curtis and the North American Indian, Incorporated* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000); and Allan Sekula, 'The Body and the Archive," appeared in *October* 39.Winter (1986): 3-64.

construction of the stereotype of hyper-sexualized Black women (qtd. in Bermingham and Brewer 221, Pilgrim). It was during this time that the association between Blacks and deviant sexuality became medicalized with efforts made by Whites to demonstrate difference through scientific standards[20]. For example, between 1810 and 1815 African-born Sarah Baartman was put on display in Europe for the purpose of proving perceived racial difference. An autopsy was performed after her death in 1815 and her genitals were then put on exhibit in Paris (until as recently as 2002), for "if their sexual parts could be shown to be inherently different, this would be a sufficient sign that the blacks were a separate […] race" (Gilman 171). It is for this reason that Mutu contends that censoring certain kinds of representation over others (a subjective choice) in order to develop a particular picture of Africa, fictionalizes the Black woman and continues to perpetrate, especially in this abhorrent example, the idea of the hyper-sexualized Black female.

In response to projects such as *Women of The African Ark*, Mutu places both the traditional and the hyper-sexualized views of Black African women into her images, as seen in her collage project *The Ark Collection* (2006). Although some of her material is sourced from pornography magazines, Mutu states that she removes the most "titillating parts" because she is not interested in duplicating the symbolism of either the sexualized woman, nor the exoticized woman: "so you reflect on both without replicating the objectification of either one" ("Wangechi Mutu").

The Ark Collection was also discussed in a panel interview, held in conjunction with the AGO exhibition, with Border Crossings magazine editor Robert Enright interviewing

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20 For a more complete history of construction of Black bodies as hypersexualized see: Sander L. Gilman, "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward and iconography of female sexuality in late nineteenth-century art, medicine, and literature" (1986) found in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader,* Edited by Amelia Jones (London: Routledge, 2010) 166-80.

artist Allyson Mitchell and poet Dionne Brand. During Mitchell's presentation, in which she tackles general themes in the work, she suggests that Mutu's project *The Ark Collection* takes the usually private consumption of pornography and makes it public. A few minutes later, Mitchell adds that Mutu's other collage works, such as *This You Call Civilization?*, challenge male sexuality by bluntly stating, "I look like this and you still want to fuck me?" (Mitchell and Brand). That is to say, even though Mutu's imagery contains stumps, missing parts and bubbling scabs, the women in the images can still be understood as sexualized, despite Mutu's stated intent. In this way her work may unintentionally reproduce the ideas she is attempting to challenge by utilizing figures in sexually suggestive poses.

Figure 5.8. Wangechi Mutu, *This You Call Civilization?*, 2008. Ink on mylar. 228.6 x 152.4 cm. © Gladstone Gallery, by permission.

However, it is important to restate that I am suggesting that her images *may* work this way and it is a necessary risk she takes. At this point it is vital to consider Ahmed's idea more fully that "we can get stuck [...] endlessly caught up in describing what we are doing *to*

whiteness, rather than what whiteness is *doing*" ("A Phenomenology" 150). If there is an expectation that Mutu's work does something to Whiteness, such as dismantle it, then we may be trapped in an endless cycle of hailing and responding to it. On the other hand, if we consider, by looking past the "blank spots" to the process of reification, then, as Ahmed says, we might understand that reification is "something whiteness does, or to be more precise, what allows whiteness to be done" (Žižek *Sublime* 26, "A Phenomenology" 150). So, while Mutu's collages may be understood as reproducing an aspect of the ideology of Whiteness (the false construction that the Black woman is hypersexual), it shows more importantly what Whiteness *does*, which is to construct the Black woman as hyper-sexual.

Though both Mutu's and Saville's projects contend with ideas about the representation of women, the ideology of Whiteness is where I see the work of Mutu functioning differently than the paintings of Saville. Into Mutu's practice I can read what Whiteness does, while I see Saville's images reproducing the expectations of ideological Whiteness; that White skin is normal skin.

CONCLUSION

Studying the manner in which the ideology of Whiteness is reflected in art, requires further research about how to navigate this particular discourse. As an artist who is racially coded as White I have two options open to me. I can choose to ignore the question altogether, and many would not fault me for it (because of my unearned advantage), or I can choose the risky ground of engagement.

No statements I could make – such as "I am racist," "I am ashamed of my racism," "I am privileged," "I have studied Whiteness," and "I know that White skin is coloured skin too" – can do anything to undo the ideology of Whiteness. These statements simply, as Ahmed says, reproduce whiteness. However, rather than be paralyzed by the non-performativity that Ahmed describes, it is important to move forward. Is there a danger of reproducing Whiteness? Absolutely. In spite of the hazards, I believe that if I am implicated and complicit in the ideologies of race, then I am also responsible for active participation in the dialogue that seeks to dismantle those racist constructs. I agree with bell hooks' insistence that the burden for this conversation belongs to everyone who is actively seeking to end White supremacy.

In summary, my intention for the works *Skin Tags* and *The Cleaning Girl* is to look at how Whiteness is normalized and above all to learn what it looks like for me to participate actively in that dialogue. While that is a valuable research direction, it has also been suggested that my project might delve further into the ideas of difference, gender, and intersectionality. These ideas push the future direction of *Skin Tags* and influence the course of current work, such as a series of narrative postcards and a set of minimal drawings. My aim with the postcards is to expose the kind of secrets families usually work to keep hidden in order to maintain their status, which also examines who keeps the secrets and why. My intention for the drawings, with their

small tracings of minimalistic furnishings and architectural devices, is to comment on the removal of artifice as a parallel concept to the idea that Whiteness is about purity. However, pushing further they can also ask who minimalism serves and how difference is reified.

Important questions remain. Does my work simply reproduce the ideology of Whiteness? In the sense that Whiteness can be reflected in my works, it does. Yet, if I am also to actively participate in this dialogue then it is a risk I take, and this is a risk other artists take as well. If, as I suggest, my work does reflect Whiteness, does that effect demonstrate what the ideology of Whiteness does? Further to that, one can ask if that is enough? By making work on this topic, do I in turn undermine the work, by being perceived by others as being "good" for talking about it? It is necessary to recall that I am not inherently good, but that the ideology of Whiteness positions me as good because I am racially coded as White, and in essence this is what it does: Whiteness is as Whiteness does.

I enjoy research immensely, and it is out of this activity of researching that my work springs. Although this MAA thesis project is limited in its ability to dismantle a Herculean ideology, I recognize it as a generative force for a lifetime of work. My work and interests continue to contend with ideological Whiteness, as well as the theories that surround, intersect, and overlap it.

Is there hope? As long as we are willing to make mistakes, admit them, reconcile, and continue to dialogue, then I believe there always is.

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APPENDIX A

FILM

The Cleaning Girl and the Boarder (4:20, exhibition version) is available to view on-line at Vimeo:

https://vimeo.com/48245305

APPENDIX B

HERE + THERE Graduation Exhibition

Emily Carr University of Art + Design

Low Residency Master of Applied Arts Graduate Exhibition

July 20 to 28, 2012

Charles H. Scott Gallery

Figure B.1. Joyce Lindemulder, Exhibition view of *The Cleaning Girl*, 2012. View of *The Cleaning Girl and the Boarder* as situated in Charles H. Scott Gallery during HERE + THERE Low Residency MAA Graduate Exhibition. 2012.

Figure B.2. Joyce Lindemulder, Exhibition view of *The Cleaning Girl*, 2012. View of *The Cleaning Girl and the Boarder* as situated in Charles H. Scott Gallery during HERE + THERE Low Residency MAA Graduate Exhibition. 2012.

Figure B.3. Joyce Lindemulder, Exhibition view of *The Cleaning Girl*, 2012. View of *The Cleaning Girl and the Boarder* as situated in Charles H. Scott Gallery during HERE + THERE Low Residency MAA Graduate Exhibition. 2012. (Photo by Kai Mushens, courtesy ECUAD Graduate Department)

Figure B.4. Joyce Lindemulder, Exhibition view of *The Cleaning Girl*, 2012. View of *The Cleaning Girl and the Boarder* as situated in Charles H. Scott Gallery during HERE + THERE Low Residency MAA Graduate Exhibition. 2012. (Photo by Kai Mushens, courtesy ECUAD Graduate Department)

Figure B.5. Joyce Lindemulder, Exhibition view of *The Cleaning Girl*, 2012. View of *The Cleaning Girl and the Boarder* as situated in Charles H. Scott Gallery during HERE + THERE Low Residency MAA Graduate Exhibition. 2012. (Photo by Kai Mushens, courtesy ECUAD Graduate Department)