Dear White Academia: Examining the relationship between architectural objects, whiteness and higher educational spaces in selected works of literature, film and other contemporary media

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Abstract

This thesis constitutes the first comprehensive literary examination of the relationship between architectural objects, whiteness and higher educational spaces. Focusing specifically on the post-Civil Rights period, I investigate the metaphorical and material impact windows, desks, desk-tops and doors have on Black students attending elite universities and colleges in Northeast U.S. In order to conduct this research, I focus on four main texts; critically close reading Joyce Carol Oates's *Black Girl, White Girl* (2007), Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie's *Americanah* (2014), Zadie Smith's *On Beauty* (2006) and Paul Beatty's *The White Boy Shuffle* (1996). Framed by Critical Race Theory and drawing on methodologies from Hip Hop Studies, Critical Whiteness Studies and Educational research, my analysis addresses intersecting systems of power, such as gender, class, dis/ability and nationality, to show the specific ways in which Black students, occupying different social locations, are effected by architectural objects in higher education institutions.

Research on architecture, race and higher education often focuses on overtly racialised objects, such as statues and portraits of colonialists and slave owners. This thesis makes an important contribution to current scholarship by revealing how more foundational and seemingly mundane objects, typically deemed neutral in the university space, also fundamentally shape the physical and ideological structure of higher education. I show how within a wider network of white bodies and discourse, these objects perpetuate and intensify the containment, coercion and control of Black students at elite, predominately white institutions. I also demonstrate how the investigative and imaginative power of literature and other cultural media can help better identify, extrapolate, examine and dismantle invisible and allusive expressions of systematic white dominance, impressing the value of a methodological approach that can be productively applied to further studies of systems of power in higher education and beyond.

Dedicated to my Grandparents

From where my passion for English Literature clearly derives. Forces much bigger than yourselves meant you were unable to pursue the subject as far as your ability promised. Thank you for the hard work and sacrifice which made it possible for me. I will always be grateful.

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Contents

List of Figures

Introduction

The opening sequence of Justin Simien's controversial Netflix show, *Dear White People* (2017), immediately draws attention to the co-constitutive relationship that exists between race and architecture in American higher educational spaces.

Perhaps the most significant shot in this sequence is one where the camera momentarily captures a university building from a low, slightly titled angle. In the context of a show that is intent on exposing the systematic racism operating at Ivy League universities, this point-of-view shot is meant to situate its audience in the position typically assumed by Black students when engaging with elite higher education; as they imagine looking up, awkwardly, at the open window in the centre of the frame.[1] Initially, this open window suggests an ease of access into the elite institution and, as the light inside emphasises, intellectual illumination or enlightenment.[2] It thus symbolises the commonly held view, addressed later in the introduction, that there are no longer any barriers to Black students' progress in higher education in the post-Civil Rights period.

Figure 1 (*Dear White People* 2017)

However, whilst this prevailing view of race is acknowledged by the presence of an open window, it is undermined by the angle at which the open window is shot. In having the audience look up at what is ostensibly the university's sole point of entry, the low shot creates

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[1] Following Michael Dumas (2016, pp.12-3 [original italics]) I capitalise "Black" in this thesis 'when referencing Black people, organisations, and cultural productions. Here, *Black* is understood as a self-determined name of a racialised social group that shares a specific set of histories, cultural processes and imagined and performed kinships'. Again, like Dumas, I write '*blackness* and *antiblackness* in lower-case, because they refer not to Black #people per se, but to a social construction of racial meaning, much as whiteness does' (Dumas 2016, p.13).

[2] I use the word "elite" to refer to higher education institutions that are typically considered "academically selective" by other scholars. The editors of *The Shape of the River* deem 'academically selective' colleges and universities to be those which have 'strict limits on the number of places in an entering class and far more qualified applicants than places' (Bowen et al. 2000, liv).

a sense of distance and unattainability which, in turn, highlights how gaining access into elite institutions still constitutes a daunting and improbable task for Black students. Situated in such an unfavourable position, only a few Black students will be able to successfully scale the wall in front of them and make their way to the precipice of formal education. Consequently, the windows stationed nearer the camera's eye level are much more reflective of the reality most Black people in America will face. Blacked out and bolted by hard lead bars, these windows signal how access to the elite institutions will be squarely denied to the majority of prospective Black students. For the few who do make it inside, the windows anticipate the feelings of entrapment and isolation that, as this thesis will show, can arise when Black students encounter the predominately white university space.

It is significant that the show's point regarding race and higher education is conveyed by capturing the university building from an unconventional angle, for it draws our attention to an architectural structure that would ordinarily be dismissed or ignored as background. Beyond establishing a sense of place, buildings are often seen to be static, passive and neutral; essentially not worth noticing (Fenwick et al. 2011). However, the unconventional camera angle makes the building appear imposing and dynamic, and thus encourages the audience to take note of its role in mediating social relations. More specifically, it encourages the audience to consider the role architectural structures play in establishing the hierarchical relationship between higher education and Black students. As architectural scholars have shown, this role can be considered in both metaphorical and material terms. In the words of Jennifer Bloomer (1993, p.36 [original italics]), architecture not only 'stands in the metaphor of hierarchical and structural thinking (e.g. gravity, Cartesian logic)' but is also 'the material expression that stands for (*stat*) ideology'. In the context of the shot above, the light in the window serves as a fitting example of architecture operating as metaphor. Indeed, light has been used for centuries to convey philosophical concepts such as enlightenment (Eversley 2005; Mazis 2015). The connection is so well entrenched within Western thinking that to argue light means ignorance sounds ridiculous; even though there is nothing inherently (intellectually) enlightening about the phenomenon. The metaphor of light thus becomes instructive and conveys a meaning that seems to emanate directly from it. The figurative Black student's distance from the light communicates their lack of access to knowledge or intellectual growth.

The building in the shot above also creates a sense of hierarchy between the elite higher education institution and its Black students. The unconventional camera angle impresses the immensity of the university building, which looms over the disempowered (and

figurative) Black student looking up. It thus produces a daunting feeling or sense of inferiority within that student, impacting the way they perceive and relate to the institution. The architectural structure expresses itself materially rather than metaphorically because it is the material height (or verticality) of the building which enforces the hierarchy. As this shot impresses, the opening sequence of *Dear White People* highlights the importance of examining the different metaphorical and material functions of various physical structures if we want to fully comprehend how racial oppression operates in higher education. Drawing on the work of C.Y. Costello, Diane Gusa (2010, p.476) argues: 'Ignoring the physical structure of space is a mistake because a school's built environment is one form of a hidden curriculum in higher education and an important aspect of the learning that takes place within that environment'. Unfortunately, despite providing a platform for discussion, the Netflix show does not follow up with any serious interrogation of university architecture. In fact, after its opening sequence, the show returns to shooting its buildings from fairly conventional angles and largely focuses on interior shots until the end of the series.

This thesis will therefore pick up from where *Dear White People* lets off. Instead of buildings, however, it will narrow its focus and examine the role specific architectural objects play in perpetuating racial oppression in elite, predominately white institutions (PWIs) in North East U.S.[4] Framed around the methodological principles of Critical Race Theory (CRT), this interdisciplinary and intersectional analysis will use the literary works of Joyce Carol Oates, Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie, Zadie Smith and Paul Beatty to consider how Black students, located in different social positions because of intersecting systems of gender, class, dis/ability and nationality, are affected by the relationship that emerges between windows, desks, desk-tops, doors and whiteness in the educational context outlined above.[5] In a thesis that stresses the central role social positioning plays in determining an individual's perspective, values, experiences and knowledge base, it is important to engage with a diverse range of authors. As such, my primary authors represent an intersection of race, gender and nationality; allowing for a more comprehensive and nuanced analysis of how systematic white

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[4] According to the Encyclopaedia of African-American Education the term "Predominantly White Institution" is 'used to describe institutions of higher learning in which whites (sic) account for 50% or greater of the student enrolment' (Brown II and Dancy II 2010, p.523).

[5] There are of course numerous novels that centre on the American university. Having read a range of these novels, such as *Caucasia* (1998); *Japanese By Spring* (1996); *Joe College* (2006); *The Human Stain* (2001); *The Secret History* (1993) and *White Noise* (1986), I settled on my four chosen texts because they engage most thoroughly with the metaphorical and material function of architectural objects in higher educational spaces.

dominance manifests and marks Black students in higher education institutions. Crucially, the authors themselves also consider the intersection of different social identities and systems of power in their novels, with each drawing attention to a particular set of experiences. For example, where Adichie explores the experience of a Nigerian woman in *Americanah* and Oates an African-American woman in *Black Girl, White Girl*, Beatty's central protagonist in *The White Boy Shuffle* is a working-class African-American man. Meanwhile, Smith's *On Beauty* features an admixture of Black middle-class and working-class men and women; some of whom are African-American and some of whom are Haitian. This makes for a compelling comparison across texts, enriching the overall analysis of the metaphorical and material impact architecture can have on Black students in predominately white institutions in Northeast U.S. On that point, each of my chosen texts carry out an in-depth investigation and exploration of the relationship between race and distinct architectural objects in the university space. This is essential for my own work which seeks to draw attention to a specific and currently unexamined feature of the higher education experience. The rich analysis afforded by these primary texts in the face of scant scholarship is of paramount importance and a central reason as to why they have been utilised in my thesis.

Despite the fact literature is the primary focus of this thesis, it will also consider other contemporary cultural media such as film, TV, Hip Hop and social media. The democratisation of source material speaks to the second objective of this thesis which is to examine and dismantle the way discourse underpins, shapes and limits any project seeking to disrupt oppressive systems and fight for social justice. According to Michel Foucault: 'Discourses are about what can be said and thought, but also about who can speak, when and with what authority. Discourses embody meaning and social relationships; they constitute both subjectivity and power relations' (Ball 1990, p.2). Engaging with different cultural media means amplifying and accrediting different experiences and perspectives, whilst also undermining the authority over knowledge production those in power currently enjoy.

This thesis marks the first-time literature and other contemporary cultural media has been used to comprehensively examine the relationship between whiteness and architectural objects in elite higher educational spaces. As I will soon show, this approach to researching racism in universities and colleges is important because it provides an effective way of engaging with theory whilst both foregrounding and re-imagining its material consequences. In order to build up a more substantial picture of why this is an important and original endeavour, I will use the introduction to examine each of the major themes and academic fields running

through and underpinning my thesis. In the process, I will highlight the major gaps my thesis fills in current scholarship and outline the parameters of my own study. I will then end the introduction by providing a brief breakdown of the chapters to come.

<u>Whiteness</u>

The case for specifically addressing whiteness when examining the operation of systematic racism in Western society has been made by scholars both in and outside of Critical Whiteness Studies (Babb 1998; Dyer 1997; Frankenberg 1993; hooks 1992; Yancy 2012). For example, Jason Arday (2018, p.29) argues: 'The challenging of normative whiteness is paramount to dismantling the cycles of inequality that permeates higher education and society more generally'. The importance of putting a particular emphasis on whiteness instead of simply just race or racism becomes clearer when acknowledging the components that make it a functioning and oppressive social category and system. In order to do so properly, it must first be understood that race is a social construct which, despite having no biological basis, still fundamentally shapes our material reality (Bonilla-Silva 2015; Frankenberg 1993; Mills 1998; Omi and Winant 1994). Whilst the whiteness of individual people is often informed by phenotypical markers, it is not a biological essence but a socially constructed and historically contingent marker of identity, used to categorise people so that they can be stratified into a hierarchy of social relations (Babb 1998; Gabriel 1998; Gusa 2010; Kobayashi and Peake 2000). More specifically:

> Whiteness refers to hegemonic racial power that privileges white groups while subordinating racialised "others". As an identity and performance, it is a position of racial privilege, a standpoint perspective, and a set of cultural practices that often remain unmarked. As an ideological and institutional structure, it is a complex web of discourses and processes that sustain racial domination (Hikido and Murray 2016, p.392).

It is important to distinguish but also impress the relationship between whiteness as a marker of *individual* social identity, largely determining the cultural practices, experiences and perspectives a person is likely to have in life, and a *system* of power, which depends on a network of institutions (educational, legal, political etc.) and media (curricula, news, advertising, film etc.) to ensure that those people who are racialised as white enjoy social, economic and political dominance over everybody else (Charbeneau 2015; Gusa 2010; Shome 1999).

Mainstream institutions and media have been able to establish the dominance of white people by propagating a value system (or ideological structure) that, in characterising whiteness as a purely positive category, justifies and consolidates white people's position of power. This system is sometimes referred to as 'whiteliness' in order to distinguish it from the social label projected onto certain individuals ("white") and the value-laden concept which underpins such a label ("whiteness") (Gabriel 1998, p.15). Indeed, whiteliness speaks to the system in America which (through law, science, media and other discourse) not only imposes meaning and value onto the concept of whiteness, but organises society accordingly.[6] The origins of this particular value system, which 'motivate(s), buttress(es) and rationalise(s)' racism in American society, can be traced back to the period of so-called European "Enlightenment" (Feagin et al. 1996, p.90). As Emmanuel Chuckwudi Eze (1997, p.4) highlights, the "Age of Enlightenment" was 'predicated upon precisely the assumption that reason could historically only come to maturity in modern Europe, while the inhabitants of areas outside Europe, who were considered to be of non-European racial and cultural origins, were consistently described and theorised as rationally inferior and savage'. George Yancy (2008, p.xx [original italics]) notes that, since this period:

> The depiction of the Black body as the quintessence of *evil* has endured across historical space and time. Hence, *my* Black body is a site of enduring white semiotic construction and historical power relations that inscribe and mark it as a particular *type* of body, an indistinguishable, threatening, evil presence, the so-called black bugaboo.

While 'whiteness (is) deemed the transcendental norm, the good, the innocent, and the pure…Black is the diametrical opposite' (Yancy 2008, p.xvi). Such value judgements have severe material consequences. As one example, the association of blackness with danger or irrationality has subsequently led to the association of Black people with criminality; conceptual pairings that, coupled with an institutionally racist criminal system, has seen an obscene amount of Black people either incarcerated or killed in cold blood (*13th*). Whilst the links between blackness and danger are used to justify the subjugation of Black people,

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[6] I will interchange between the terms "whiteliness" and 'system of white dominance' whenever specifically referring to whiteness as a system in this thesis. It will perhaps be noted that other cited critics use "white supremacy" in their own attempt to distinguish between whiteness as an individual label or concept and a system of power. Whilst this is a well-established and valid decision, I avoid using "white supremacy" myself because I believe it too often conjures ideas of alt-right groups, such as the KKK, and therefore aligns racial violence with individual extremists as opposed to structures and systems that can be perpetuated by (but work independently of) all white bodies.

concomitant ones between whiteness, goodness and rationality are used to impress the need for white people to assume positions of power, authority and control.[7]

The way in which mainstream institutions and media utilise the concept of whiteness to secure a system of white dominance, or whiteliness, is overlooked or wilfully ignored by the people it serves. This is partly because white people have, unlike other racial groups, been encouraged to see themselves as individuals who are not reducible to race. Such self-delusion is tied to the fact whiteness is a relational concept; meaning that it is ultimately defined by what it is not (Frankenberg 1993; Gusa 2010; Keating 1996; Matias 2016; Mills 1998). Within our dualistic, Manichean society, this means whiteness is defined by its 'diametrical opposite', which is blackness (McLaren 1995). Characterised as something that is distinctly *non-Black*, the racialisation of whiteness is thus obscured, with emphasis being placed on the racialisation of blackness and Black people instead. We see an example of this in Chapter Three's brief discussion of smell in *Americanah*. Here, I highlight that Ifemelu's impression that the predominately white institution of Princeton does not smell of anything is reflective of historic attempts to dissociate smell from whiteness and link it instead to the Black body. The fact that whiteness is characterised by the *absence* of smell, that it is defined by what it is not, allows the concept to become what Yancy earlier referred to as a 'transcendental norm'.

The positioning of whiteness as the 'transcendental norm' and the idea of individuality this subsequently inspires in white people is further enforced by their standards, values, tastes, practices and experiences being rendered ubiquitous in mainstream American culture. As Richard Dyer (1997, p.3 [original italics]) notes: 'Whites (sic) are everywhere in representation. Yet precisely because of this and their placing as normal, they seem not to be represented to themselves as *whites* but as people who are variously gendered, classed, sexualised and abled'. In almost entirely reflecting the reality of white people, mainstream culture makes the particular characteristics of whiteness appear universal and thus ensure they become invisible; to white people anyway. This caveat is important to stress because, as Sara Ahmed (2012, p.3) points out: 'Whiteness tends to be visible to those who do not inhabit it (though not always and not only) – for it is people of colour who are the ones who feel the effect of whiteness as a power system'. Whilst in Joyce Carol Oates's (2007) *Black Girl, White*

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[7] Rudyard Kipling's 'The White Man's Burden', originally published in 1899, is an emblematic example of how racial connotations have been used to justify colonisation and oppression in the West. The first verse reads: 'Take up the White Man's burden - / Send forth the best ye breed - / Go bind your sons to exile / To serve your captives' need; / To wait in heavy harness / On fluttered folk and wild - / Your new-caught sullen peoples, / Half devil and half child' (Kipling ©2009).

Girl the white student and narrator, Genna, struggles to accept that the destruction of her Black roommate's window is the result of direct racial abuse, Minette, the Black roommate, is under no illusion about the underlying motivations. As will be discussed in Chapter Two, Genna's control over the historical narrative, over discourse, means that her version of events is authorised as "Truth" and can thus be used to perpetuate the myth that America now boasts a "post-racial" society.

The problem with white people being generally unable or unwilling to acknowledge the workings of whiteness, on both an individual and institutional level, is outlined by John Gabriel (1998, p.88 [original italics]) who argues that:

> The very invisibility of whiteness and its associated privileges, serves to *de-ethnicise* its beneficiaries and turn them into *individuals* who achieve, not as a result of their collective ethnic status, but because of individual merit. Such a view coincides with the widely held belief that American democracy is built on the principle of individual opportunity.

The ideological and institutional structures underpinning whiteness thus ultimately encourage white people to perceive themselves as individuals, unbound to any racial group. It teaches them that they are solely responsible for their own success and social status, which is a lesson that also leads white people to blame Black people and other people of colour for occupying the lowest rungs of the economic and social ladder. It is for this reason that we must continue to place an emphasis on whiteness when analysing systematic racism in America and beyond. Again, in the words of George Yancy (2012, p.7): 'The act of marking whiteness…is itself an act of historicising whiteness, an act of situating whiteness within the context of material forces and raced interests-laden values that reinforce whiteness as a site of privilege and hegemony'. It is only by drawing attention to the particular mechanisms that shape whiteness as a concept and system of power that we can hope to dismantle it.

This is the premise that underpins Critical Whiteness Studies. As Andrew Hartman (2004) and Stephanie Li (2015) note, the destabilising of whiteness as a normative social category started (in academia anyway) with the eminent Black scholar, W.E.B. Du Bois, and it was continued by various Black thinkers and writers in the early to mid-twentieth century (Baldwin 1998; Wright 1957). However, as a formal academic field, Critical Whiteness Studies began in the 1990s as a host of white scholars began to reflect on the historical contingency of race and the implications of their own racialisation. Previously, white scholars interested in issues of race and racism took to examining Black culture, which not only exacerbated the

objectification of Black people by white individuals and institutions, but also implied that whiteness was a normative and neutral social category irrelevant to the workings of systematic racism and thus unsuitable for critical analysis. What emerged from the early work of scholars like Peggy McIntosh (©1989) Ruth Frankenberg (1993), Theodore Allen (1994) and David Roediger (1994) was an expansive and interdisciplinary field which, at its best: 'seeks to make visible the assumptions of whiteness that produce and reproduce structures of domination, so that possible alternative realities can be collectively developed and striven for' (Hikido and Murray 2016). This reference to 'structures' of domination is vital. As Hikido and Murray (2016, p.407) note, scholars who wish to properly attend to whiteness and not wallow in "white guilt" must move 'beyond confessions of white privilege and towards historical and structural reaches of white supremacy'. In fairness, interest in the historical reach of white supremacy has been evident in the work of Critical Whiteness Scholars from the beginning. Since the early work of Theodore Allen (1994), Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994) and Alexander Saxton (1990), there has also been an interest in interrogating the different institutions that form the system of white dominance; educational institutions being one notable example.

The need to examine the effects of whiteness in education is well established but Nolan Cabrera (2014, p.35) makes a special appeal for higher education because, according to him: 'When whiteness is discussed in education it tends to focus on elementary and secondary and not post-secondary'. Fortunately, there is more and more research being produced in this area, with a wide range of subjects being covered. Examples include: whiteness and critical pedagogy (Allen 2004), whiteness and emotionality (Matias 2016), whiteness and feminism (Razack et al. 2010), white fragility (Jayakumar et al. 2017), whiteness and faculty (Charbeneau 2015), whiteness and curricula (Feagin et al. 1996), whiteness and unconscious bias (Tate and Page 2018), whiteness and admission policies (Warikoo 2016), whiteness and campus climate (Gusa 2010) whiteness and microaggressions (Williams and Nichols 2015) and whiteness and dis/ability (Banks 2015). Nevertheless, there are still important gaps to be filled when it comes to scholarship on whiteness and higher education. The role of architectural objects in perpetuating whiteliness, the system of white dominance, is one of them. This will be explained in more detail in the following sections. First though, it is necessary to make clear my reasons for focusing specifically on elite, predominately white institutions in Northeast US.

Elite (Predominately White) Higher Education

The role American higher education plays in determining Black people's life chances is clear. As Michelle Fine (2004, p.252) puts it:

> Without a diploma, there are almost no options for survival for Black and Latino young adults. The absence of a diploma signifies, disproportionately, a biography of miseducation, a state that has declared war on poor communities of colour. Lack of education predicts that Black and Latino youth and young adults will end up in the criminal justice system.

Such a prediction is partly due to the economic shift that took place in urban areas (mainly populated by Black and Latino people) during the 1970s. As Madhu Dubey (2003, p.25) highlights, the move from a manufacturing to service industry 'resulted in a bipolar employment structure, characterised by a small proportion of well-paid, high-tech jobs, a large pool of low skilled and poorly paid service jobs, and an evisceration of the middle levels of skill and income'. Following de-industrialisation, those who were without appropriate skills and qualifications, typically secured in higher levels of education, joined what Mark Anthony Neal (2004, p.366) calls the 'veritable nation of displaced workers', serving as 'integral cogs in the federal government's economy and industry of misery'.[8] Significantly, if unsurprisingly, Black people made up a disproportionate number of Neal's 'veritable nation'. According to Michelle Alexander (2012, p.51), this 'decline in legitimate employment opportunity among inner city residents (has) increased incentives to sell drugs – most notably crack cocaine'. Coinciding with a virulent War on Drugs campaign in America's inner cities (instigated by Ronald Reagan and intensified by Bill Clinton) and condemned by an already racially discriminating justice system, the economically enforced decision to sell drugs meant that 'more than 2 million (Black people) found themselves behind bars at the turn of the twenty-first century' (Alexander 2012, p.58).

The number of Black people incarcerated within an American prison has only increased over time. The Netflix documentary, *13th* (2016) highlights that, in the year of its release, Black men comprised 40.2% of the entire prison population despite only making up 6.5% of the American population. As I will discuss in Chapter Five, Beatty's *The White Boy Shuffle* shows how early education prepares young Black men for a life of low paying work or

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[8] The link between not attending university or college and being economically displaced is reinforced when Michelle Alexander (2012, p.229) highlights that 'during the much-heralded economic boom of the 1990s, the true jobless rate among noncollege Black men was a staggering 42 percent (65 percent among Black male dropouts)'.

prison by surrounding them with the hard, lifeless, regulating material of metal. Not only are students placed in the Metal Shop as a 'good prerequisite for license plate pressing', they are forced to walk through a metal detector each day; an early indication of how Black bodies are primed for and associated with criminality (Beatty 1996, p.71). Although recent reports (Moore 2017) have disputed popular claims that Black people are more likely to go to prison than to college, it is clear that higher education can and does play a crucial part in ensuring Black people are not restricted to low paying jobs or a life in prison which, Alexander (2012, p.103) argues, forever reduces them to 'an inferior second-class status'.

Significantly, Gohkhan Savas (2014, p.514) reveals that those who avoid the trajectory outlined above and attend a higher education institution are typically 'incorporated into the lower tiers of the hierarchy of universities'. This is corroborated by Lori Patton (2016, p.331) who notes that 'community colleges and for-profit institutions primarily educate low-income, working class, and racially minoritised groups'. Revealingly, the *New York Times* stated in 2017 that 'even after decades of affirmative action, Black and Hispanic students are the most underrepresented at the nation's top colleges and universities than they were 35 years ago' (Arshkenas et al. 2017). In the words of the article: 'The share of the Black freshmen at elite schools is virtually unchanged since 1980. Black students are just 6 percent freshmen but 15 percent of college age Americans' (Arshkenas et al. 2017). Harvard, Yale and Princeton (three examples of elite, Ivy League universities) are recorded as having 47 percent, 51 percent and 49 percent white students respectively, but only 8 percent Black students. Summarising her own (similar) findings on attendance at elite universities, Warikoo (2016, p.26) states plainly that 'racial disparities in enrolment appear to be increasing over time, not decreasing'.

There is a need then to examine elite higher education institutions and the racist system that underpins them. This work is particularly important because, as Warikoo (2016, p.17) highlights:

> Elite universities are the very places we uphold as bastions of excellence and meritocracy in the United States. Notions of merit and worthiness at Harvard are watched not only by lower-tier colleges setting their own admissions criteria, but also by ordinary Americans viewing Harvard as a symbol of excellence, opportunity and meritocracy. Beyond symbolic meaning, considerable evidence suggests that attending an elite college rather than a non-elite one means that a student is more likely to graduate, to earn more, and to hold a position of power.

The idea that material prosperity is more likely to come after attending an elite institution is evidenced by editors of *The Shape of the River* who note in their own research that 'the earning

premiums associated with attending a selective school, compared with benchmark figures for graduates of all four-year institutions, are *very* substantial (in the 70 to 80 percent range)'(Bowen et al. 2000, p.xxix [original italics]).[9] Lori Patton (2016, p.319) also reinforces Warikoo's claim that attending an elite college or university will likely lead to occupying a position of power when she states that 'throughout history, nearly every government leader attended college and law school or some other post baccalaureate training. Most if not all attended elite, private institutions'. For Patton (2016, p.324), this is particularly problematic because 'those with the power to change institutions were also educated by these institutions, meaning they graduate from their institutions and often perform their lives devoid of racial consciousness'. As an example, Patton (2016, p.319) points to the 'majority of US Supreme Court justices (who) attended Harvard and Yale university' and make many decisions 'cloaked in racist ideologies that disenfranchise racially marginalised groups'. According to Patton (2016, p.324), this demonstrates how 'the reproduction of racism occurs without much disruption'. Having internalised the racism that pervades elite universities and colleges, empowered white people are likely to perpetuate a system which consigns Black people to the lowest rungs of American society. On that basis, we must interrogate elite institutions of higher education if we want to disrupt the reproduction of racism in American society.

To properly address this problem, however, we must not only interrogate university admission policies but also the hostile environment that the small number of Black students attending elite institutions are forced to contend with. Beyond low admission figures, Andrew McGill (2015) reports the issue of 'persistently low graduation rates among Black students in elite universities and colleges'. According to Diane Gusa (2010, p.465): 'Studies have reported racial discrimination as a major reason for high attrition rates of Black students matriculating at predominately white colleges and universities', which characterises the majority of elite higher education institutions. As Gusa (2010, p.466) goes on to explain: 'Many academically successful Blacks (sic) drop out of college because of feelings of disconnection or lack of support from their institution'. These feelings often arise because of the overt and covert racism that manifests in and around campus (Feagin et al. 1996). Examples of such racism abound. An article in *The Nation* for instance, reports how 'a Black student at Cornell was beaten by other students in an attack the student claimed to be racially motivated', and that

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[9] According to the editors, these 'gains associated with attending the most selective schools are, if anything, greater for minorities than for whites' (Bowen et al. 2000, p.195).

'in 2012 *The Harvard Crimson* published a piece where the author compared students admitted through affirmative action to blind pilots' (Thorne 2018). This is not to mention the various college parties across the country where students have arrived wearing blackface as a "fancy dress" costume (Jaschik 2018). Or the spate of less headline grabbing but no less damaging microaggressive assaults which, according to Tara Yosso et al. (2009, p.673), 'adversely have an impact on adjustment, academic performance, sense of comfort, sense of value, and ultimately the persistence of students of colour'.

Given all of the above, it is imperative that we interrogate the internal racial dynamics of elite universities and colleges. It is my contention in this thesis (soon to be discussed in more detail) that the investigative and imaginative power of literature makes it an ideal source material for examining the allusive, often invisible features of systematic white dominance in higher education; such as the material impact architectural objects have on Black students when situated in elite, predominately white institutions. In my own study, I have decided to focus exclusively on elite, predominately white institutions situated in Northeast America. This is not simply because the majority of America's oldest and most renown Ivy League universities reside in this region of the country. It is also because focusing on the Northeast region allows me to confront the long-standing myth that the most violent and debilitating forms of racism are restricted to South U.S, with North U.S serving as a place of relative if not total freedom. It should also be emphasised that I am only focusing on PWIs in Northeast U.S. As such, I will not be examining Howard University, located in Washington D.C., or any other HBCU. This is because the majority Black demographic makes for a completely different cultural climate, as Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015, p.56) illustrates when he describes his experience at Howard in *Between the World and Me*:

> The reality out there was on the Yard, on the first warm day of spring when it seemed that every sector, borough, affiliation, country, and corner of the broad diaspora had sent a delegate to the great world party. I remember those days like an OutKast song, painted in lust and joy. A baldhead in shades and tank top stands across from Blackburn, the student centre, with a long bao draping his muscular shoulders. A conscious woman, in stonewash with her dreads pulled back, is giving him the side eye and laughing…Here at the Mecca, we are without fear, we are the dark spectrum on parade.

The warmth, joy and sense of safety that is conveyed in this passage, as Coates basks in the splendour of his rich culture without the overt surveillance and coercion of white people, is a world away from the experiences of the Black students in my chosen texts. Of course, the experiences of these characters cannot speak for all Black students in predominately white

institutions. However, the narrative accounts produced by Oates, Adichie, Smith and Beatty, as well as those provided through the supporting secondary material (referred to throughout the thesis) indicates that studying at a PWI is more likely to lead to feelings of isolation, displacement and violation than in a HBCU.

This is not to say that HBCUs are entirely disconnected from the racial oppression operating at predominately white institutions. In fact, Chapter One will highlight how the fate of HBCUs has always been at the mercy of racist PWI policies and practices. However, the role and function of objects in these predominately Black institutions is likely to manifest quite differently. As I will shortly explain, objects in sites of higher education do not inherently contain racially oppressive forces which negatively impact on the Black bodies they come into contact with. Objects operate as nodes in a network comprised of bodies, discourse and other objects. Their role and function change depending on the other elements in this network. The fact HBCUs are dominated by Black bodies as opposed to white ones means that the impact their objects have on Black students will be different to the ones in predominately white institutions. The impact of objects on Black students in predominately white institutions and the importance of examining them will become clearer in the following section.

Architectural Objects

The metaphorical and material role that objects play in perpetuating a racist campus climate has been largely overlooked by academics. As Tara Fenwick et al. (2011, p.1) state: 'What is material is often taken to be background context against which educational practice takes place or within which it sits, and material artefacts are often taken to be simply tools that humans use or objects they investigate'. Objects are in fact much more active in helping to shape social relations than these attitudes suggest, both within and beyond education. As this thesis will show, objects can perpetuate hierarchical race relations by reinforcing the alienation and intensifying the coercion and control of Black students, whilst also obscuring the mechanisms of racial oppression Black students are subjected to. It should be noted that certain objects can inspire a sense of freedom amongst Black students as well. In Chapter Three's analysis of Adichie's *Americanah*, for example, I will demonstrate how the desk-top provides a portal into a virtual world where Black women in particular are able to more readily affirm identity, access community and engage with alternative knowledge paradigms. By dismissing objects as passive background entities, we ultimately ignore important

proponents of and protections against the racist system operating in elite higher education. As Patricia Locke (2015, p.3) argues, we therefore 'need to return "to things themselves", to make the familiar strange again, in order to overcome our disengagement from overly determined places (or virtual placelessness) around us'. In the context of my thesis, this means interrogating how ostensibly mundane and inert objects actively impact upon differently racialised bodies they come into contact with.

Although objects are much more active in the process of shaping social relations than what is often supposed, it is important to clarify that objects are also, as Iain Borden (2000, p.224) puts it: 'a medium and not a message, a system of power relations and not a force, a flow and not a line'. In other words, messages, meanings and forces of power do not directly derive from objects themselves. Rather, they emanate from humans and become part of a wider social network comprised of humans, objects and discourse. It is the interaction between these three different aspects of the social network which has created a system of white dominance in America generally and elite higher education specifically. The way this network functions becomes clearer after attending to Affect Theory. Whilst the exact definition of 'affect' is still debated, Mellissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (2010, p.2) characterise it as a 'palimpsest of force-encounters traversing the ebbs and swells of intensities that pass between "bodies"', which are defined 'not by any outer-skin envelope or other surface boundary but by their potential to reciprocate or co-participate in the passages of affect'. Significantly, Affect Theory's reconfiguration of the "body" incorporates supposedly inanimate objects into its schema, as it recognises their ability to transmit, redirect and intensify forces of power.

In reconfiguring the role of objects, Affect Theory resists the distinction that is typically made between humans and objects that comprise the social world. It posits that all of these "bodies" are included within a network of forces, which move through and between them. This means that objects are recognised as having an ability to directly impact and make impressions on the human body, not just the other way around. As Sara Ahmed (2004, p.1) states: 'Bodies take the shape of the very contact they have with objects and others'. The exact impression that these objects make on each human body depends on the wider social network it is part of. In Ahmed's (2010, p.37) words: 'What we may feel depends on the angle of our arrival'. If a Black student, who has long been subjected to a social system of racial oppression, enters into a predominately white institution and is subsequently surrounded by white bodies and discourse promoting the superiority of white people (through university

culture and curricula for example) they will interact with and be affected by objects in a fundamentally different way to their white counterparts. In *Black Girl, White Girl*, for instance, Genna feels she has behaved benevolently towards Minette by offering her the desk with a bigger window that overlooks their college campus. However, this serves to intensify the alienation and violation of Minette who is exposed to the paralysing sight of colonial buildings; not only reminding her of the institution's legacy of racial oppression but her out-of-placeness at the college. This thesis conducts an important investigation into the specific and distinct interaction between Black students and objects in elite higher educational institutions. Due to the fact affective forces work through and between objects, and do not derive directly from them, such an investigation necessitates an analysis of the racially oppressive network in elite higher education, which is comprised of objects, discourse and Black and white bodies.

There has been a growing interest in the affective impact certain objects have as part of the racially oppressive network comprising higher education institutions around the world. This is made most clear by the #RhodesMustFall (RMF) campaign, which took place in 2015 across various different nations. Originating at the University of Cape Town, the Black student-led campaign challenged the presence of a Cecil Rhodes statue on campus, as it was seen to celebrate a coloniser who had spearheaded the violent oppression of Black people in Southern Africa during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. In the words of student activist Chumani Maxwele, who inspired the campaign after throwing excrement at the statue in political protest, 'as Black students we are disgusted by the fact that this statue still stands here today as it is a symbol of white supremacy' (Knudsen and Anderson 2019, p.239). Maxwele and his fellow protestors recognised the active role such a statue played in perpetuating the ideology of whiteliness and highlighted how this had a material impact on Black students attending the university. As Britta Timm Knudsen and Casper Anderson (2019, p.244) report: 'the statue expressed in some sense a strong feeling of non-acceptance among the contemporary Black students…and became a symbol of what "Africa should not be for us in the future"'. By calling for the statue to be brought down, RMF sought to 'demythologise whiteness' and, in turn, diminish the system of oppression they endured on a daily basis (Knudsen and Anderson 2019, p.242).

Although it took on a slightly different name, one university campaign in America that was inspired by events in South Africa and ended up having its demands met in full was the

Royall Must Fall campaign at Harvard Law School.[10] Here, students called for the Law School to stop using the insignia of Isaac Royall Jr., who they claimed came from a 'family of slavers' and was 'responsible for the brutal torture and murder of 88 enslaved persons in Antigua in the mid-1730' (Exhibit Addenda ©2019). In an open letter to the School's Dean, students highlighted how:

> From the portraits on the second floor of Wasserstein, to the paintings in the library, to the current composition of the faculty, the Law School is filled with visual reminders that this school was created by, and for, white men. The most ubiquitous of these symbols, the seals – which adorns all of our buildings, apparel, stationary, and diplomas – honours a slaver and a murderer (Harvard: Royall Must Fall 2015).

Like students at the University of Cape Town, the Royall Must Fall campaigners connected their call to remove the Royall insignia to the wider concern of decolonising the university as a whole. Patricia Noxolo (2017, p.342 [original italics]) argues that 'decolonial theory is focused on an epistemic challenge to colonialist thinking, with an emphasis on radical *delinking* from the sources of ongoing inequalities that have deep historical roots in European imperialism'. For Noxolo (2017, p.342), 'decolonial theory makes a louder and more radical challenge' than postcolonial theory because it is 'linked more directly to protest and direct confrontations with existing practice'. Rather than just making space for alternative narratives and theories from people of colour, decolonial theory (which I will discuss throughout the thesis) interrogates the way in which knowledge is currently conceived, taught and acted upon in order to perpetuate a Eurocentric and thus racially oppressive ideology. In their effort to further decolonise Harvard University, Royall Must Fall formed Reclaim Harvard Law School and campaigned for things like the implementation of a Critical Race Theory programme, better and more accessible financial aid for Black students and the focused hiring of Black faculty members. It should be noted that by making objects the focal points of this thesis, I do not mean to suggest that they act independently or with greater efficacy than these other aspects of higher education. Like students from the respective RMF campaigns, I argue that they all connect to create the system of white dominance that comprises the institution. Although Literature Studies has been rightly identified as a fundamental part of this system, my thesis will show how literature itself can help confront the elements of existing practice

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[10] The RMF campaign at the University of Cape Town also inspired Black students at Oxford University to form a protest group of the same name and pressure Oriel College to tear down its own statue of Cecil Rhodes (RMFO 2018).

that are ordinarily overlooked or trivialised by other academic subjects; such as the racially oppressive function of foundational architectural objects (Gill 2018; Gopal 2017).

As the #RhodesMustFall and Royall Must Fall campaigns illustrate, there is a tendency when addressing the relationship between objects, whiteness and universities to focus on more distinctive architectural features such as monuments, statues and portraits. This is important work that, as pushback against the RMF campaigns suggest, is still considered contentious despite centring on overtly racial objects. Whilst it is clearly necessary to keep on stressing the significance of these explicit markers of systematic white dominance, it is also imperative that we attend to those objects that are less obviously part of an internal racist network but are equally if not more foundational to shaping the physical and ideological structures of the university space. An example of the kind of interrogative work I have in mind can be found in Jay Dolmage's (2017) excellent book *Academic Ableism*. After acknowledging that 'there is tremendous potential, and tremendous responsibility…to examine these buildings we work in, and how they are involved in building a larger social and public space outside of these walls', Dolmage (2017) proceeds to examine the role foundational architectural features like stairs and gates play in establishing an ableist environment in higher education institutions. In his discussion about "steep steps", for instance, Dolmage (2017) highlights how 'university campuses have lots of steep steps – but the entire university experience can be metaphorised as a movement up steep steps. The steep steps, physically and figuratively, lead to the Ivory Tower'.

This thesis supports and extends Dolmage's work by redirecting focus to the physical and ideological structures of whiteliness that the scholar refers to but does not explore in detail. Rather than steep steps or gates, this shift in focus results in an analysis of the material and metaphorical role windows, desks, desk-tops and doors play in perpetuating a system of white dominance in the elite higher education institution. An analysis of these specific objects in the context of whiteliness and higher education aligns my work closely with Sara Ahmed's. Instead of identifying as a Literature or even Critical Whiteness Scholar, it would perhaps be more accurate to refer to myself as an Ahmedian scholar, such is her influence on my thinking. Rather than a wholesale departure from Ahmed's work, this thesis constitutes an important extension and refocusing of it. As well as building on Ahmed's theoretical discussion of desks and doors, I examine architectural features she has not (to my knowledge) addressed, such as desk-tops and windows. Importantly, I also place greater emphasis than Ahmed on the way such objects materially

enforce racial oppression. This distinctive element of my thesis is made possible because of my decision to focalise an analysis of objects, whiteness and higher education through literature, which by its very nature (or form) tends to focus on individual subjects and their material realities.

Literature

The most significant departure my thesis takes from scholarship discussed so far (Ahmed's included) is that it uses literary texts as primary sources of both information and imagination. In fact, this is the first-time literature has been used to conduct a comprehensive study of objects and their relationship with whiteness in the context of higher education in the post-Civil Rights period. Applying a literary analysis to such a context demonstrates one way in which my thesis makes an important (and original) contribution to current scholarship. For literature is a valuable resource when it comes to examining forces and networks that are either invisible or so normalised that they can be considered unseen. As Toni Morrison (1992, p.15) contends: 'Writers are among the most sensitive the most intellectual anarchic, most representative, most probing of artists. The ability of writers to imagine what is not the self, to familiarise the strange and mystify the familiar, is the test of their power'. Given this characterisation of writers, literary texts are a fitting place to identify, focus in on, amplify, extrapolate and even reimagine the mechanisms that underpin social relations; without surrendering a hold on material reality.

There has, of course, been a long-standing scholarly interest in the connections between literature, the concept of blackness and the material experiences of Black people in American society. Such interest became particularly intense following the implementation of Black Studies programmes in American universities during the 1960s and 1970s; something Chapter One will examine in more detail. In his book, *Loose Canons*, Henry Louis Gates Jr. (1992, p.xiii) marvels at the 'social and political "relevance"' literary scholars are considered to have in relation to 'the actual lives of our fellow citizens', going on to state that 'this new state of affairs is especially gratifying, given the link between the social and economic conditions of African-Americans and our field of inquiry'. Gates uses *Loose Canons* to explain this link between literature and Black people in America, highlighting that from the time enslaved Black people used writing to "prove" their humanity (along lines established during the "Enlightenment" and institutionalised by educational canons and curricula), writing and literature specifically have been intrinsically tied to their social, economic and political status

in America. Whilst renowned scholars such as Gates, Houston Baker Jr. (1980), Barbara Christian (1985) and Ann Louise Keating (1996) produced important works that extrapolate these links, it was Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark* which first made a serious case for examining the concomitant relationship between literature and whiteness; both as a concept and material reality.

In her seminal collection of essays, Morrison argues that attending to the ways in which blackness is framed by canonical white writers exposes how these writers (and Americans generally) articulate, explore, worry about, negotiate and use the concept of whiteness to create the material, racial reality of America. According to the esteemed author:

> What Africanism became for, and how it functioned in the literary imagination is of paramount interest because it may be possible to discover, through a close look at literary "blackness", the nature – even the cause of literary "whiteness". What is it *for*? What parts do the invention and development of whiteness play in construction of what is loosely described as "American"? (Morrison 1992, p.9 [original italics])

Since Morrison posed these questions, a small but ever-expanding field of research has emerged, with scholars exploring the relationship between whiteness and literature in a number of different contexts. The more prominent examples of such research have been historical overviews. For example, in her book *Whiteness Visible*, Valerie Babb (1998) highlights how whiteness was navigated in early to mid-twentieth century American literature and other cultural sources. Similarly, Veronica Watson (2013) and Stephanie Li (2015) respond to and expand on Morrison's work by considering how whiteness has been conceived by Black writers from early to mid-twentieth century (Watson) and mid-twentieth century only (Li). In addition to this, Josep Armengol (2014) and Stephany Rose (2014) explore the relationship between whiteness, literature and masculinity, whilst Aretha Phiri (2013) and La Vinia Deloise Jennings (2009) focus on its connection to specific national practices across the world. Other examples include Helen Young's (2015) examination of whiteness in popular fantasy fiction, John Young's (2006) interrogation of the predominately white publishing industry and E. Lale Demiturk's (2012) research on the effects of white discourse in the city space. There is also some scholarship on the way whiteness manifest in other cultural media, with Henry Giroux (1997), Richard Dyer (1997) and Daniel Bernadi's (2008) edited collection examining its relationship with film, and Steven Netcoh (2013), Liam Grealy (2008) and Thandi Sulé (2015) its relationship with Hip Hop. Such work lays the foundation for my own investigation into how literature (and other cultural sources including film and Hip Hop) expose and explore

the ways in which objects perpetuate whiteliness and negatively shape the experience of Black students in elite higher education institutions.

Significantly, several architectural scholars have drawn links between architecture and literature, with some going on to argue that the specific skill set possessed by writers is particularly well suited to analysing physical structures and their relationship with various social processes. According to Klaske Havik (2014, p.23 [original italics]): 'Literary writers prove to be able to *read* places and spaces, cities and landscapes at different levels… (they can) describe other sensory perceptions of space (aside from visual and formal) with great detail and intensity'. As such, 'literary narratives often reveal the social aspects of architecture – it is through the literary accounts of such places that we can learn about the *socius* of architecture' (Havik 2014, p.24 [original italics]). Despite its ability to do so, literature has rarely been used to examine the relationship between architecture and the social processes of race. In the words of William Gleason (2011, p.2): 'Although race has been one of the most important analytic, theoretical, and historical categories in literary studies for more than a quarter of a century, it has played on a small part in the interdisciplinary study of architecture and literature – or, to borrow a phrase, the study of "building and books"'. This is perhaps due to Darell Fields's (2000, p.45) observation that, fundamentally: 'Architectural history is white. Architectural theory is white. And architectural practice, no matter what colour the "owners" and "workers" is white'. Consequently, 'the whiteness of the architectural regime feigns that it does not know blackness, and when it attempts to know it produces the lamest of Blacks (seen only in terms of colour versus ideological position) unthreatening "examples"' (Fields 2000, p.47). For Fields (2000, p.47), those who want to address the whiteness of architectural scholarship need 'to formulate not on the basis of "examples" but on experience – experiences that reveal the malicious operation of the regime'. By prioritising experience over examples, Fields is effectively calling for an analysis that is not static, superficial and apolitical, but one that is dynamic, nuanced, intimate, integral and attentive to both psychological processes and systems of power; which are all essential features that characterise great works of literature.

Toni Morrison has herself explored and utilised the relationship which emerges between race, architecture and literature. Using the 'metaphor of house' (distinct from the 'metaphor of home' which will be discussed in Chapter Five), Morrison (1997) articulates her struggle and conflict about how to most effectively readdress systematic racial oppression in America. Summarising her central inquiry, Morrison (1997) asks 'how to convert a racist

house into a race-specific yet nonracist home?' Most importantly for this thesis, Morrison implies that a significant transformation of America's 'racist house' requires attending to the individual architectural objects which form its foundations. She notes that:

> If I had to live in a racial house, it was important, at the least, to rebuild it so that it was not a windowless prison into which I was forced, a thick-walled, impenetrable container from which no cry could be heard, but rather an open house, grounded, yet generous in its supply of windows and doors (Morrison 1997).

In order to address critical issues such as the coercion, containment, alienation, isolation, and access of Black people in American institutions, Morrison draws on architectural metaphors of walls, windows and doors; implying that individual architectural objects each play their own part in determining the dynamics of the house as a whole. Following Morrison's example, this thesis will consider the distinct (yet interconnected) roles doors, windows, desks and desk-tops perform in the racist house of elite higher education. Crucially though, my analysis of literary texts by Oates, Adichie, Smith and Beatty will move beyond the metaphorical and consider how objects, foundational to the structure of universities and colleges, can negatively impact on Black students and materially determine their experiences in higher education. Indeed, my selected texts have been chosen because they each focus in on and excavate the way such foundational objects operate both metaphorically and materially within elite higher education's system of white dominance which, as I stated earlier, is comprised of predominately white bodies, objects and discourse.

The Problem with Literature: A Discourse

In Morrison's (1997) essay on 'Home', she reflects on her role 'as an already – and always - raced writer'. In doing so, the author makes clear her refusal to 'reproduce the master's voice' or that of his 'fawning mistress' because 'both of these positions seemed to confine me to his terrain, his arena, accepting the house rules in the dominance game' (Morrison 1997). Through such self-reflection, Morrison highlights literature's ability to both consolidate and challenge whiteliness and thus either subjugate or liberate Black people. Despite what has been argued about the merits of literature, there are certainly still some potential problems that come with centring an analysis of power relations on the work of literary writers. For one, the incisive observations such writers provide are somewhat shaped and therefore compromised by the industry these individuals operate in. Interestingly, author Mat Johnson (2013, x) argues otherwise in the essay collection *Contemporary African-American Literature*, where he states that:

What the novel offers, like no other storytelling form (is) truth. One person's truth. Not one person and a legion of collaborators. Not a truth dictated in part by harsh market concerns and obligations to financial reward. Not just truth the majority of people want to hear. That same money that floods into TV and film also brings with it the need for a mass audience, and for a vision that can sacrifice its intimacy for leaps towards the universal.

The argument presented here is deeply flawed. As Kristina Graaf's (2013) essay on 'Street Literature and the Mode of Spectacular Writing' in the same edited collection implies and Percival Everett's (2001) novel *Erasure* addresses explicitly (to give just a couple of examples) the publishing industry does apply at least *some* pressure on writers to produce certain types of novels (from the esoteric "academic" novel to the more mass marketed ones) so as to appeal to a wider range of readers and boost sales. Crucially, this desire to generate more interest and income means that the 'predominately white publishing industry reflects and often reinforces the racial divide that has always defined American society, representing "blackness" as a one-dimensional cultural experience' (Young 2006, p.4). According to John Young (2006, p.4), 'minority texts are edited, produced and advertised as representing the "particular" Black experience to a "universal", implicitly white (although itself ethnically constructed) audience'. As Young makes clear, there is in fact a "Truth" that the reading audience want to see and it is in the publishing industry's interest to make sure they provide it; whether or not it perpetuates regressive perceptions of race. Financial issues aside, the level of process Young describes (with various stages of editing, production and advertising altering the way the work is perceived and processed) serves as further evidence that, despite what Johnson claims, the novel cannot be considered the product of just one person's "Truth"; a concept so vague and yet so loaded that it requires further examination.

As is made clear by phenomenologists, people's perspectives are restricted to the particular position they occupy within a network of social relations (Ahmed 2006; Merleau-Ponty 2008). Such social positioning not only determines the kind of experiences an individual has and the external sources of knowledge they consume, but also the way in which they reflect on and process these things. In doing so, it ensures that an individual's notion of "Truth" (or what is "True") is more subjective than it ostensibly appears. Importantly, social positioning then also determines whose "Truth" becomes accepted and authorised as Fact. Due to the particular systems of power that underpin American society, the most authoritative version of "Truth" typically derives from white, middle/upper class men (McLaren 1995). This is not only because of our conceptual understandings of such privileged

social groups (that whiteness and masculinity equate to rationality for instance) but also the fact these groups are disproportionately represented in what are considered to be the most authoritative sites of knowledge production in society; like the university. The knowledge, or discourse, produced in such spaces is deemed definitive and becomes the unquestioned starting point from which society looks at and makes sense of the world and how it works. That is why anti-racist and other social justice scholars put so much emphasis on analysing different types of discourse within the university. Hegemonic discourse not only obscures the knowledge claims of marginalised social groups but also results in the active proliferation of racist and other oppressive ideologies (Bernal 2002; Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995; Smith 1999).

Due to preconceived (or rather, predetermined) ideas of what constitutes "literary writing" and the commitment such writing entails (both in terms of finance and time), it seems fair to assume that writers, in the main, have a certain level of education and economic standing.[11] Any project that relies on the work (or discourse) of this select and relatively privileged group of people to be its sole source of knowledge is thus limiting itself by prescribing to a particular version of "Truth"; no matter how imaginative and empathetic such people seem to be. Whilst this is potentially less of an issue when it comes to examining the elite higher education experience (which is already reserved for a select group of relatively privileged people) it is still important to consult a range of sources that permit significant engagement with different social positions and perspectives. It is for this reason that my thesis will not only draw from literature but also other cultural forms such as TV, film, Hip Hop and social media. Democratising source material in this way ultimately allows for a more nuanced and accurate analysis. It also, as I mentioned earlier, allows me to engage with counter hegemonic ideas, templates and paradigms that undermine the system of white dominance in elite higher education institutions in America.

This discussion of discourse introduces a second major feature of my thesis. Aside from analysing the relationship between whiteness, architectural objects and elite higher education through literature and other cultural texts, it will explore how narrative voice is

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[11] It is interesting to note that all four of the main authors being considered in this thesis attended prestigious universities at some point in their educational journey. Joyce Carol Oates was awarded a PhD at Rice University and Chimamanda Ngzoie Adichie was awarded an MA at John Hopkins University, as well as a Fellowship at Princeton and Harvard. Zadie Smith graduated from Cambridge University before obtaining a Fellowship at Harvard, whilst Paul Beatty gained an MA at Boston University.

utilised by racialised characters to impress an (always political) version of the "Truth" onto readers, so as to reinforce or transgress real life power relations. Looking at these two things together (objects and narrative voice) in the context of higher education is important because, as Jay Dolmage (2017) argues: 'The disciplinary and the institutional, the discursive and the physical, must be considered always in relation'. Indeed, the power that Genna holds over Minette in *Black Girl, White Girl* is not only expressed by the way she continually exposes her Black roommate to physical violations, it is also exhibited by her ability to take full control of the novel's narrative and thus manipulate the historical record in order to effectively convince the reader of her sanitised version of events. The physical and discursive elements of the higher education experience, displayed in Oates's novel, form part of what Jessica Charbeneau (2015, p.656) calls higher education's 'hidden curriculum'. This also underpins the PhD writing process I am currently engaged in. The PhD rubric determines (and thus restricts) the ways in which a researcher is able to engage with, analyse and make sense of power relations (Smith 1999). Aside from the more obvious defining features of a PhD thesis (such as word count, the Viva assessment and the need to engage with and reference "authoritative" and "legitimate" scholars, fields and methodologies), there are also more seemingly mundane elements like word font, word colour and the geometrical shape of the page.

On that note, it will have been observed that the beginning of this introductory chapter was not formatted in a conventional manner; with its opening sentence placed in the bottom right hand corner of the page instead of the upper left. My intention here was to discursively reflect the power dynamic established physically in the *Dear White People* shot (analysed earlier) which is reflective of the general power dynamic between Black students and the elite higher education institution. By placing my text in this position, I sought to highlight how the white page, like the university building, reinforces whiteliness and thus poses an immediate challenge to anti-racist scholarship. After making this small adjustment the force of the white page becomes more palpable, as it looms large over the small amount of text in the corner. This serves as an important reminder that even the most elemental features of the PhD support dominant power interests. Although I attempt to expose this connection between form and power throughout the thesis, I must (due to my training and a desire to pass the Viva) reinforce it as well. It is a situation that all PhD student's concerned with social justice are forced to accept. We will never be as radical as we hope to be whilst we continue to complete conventional forms of assessment. These conventional forms will always diminish our ability to accurately assess and counter the oppressive forces that operate within

universities. In *The Fire Now*, Derrais Carter (2018, p.39) asks his reader: 'How transformative can one's argument be when the terms upon which the argument is introduced are designed to favour the structure that makes that argument both necessary and null in the first place?' The answer to this (admittedly rhetorical) question is, in essence: never transformative enough. For as Audre Lorde (1984, p.112) so famously put it: 'The Master's tools will never dismantle the Master's house'.

Critical Race Theory

Some scholars and other thinkers of colour have argued that one way to dismantle white discourse in academic research is to take seriously the politics of citation. As Sara Ahmed (2013) notes, the practice of citation is a 'rather successful reproductive technology, a way of reproducing the world around certain bodies'. Perpetually referencing work produced by the same white, middle/upper class men (encouraged by university curricula but also library collections and general reverence for certain "star" scholars) means that the experiences, perspectives, theories and ideas of one small but privileged section of society become further ingrained as a universal "Truth" that frames our understanding of and behaviour in the world. The Black feminist initiative, Cite Black Women (2017), argue in their mission statement that 'we must reconfigure (this) politics of knowledge production by engaging in a radical praxis of citation that acknowledges and honours Black women's transnational intellectual production'. This not only diminishes the hold white, middle/upper class men have on our sense of reality, but also foregrounds the work of those typically ignored in formal academic spaces. As Cite Black Women (2017) put it:

> There has been a total disregard when it comes to recognising and respecting the intellectual property of Black women. For centuries, people have listened to our ideas and reproduced them without citation. For centuries, people have been content with erasing us from mainstream bibliographies, genealogies of thought, and conversations about knowledge production…citation as practice allows us to engage with voices so often silenced or left behind.

This leads the initiative to conclude that 'citing Black women is both feminist and antiracist, pushing back against white male heteronormativity prevalent in academia' (Cite Black Women 2017). As part of my own praxis, I aim to push back against white male heteronormativity prevalent in academia by foregrounding and engaging with the testimonies, research and theories of (particularly Black) scholars of colour.

Challenging dominant and dangerous ideologies that perpetuate racism and other systems of oppression in the manner outlined above speaks to one of the fundamental principles of Critical Race Theory (CRT). It is partly for this reason that the CRT framework underpins my methodological approach to the forthcoming analysis of whiteness, architectural objects and elite higher education. Though originally developed by Black and Latino legal scholars during the 1980s, as a response to the general failure of Critical Legal Scholars to engage with race when analysing the law, CRT has since been used across a variety of academic fields; including education (Bernal 2002; Crenshaw et al. 1995; Dixson 2018; Tate 1997). Putting CRT in this context, whilst outlining its central ethos, Tarra Yosso et al. (2009, p.663) state that: 'Critical Race Theory in education starts with the premise that race and racism are endemic to and permanent in US society and that racism intersects with forms of subordination based on gender, class, sexuality, language, culture, immigrant, status, phenotype, accent and surname'. It thus 'challenges claims of objectivity, meritocracy, colour-blindness (sic), race neutrality and equal opportunity, asserting that these claims camouflage the self-interest, power and privilege of dominant groups' (Yosso et al. 2009, p.633). Helpfully, Lindsay Huber and Daniel Solórzano (2015, pp.301-2) highlight the five key tenets which comprise it:

1) Centrality and intersectionality of race and racism;
2) Challenge dominant perspectives;
3) Centrality of experiential knowledge;
4) Interdisciplinary analyses and
5) Explicit commitment to social justice

These central tenets of CRT are an important foundation from which to build an analysis of higher education. For one, they foreground the fact race and racism are inextricably linked to the composition and daily function of higher education institutions. They also highlight how the system of race and racism works in tandem with other systems of oppression and, subsequently, stress the importance of elevating the wide range of experiences, perspectives and cultural practices held by people of colour in order to dismantle them. Finally, they remind us that research should be conducted in service of the long-term goal of securing real life social justice for people within and outside of academia, and not individual advancement, acclaim or cultural capital.

Although the five key tenets outlined by Solórzano seem quite self-explanatory, the particular focus of this thesis (i.e. whiteness), as well as developments in academic and popular discourse regarding key terms (i.e. intersectionality), means there is a need to discuss some

in greater detail. According to Noah Cabrera (2014, p.36): 'Applying CRT to the study of whiteness is slightly different than that described by Crenshaw or Solórzano even though all are dedicated to the eradication of white supremacy'. This is because, in Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS), 'there is no centrality of experiential knowledge…(with) whiteness represent(ing) an *epistemology of ignorance*' (Cabrera 2014, p.36 [original italics]). For Cabrera (2014, p.36) 'relying upon racially privileged experiential knowledge would serve to reify white supremacy as opposed to challenge it'. In other words, Cabrera is arguing that we need to question the validity of knowledge produced by white thinkers when addressing dominant ideologies and deficit perspectives, rather than centralising such experiential knowledge in the way Critical Race Theory advocates. This commentary speaks to the core controversy of Critical Whiteness Studies becoming an increasingly prominent and persuasive field within and even beyond academia.

As it has been said, Critical Whiteness Scholars generally endeavour to draw attention to the active operation of their own whiteness and the system of whiteness which underpins society. However, in the words of James Baldwin (1998, p.431): 'White children, in the main, and whether they are rich or poor, grow up with a grasp of reality so feeble that they can accurately be described as deluded – about themselves and the world they live in'. It is therefore questionable, given their (personal and collective) history of self-delusion, whether white people are best placed to comment on the workings of whiteness. As George Yancy (2012, p.7) notes in *Look, A White!*: 'People of colour…confront whiteness in their everyday lives, not as an abstract but in the form of embodied whites who engage in racist practices that negatively affect their lives'. This means that white scholars, who do not and cannot directly encounter the negative effects of their particular racialisation, are liable to trivialise or misrepresent the oppressive system they write about; thus developing, as Cabrera puts it, an epistemology of ignorance that consolidates rather than challenges a system of white dominance.

This consolidation of whiteliness is further reinforced by the fact these self-same scholars, as palatable players in an increasingly popular field, will likely (regardless of the limitations of their work) gain greater acclaim, status and financial reward than scholars of colour who write, with more insight and nuance, on the very same topic. Such a situation promises to perpetuate racial inequities amongst academics. It also promises to reduce the field of Critical Whiteness Studies to something of a honey-pot for careerists who distort and neutralise the critical work being done on whiteness, in order to satisfy their own personal

ambitions in the institution that they serve. This is even more of a problem considering Paul Taylor's (2004, p.228) warning that the 'new field of inquiry' could 'compete for resources and attention with the fields, programs, and departments of, for example, African-American and Chicano Studies'. In a bid to critique the concept and system of whiteness then, even the most well-intentioned white Critical Whiteness Scholar may end up distorting the experiences of people of colour and silencing them in the process. With that said, I do not think that a study of whiteness necessarily leaves scholars with the unwelcome choice of indulging in an epistemology of ignorance or excising experiential knowledge altogether. As stated previously, this thesis will frame its analysis of the ideology of whiteliness through the experience, perspectives and ideas of various people of colour. It thus foregrounds the experiential knowledge of people of colour whilst maintaining focus on the workings of whiteness.

It is important to stress that there is also an internal power dynamic amongst people of colour. Due to antiblackness in American and Western society generally, 'other racial groups achieve their subjectivity and citizenship through "othering" Blacks (sic), because humanity is measured through distance from blackness' (Ray et al. 2017, p.151). This is not to say that non-Black people of colour do not suffer from racial oppression. There is irrefutable evidence that Chinese, Japanese and Filipino, not to mention Native American and Mexican people, have faced systematic racial discrimination for centuries (Feagin 2013; Frankenberg 1993; Hill 2008; Lipsitz 1998; Saxton 1990). However, the denigration and systematic discrimination of these ethnic groups are based on their proximity to blackness. This has led these and other ethnic groups emanating from Europe, like Jewish and Irish people, to assimilate into a system of whiteness in order secure a greater status in America (Goldberg 2002; Ignatiev 1995; Roediger 1994). The way in which non-Black people of colour are able to negotiate their social and economic position by distancing themselves from blackness means it is important to scrutinise the way in which non-Black people of colour speak on, frame and behave towards those who are racialised as Black. As a British Asian scholar, this is something I am acutely aware of. Being a non-Black person of colour means I have the ability to exploit and replicate a system of antiblackness. Given that my thesis focuses exclusively on how whiteness impacts upon Black students, I have endeavoured to remain attentive to my relative position of power through the research and writing process. My decision to attend solely to Black students is because, whilst treating all non-white social groups as a monolith would be wrong, it is not possible to attend to each of their distinct (yet interweaving)

histories and experiences of racial discrimination in higher education. As such, I focus on Black students to allow for a less sweeping and more nuanced analysis, where I can consider racism in conjunction with other intersecting systems of power; like gender, class, dis/ability and nationality.

It is worth discussing Solórzano's call to analyse race and racism through an intersectional lens. This is because "Intersectionality" has followed "Diversity" and "Inclusion" in becoming a vague, misunderstood and misused buzzword exploited by opportunistic individuals and institutions alike. In a comprehensive study of various academic journals, Jessica Harris and Lori Patton (2019, pp.357-8) found that 'the majority of scholars who employed "intersectionality" did so in a cursory manner'. Such 'ornamental intersectionality', as Sirma Bilge (2013, p.408) calls it, stymies the struggle for social justice because it 'allows institutions and individuals to accumulate value through good public relations and "rebranding" without the need to actually address the underlying structures that produce and sustain injustice'. In this way, the 'use, misuse and critique' of intersectionality, which sees its historical origins obscured, various nuances flattened out and core principles compromised, can be seen to 're-inscribe the very political relations intersectionality scholarship critiques and seeks to transform in the first place' (Hancock 2016, p.5). It is thus important to trace the origins, establish an accurate definition and outline the core principles of intersectionality, before then going on to use it as an analytical tool.

As several scholars have argued, women of colour were practicing the politics of intersectionality in different locales around the world, long before it was officially named by academics in the West. Nevertheless, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991, p.1245) is typically credited with coining the term in the early 1990s, as she argued for the 'need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed'. In her seminal article, 'Mapping the Margins', Crenshaw (1991, pp.1251-2) highlights that 'women of colour are situated within at least two (inseparable) subordinated groups that frequently pursue conflicting political agendas'. With Crenshaw's theory, different social systems (such as race, gender, class, sexuality and dis/ability) do not operate independently from one another in the constitution of an individual's identity. Instead, they intersect to create a more complex and less divisible identity. Importantly, this means that 'like feminist ideology, intersectionality conceptualises power relationally, but not in a binary fashion' (Hancock 2016, p.119). A white woman, for example, is simultaneously subjugated by gender but empowered by race to create a unique experience that is distinct from that of a white man or Black woman. To be clear,

intersectionality does not posit that people are rigidly reduced to their social positions (one white woman's experience of the world will differ from the next) but rather that the network or intersection of these social positions will largely ground their experiences and perspectives of the world.

It is essential to note that intersectionality is not just a theory about social identity but also an analytical tool imperative to accurately assessing systems of power. Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge (2016, p.8 [original italics]) make clear that 'power relations are to be analysed both *via their intersections*, for example racism and sexism, as well as *across domains of power*, namely, structural, disciplinary, cultural, and interpersonal. Violence can be analysed both via how it traverses intersecting systems of power as well as by how it is organised across the domains of power'. Using intersectionality to analyse power relations and the different domains through which they are mediated is essential because, as Harris and Patton (2019, p.354) put it: 'To mis/use intersectionality as an identitarian-only framework is to undermine the capacity of the concept to critique structures of power and domination, productive transformative knowledges, inform praxis and work towards social justice'. For this reason, it is not enough that my chosen authors constitute a diverse mixture of race, gender and national profiles. It is necessary for my analysis to consider how race, gender and nationality intersect together when examining each author's respective novel, which is exactly what it does. The end goal of an intersectional analysis (as with CRT more generally) should be to effect positive social change in the real world. For 'practitioners and activists, intersectionality is not simply a heuristic for intellectual inquiry', but a precise analytical tool that draws out and makes sense of the complex ways in which power mediates our different social realities, so that we can more effectively dismantle pervasive systems of oppression (Collins and Bilge 2016, p.39).

In light of what has been said above, I take seriously my claim that this interdisciplinary thesis addresses the intersectionality of race and racism, as I build on the work of Justin Simien and other writers of colour to explore how certain architectural objects actively perpetuate and even intensify a system of white dominance in elite higher education institutions in post-Civil Rights America. Over the course of my four main chapters I will consider the ways in which race intersects with other dominant structures of class, gender, dis/ability and nationality to shape the experiences of Black students within my chosen literary texts. In line with the central precepts of Critical Race Theory, I do so in order to effect real social change. By drawing attention to the role that seemingly inert objects play in the racially oppressive system underpinning elite universities and colleges, I aim to make people more cognisant of

and attentive to the ways desks, doors, windows and desk-tops can negatively impact upon Black students when part of a network of predominately white bodies and discourse which characterises the elite higher education institution.

The Post-Civil Rights Period

Rather than demarcating the time when race and racism were rendered obsolete, the "post-Civil Rights period" points to a shift in the way racism manifests in America. Such a shift is possible because the historical contingency of race and racism means they are malleable concepts and systems which adapt to new contexts, even as their fundamental components remain the same. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2015, p.1368) highlights that: 'Racism has always been systematic in our nation, but racial domination was structured differently during slavery than during Jim Crow, and since the late 1960s, the "new racism" regime developed as the way of reproducing White rule. The "new racism" like all previous racial orders, has evolved'. The system of white domination in America was forced to evolve following the Civil Rights Movement because, in the words of Michelle Alexander (2012, p.100): 'Forms of race discrimination that were open and notorious for centuries were transformed in the 1960s into something un-American'. This transformation was not, as Derrick Bell Jr. (1996, p.22) impresses, simply (or centrally) about 'the immorality of racial inequality', but specific 'economic and political advances at home and abroad'. According to Bell (1996, p.23), returning Black veterans 'need(ed) reassurances…that the precepts of equality and freedom so heralded during World War II might yet be given meaning at home', whilst an overt rejection of racism 'helped to provide immediate credibility to America's struggle with communist countries to win the hearts and minds of emerging Third World people'. In other words, as America became increasingly embroiled in global affairs it sought to project an image of itself as a beacon of democracy and egalitarianism, which was undermined by the violent racism occurring within its borders; something that was embarrassingly exposed by the Civil Rights Movement but partially (and publicly) quelled by equal rights legislation (*13ᵗʰ* 2016).

 After the Civil Rights Movement then, leading figures decided that racist government policies and practices had to be couched in economic and other race-neutral terms in order to satisfy the new sentiments of the country. According to Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2009, p.18 [original italics]), the emergent 'system or *racial structure* characteristics of the post-Civil Rights era' comprised the following elements:

1) The increasingly covert nature of racial discourse and practices;

2) The avoidance of direct racial terminology;
3) The elaboration of a racial political agenda that eschews direct racial references;
4) The subtle character of most mechanisms to reproduce racial privilege, and
5) The re-articulation of some racial practices of the past

It is this eschewing of racism which prompted my decision to analyse the dynamic between whiteness, architectural objects and elite higher education during the post-Civil Rights period. At a time when the relevance of race is not only being disputed but actively denied and disguised, it becomes particularly important to examine supposedly neutral and deracinated networks and institutions. As a distinct time in America's history, where instructive political, economic and social perspectives, practices and policies remain relatively consistent, the "post-Civil Rights period" provides a somewhat stable context from which to make accurate and relevant observations about the role architectural objects play in perpetuating a system of white dominance in elite universities and colleges.

Colour-Evasiveness, Neoliberalism and White Fragility

The perception that Americans are living in a "post-racial" society is one that has been pushed by both major political parties in the post-Civil Rights period. As Sirma Bilge (2013, p.407) puts it:

> Political myths of "posts" (postraciality, postfeminism) and fantasies of transcendence are espoused by both liberal and conservative forces. The result is a contradictory political and cultural climate replete with idea(l)s of equality, accompanied by an unbending refusal to see the persistence of deeply entrenched (and intersecting) inequalities of race, class, gender, sexuality, ability and citizenship.

The practice of refusing to acknowledge whilst clearly engaging in systems of race and racism is typically referred to as "colour-blindness" (Bonilla-Silva 2015; Jayakumar et al. 2017). However, I prefer the term "colour-evasiveness", advocated by proponents of DisCrit (a branch of CRT that focuses on the intersection of race and dis/ability) who argue that 'colour-evasiveness…both refuses to position people who are blind as embodying deficit and recognises the active evasion involved in people's refusing to discuss race in the face of racial inequalities' (Annamma et al. 2016, p.6). The process of using (what I shall henceforth refer to as) colour-evasiveness as a political strategy began with Richard Nixon's "Law and Order" campaign but was properly established during the presidency of Ronald Reagan, before then being seized upon by Bill Clinton (Alexander 2012; Omi and Winant 1994). This 'new racism', in the words of Henry Giroux (1997, p.287), was 'coded in the language of "welfare reform", "neighbourhood schools", "toughness on crime", and "illegitimate children"'. It enabled both

Republicans and Democrats to withdraw support for the welfare system and implement a more aggressive penal system, which consigned Black people to their lowly economic, social and political status without any overt mention of race being made at all (Collins 2000; Lipsitz 1998; Omi and Winant 1994). It was not until the presidential election of (Democrat) Barack Obama, in 2008, that the predominate view of race in the post-Civil Rights period, encouraged by colour-evasive policies and practices, seemed properly vindicated. As Victor Ray et al. (2017, p.147) put it: 'Barack Obama won the presidency on a message of "hope". His rise was celebrated around the world as evidence of racial progress in the United States, a country with a long and brutal history of slavery and racism'. Writing at the time, Bonilla-Silva and David Dietrich (2011, p.191) highlighted that 'journalists…political advisors…some people of colour…and most whites (sic) have deemed the election of our first Black president proof positive that we have entered a "Post-Racial" era'. With Obama taking the most prestigious, public and ostensibly powerful position in the world, it became the indisputable opinion of many white people (as well as some people of colour) that race no longer determined a person's life chances in America.

Systematic racism has always been entangled with the economic interests of the elite. It is therefore unsurprising to read that, 'as colour-blindness (sic) became hegemonic, this new racial ideology incubated and buttressed neo-liberalism', which is another defining feature of the post-Civil Rights period (Singh 2018, p.557). Acknowledging that 'the concept of neoliberalism is a contested and complex term', Kalwant Bhopal (2018, p.1) suggests it 'generally refers to the systematic privilfeging of a "free market" as the mechanism best suited to manage the movement of all capital, goods and services, including services that would conventionally be understood to be public services'. Henry Giroux (2014, p.2) is unrelenting in his criticism of this economic and social model, arguing that it is a 'form of economic Darwinism (that) attempts to undermine all sorts of solidarity capable of challenging market-driven values and social relations, promoting virtues of an unbridled individualism almost pathological in its disdain for community, social responsibility, public values, and the public good'. Malinda Smith (2010, p.46) concurs with Giroux's assessment, highlighting that 'unlike the welfare state, which recognised systematic discrimination as a barrier to citizenship equality, neoliberalism promotes a form of market citizenship that is anathema to group claims and hence to equity as social justice'. One fundamental point that emerges from the two critiques here is that neoliberalism and colour-evasiveness and mutually reinforcing in that they both position citizens as individuals (individual consumers specifically) who are

unattached to a wider social collective and thus ultimately responsible for their own success or failures. This is corroborated by Charles Mills (2014, p.84) who argues that, for those who prescribe to colour-evasive and neoliberal ideologies, the reason 'some succeed while others fail is not a result of the legacy and ongoing practice of systemic (racial) discrimination, but of market savvy and moral virtue, an appropriate return on one's efforts'.

The prevailing attitudes of the post-Civil Rights period (and the policies and practices that inform them) are observable in higher education as well. Whilst Chapter One will explore colour-evasiveness in higher education, it is worth noting here that the American university is subject to the same neoliberal forces operating in wider society. Chandra Mohanty (2003, p.173) argues that 'the ideology of the market and of the consumer as the global and North American citizen par excellence is actively consolidated in the restructured U.S. university'. As in society more generally, neoliberalism here 'tells the story of an autonomous, self-sufficient individual who can detach herself from historical, racial, and cultural markers in the pursuit of freedom and self interest in the academy' (Smith 2010, p.47). According to Malinda Smith (2010, p.47) , this means that 'white students are able to legitimise and justify their attendance at elite universities because they believe that it is a meritocracy that enabled them to be there, rather than their white privilege, their class and/or their social connections'. A clear example of this self-serving logic at play (and the impact it can have on racial equity) in higher education is provided by the historic case of *Bakke* (1978), which involved 'a white student who claimed he had been wrongfully excluded from the medical school of the University of California, Davis, to make room for minority applicants with inferior academic records' (Bowen et al. 2000, p.8). Unsurprisingly, Bakke won his case as Justice Powell:

> condemned the use of rigid quotas in admitting minority students and found that efforts to overcome "societal discrimination" did not justify policies that disadvantaged particular individuals such as Bakke, who bore no responsibilities for any wrong suffered by minorities (Bowen et al. 2000, p.8).

As George Lipsitz (1998, p.37) argues, the decision in *Bakke* seems absurd considering 'the universally recognised legality of special admission plans that routinely benefit whites (sic), such as "legacy" admits at elite institutions, including Harvard, Yale, Dartmouth, the University of Pennsylvania and Stanford'. These 'legacy admissions', Diane Gusa (2010, pp.470-1) explains, 'use white sociohistorical inheritance criteria that give preferentiality to whites (sic) who long have had access to higher education over those racialised others who have had a diversity of

exclusion'.[12] They form part of what Linda Pruitt (2004, p.251) calls 'strategies of privatisation', which, in mobilising legacy admissions as well as 'money, pressure, influence, external support, tutoring services, and therapy', create 'the (secret) magic of "merit"'. This of course all works in tandem with (and is intrinsically tied to) the social and economic disadvantages that prospective Black students are forced to wrestle with when attempting to access elite higher education institutions; creating a wide chasm of resources and opportunities that is fundamentally racist and characteristic of the post-Civil Rights period.

White people have, for the most part, proven unable to deal with the kind of information outlined above. Robin DiAngelo (2018, p.100) argues that when 'ideologies such as colour-blindness (sic), meritocracy and individualism are challenged intense emotions are common'. The scholar refers to this response as 'white fragility', which she describes as 'a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress in the habitus becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation' (DiAngelo 2018, p.103). In regard to white liberals, a group of people ostensibly more open to discussions of race and racism due to a general commitment to social justice, white fragility also often manifests because of 'threats to integrity and personhood' (Jayakumar et al 2017, p.916). If a white liberal prides themselves on being a "good person", who is loving, tolerant and understands racism to be "unfair", then the notion that they are somehow complicit in a racist system destabilises and damages a valued aspect of their own self-image; resulting in the emotions and behaviours DiAngelo describes. Despite the connotations that come with the term, 'white fragility is not weakness per se' (DiAngelo 2018, p.2). 'In fact', DiAngelo (2018, p.2) argues, 'it is a powerful means of white racial control and the protection of white advantage', as intense emotions that surface 'repel the challenge, return our racial comfort and maintain our dominance within the racial hierarchy'. As DiAngelo impresses, we must always remember that aside from wanting to be seen as "good", white people (liberal or otherwise) often avoid issues of racism because they benefit from it and are thus (whatever their politics) directly invested in the maintenance of its structures.

According to Uma Jayakumar et al. (2017, p.913), this issue regarding white fragility is becoming more pervasive in the era of Donald Trump's presidency:

> The perceived racial progress of Obama's presidency, grassroots movements contesting antiblackness, and Trump's promise to "Make America Great Again"

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[12] According to George Lipsitz (1998, p.37), for instance, 'since the 1950s, 20 percent of the undergraduate students entering Harvard have secured admission because their parents were Harvard alumni.'

appeals to white innocence and a sense of loss. These broad-scale trends provide fertile grounds for a newly emerging racial backlash, with implications for the contemporary role of colour-blind (sic) ideology in reproducing a racialised social system. As we transition from a post-Civil Rights colour-blind (sic) racial era described by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, to one increasingly informed by white fragility.

I am reluctant to agree with Jayakumar et al. that we are neatly 'transition(ing) from the post-Civil Rights colour-blind (sic) racial era' to 'one increasingly informed by white fragility' because strategies of white fragility have been deployed long before now. Henry Giroux (1997, p.287) highlights that, in the 1980s, Ronald Reagan 'cleverly designed to mobilise white fears (after apparent progress for Black and other people of colour) while relieving whites (sic) of any semblance of social responsibility and commitment'. Going back even further, James Baldwin (1998, p.722) argued in an article entitled 'The White Man's Guilt' (originally published in 1965) that when white people look at Black people 'what they see is a disastrous, continuous, present, condition which menaces them, and for which they bear an inescapable responsibility. But since, in the main, they seem to lack the energy to change this condition, they would rather not be reminded of it'. Fragility seems to be a crucial part of how whiteliness works, rather than being tied to a particular time period or political context. Having said that, it does seem that the optics of the Obama administration, the prominence of Black Lives Matter, the emergence of "Black Twitter", the increasing incorporation of Black people into mainstream media, and Donald Trump's "Reagan-esque" mobilisation of white fears, has intensified certain attitudes and behaviours regarding race and racism in recent times. It is thus my view that white people are currently experiencing a heightened sense of racial discrimination and more frequently exhibiting behaviours of white fragility evident throughout the twentieth century. This is significant because it means that those who agitate for change in elite universities are likely to be met with fiercer shows of resistance and forced to negotiate an even more hostile higher education environment; lending further credence to the idea, discussed in Chapter Five, of leaving these institutions altogether.

Dear White Academia

Given everything that has been said about whiteness, colour-evasiveness, neo-liberalism and the intensification of white fragility, the label "white", which groups together and racialises a selection of self-professed individuals, can be considered inflammatory; with white people perceiving it to be an accusatory, assaultive, misplaced and/or regressive generalisation. Like Justin Simien when he named his controversial Netflix show, I recognise that identifying the academy as white in my title is likely to spark alarm and trigger shows of white fragility amongst

white scholars. Despite this reality, I follow Simien in refusing to pander to those who exhibit such behaviour. By acknowledging the whiteness of the higher education institution in my title, I aim to immediately establish the fact universities and colleges are underpinned by a racist system which privileges white people. In other words, I do not consider this a point of contention that requires debating within the thesis itself.

The experience of researching and writing this thesis has left me cynical about white people's ability to accept and respond to the premise outlined above. *Dear White People* is under no illusion in this regard either. In the very last shot of the first series, Simien's Black students stare contemptuously into the camera at their watching white audience. At the end of a series that has exposed racism throughout, this look puts the impetus on white people to make some sort of change, whilst simultaneously suggesting that not much is expected of them. How will they respond? Will they make these exploits, these sacrifices of autonomy and general well-being worth it? The Black students seem to know the answer. Reni Eddo-Lodge (2017, pp. ix-x) certainly does as she writes in the introduction of her bestselling book, *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race*:

> I can no longer engage with the gulf of emotional disconnect that white people display when a person of colour articulates their experience. You can see their eyes shut down and harden. It's like treacle is poured into their ears, blocking their ear canals. It's like they can no longer hear us…their eyes glaze over in boredom or widen in indignation / their mouths start twitching as they get defensive. Their throats open up as they try to interrupt, itching to talk over you and not really listen, because they need to let you know you've got it wrong.

Despite her determination to stop addressing white people, the very existence of Eddo-Lodge's book indicates her inability to do so. As she says herself: 'every voice raised against racism chips away at its power. We can't afford to stay silent. This book is an attempt to speak' (Eddo-Lodge 2017, p.xvii). Ultimately, the stakes are too high for Black and other people of colour to stay silent on the topic of whiteness, whether or not we have much faith in the response from white people and even if we know such an endeavour will come at the cost of our individual and collective well-being. For that reason I now present a summary of the chapters that comprise my PhD.

Chapter Breakdown

In order to put my analysis of post-Civil Rights higher education in its proper context, I use **Chapter One** to trace the history of predominately white universities and colleges in

Northeast U.S, as well as the racist policies and practices they enacted from the beginning of the 20th century (when the modern university was first starting to take shape) to its end. This overview will not only demonstrate how higher education has historically worked as part of a comprehensive system of racial oppression but will also, in the process, show how North U.S generally and Northeastern universities in particular have always been invested in perpetuating the power and privileges of whiteness. Such an overview will be focalised through the literary works of W.E.B. Du Bois, William Faulkner and Joyce Carol Oates and, more specifically, their utilisation of the window as a metaphor for race relations. Attending to the different ways this metaphor is employed to create and explain material conditions allows me to identify distinct periods and shifts in higher education's history; from the advent of mass education, to the unrest of the Civil Rights Movement to the current, supposedly "post-racial" moment. It is from this point that I can attend to the way in which whiteness operates through and between architectural objects in the network of racial oppression that comprises the higher education environment in Northeast U.S.

In **Chapter Two** I use Joyce Carol Oates's *Black Girl, White Girl* to examine the metaphorical and material role the university desk plays in regard to the violation of Black students on campus. In this text, a privileged white student, Genna, recounts her experience of sharing a dormitory with a young Black woman, Minette, in an all-women's college during the 1970s. Despite the narrator's best efforts to pretend otherwise, her story reveals the litany of racial microaggressions that Minette was subjected to and makes clear that, regardless of colour-evasive rhetoric, a system of white dominance continues to underpin elite institutions in post-Civil Rights Northeast U.S. In my analysis of this text, I interrogate the way in which Genna treats the objects on Minette's desk as "cultural artefacts", fixing and reducing her Black roommate to a debilitating stereotype. I then go on to show how this oppressive relationship between the two women speaks to the specific experiences of Black women in higher education, using the works of various Black women in academia to evidence my point. Finally, I examine the role discourse plays in shaping the perceptions of race relations by showing how Genna uses her first-person narrative and role as a celebrated historian to not only ensure she is seen as a well-intentioned victim by her reader, but also to prohibit Minette from establishing any sort of discernible counter- or alternate-narrative. The capacity of counter- and alternate-narratives to help Black students resist the system of oppression they are subjected to in higher education is a topic I take up more fully in **Chapter Three**. Here, I use Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie's *Americanah* to explore how desk-tops (and more

specifically the internet) can be used to assert Black people's agency in ways that are denied in oppressive offline spaces; seemingly more conditioned by discriminating systems of class, race and nationality. *Americanah* is a novel that centres on Ifemelu, a Nigerian woman who journeys to America in order to obtain greater educational and financial opportunity by attending an American university. Despite early trials and tribulations, where Ifemelu struggles to find a job, pay rent and navigate racialisation and white privilege for the first time, *Americanah* is a story of success with the young Nigerian woman creating a hugely successful blog that results in her taking up a fellowship at Princeton, before returning to her native home in Lagos. In my analysis, I trouble the somewhat utopian account Adichie puts forward regarding race and the internet by highlighting how whiteliness manifests online and, in some cases, actually intensifies the oppression Black people experience in the context of higher education. Some of the issues I point to include: accessibility for dis/abled and working-class Black people, the capacity to co-opt ideas without citation or renumeration, the concomitant erasure of Black women's role as producers of knowledge, and the amplification of overt racial abuse.

This conversation about the desk-top continues in **Chapter Four** which I open with an examination of the role digital archiving can play as a tool for effective counter and alternate-storytelling in higher education. Despite the apparent benefits, I note how Zadie Smith's *On Beauty* seems to question the merits of digitally archiving Black history and culture within higher education because of how the intellectual endeavour detracts from actual political protest. Although seemingly about the internal trials and tribulations of one American family, the Belseys, this novel is an exploration of the different ways in which race and class intersect to govern individual and collective identities, ideological outlooks and social positions. In the context of higher education, Smith's novel uses the character of Carl to demonstrate how race and class can intersect to make Black working-class men feel alien and inferior in the university space. This is primarily conveyed through the door. Capitalising on the door's historically material and metaphorical function (which I outline in the chapter in question) Smith suggests that the work of Blacks students in PWIs will always ultimately be used to serve the interests of whiteness. I interrogate this position in the chapter by utilising theory on "hospitality" and applying it to the context of higher education. More specifically, I look at how the concept of "hospitality" applies to the university's implementation of Hip Hop; a principally Black working-class art form. Such an interrogation leaves the thesis at something an impasse. In **Chapter Five** I acknowledge the fact all the objects so far

considered have been rectangular in shape and speculate whether there is a connection between geometry and the regulation of Black bodies in higher education. I then proceed to examine circular shapes and objects from Hip Hop, namely the cypher and snare, to determine whether resistance is possible in higher education or if, as Smith suggests, it ultimately will not work. Using Paul Beatty's *The White Boy Shuffle*, I posit that the cypher is in fact a credible counter-hegemonic pedagogical tool best exercised in alternate spaces than the higher education institution; spaces where love and community can properly function. *White Boy Shuffle* is a bildungsroman that tracks the educational growth of central protagonist Gunnar Kaufman, who starts out as a naïve and confused student at an inner-city high school in Los Angeles, but eventually develops into a clued-up and cynical poet and student at Boston University. Gunnar is shown to negotiate white privilege and power in various educational spaces throughout this journey. The acts of resistance that prove most successful for Gunnar, essentially those which are driven by the character's comic rage, leads me to argue at the end of this thesis that adopting the cypher as a paradigm for educational practice and cultivating alternative educational spaces may constitute the most effective way of countering the system of white dominance operating in American society.

<u>Windows</u>

My focus on architectural objects implies that I am centrally concerned with the spatial manifestation of whiteliness, or systematic white dominance, in elite universities and colleges. However, in order to properly appreciate this relationship between whiteliness and space, it is important to pay considerable attention to history, for this provides the crucial context that explains the impact architectural objects have on Black bodies. As Remi Joseph-Salisbury (2018, p.46) argues: 'we must always be aware of (and beware of) the historical role that universities have played in the creation and perpetuation of white supremacy, and in the oppression of the Black and brown people more generally'. This is because 'in the material sense, to come to terms with this history is to rid ourselves of the debilitating historical amnesia that so often characterises contemporary debates', and 'in the more ideological sense, we should know the fundamental role that universities have played in constructing the Black body as non-human, sub-human, criminal, hypersexual and monstrous' (Joseph-Salisbury 2018, p. 46). The history of higher education has given shape to the system of white dominance that currently comprises universities and colleges; determining the discourse that permeates these institutions and the messages or meanings different objects within them project. Knowing this history helps us to better understand the effect different architectural objects in elite universities can have on Black bodies. It is only after learning about Cecil Rhodes's central role in the colonisation of Southern Africa, for instance, that we can comprehend the significance of his statue being erected on university campuses (South African History Online 2019). Recognising the intrinsic relationship between American higher education and systematic racial oppression, and tracing its development through history, also allows us to cultivate more effective approaches to resistance when faced with debilitating acts of racial violence. As I will argue in Chapter Five, an awareness of how foundational racism is to the structure of elite universities and colleges, achieved by studying the origins of higher education, ultimately compels us to re-evaluate our ambitions for these institutions and start to look elsewhere for alternate spaces of liberation.

Craig Steven Wilder has highlighted the pivotal role colonial colleges played in securing the systematic enslavement and subjugation of Black people in America, both on and off campus. In his detailed and damning historical account, *Ebony and Ivy*, Wilder (2013, p.11) reports that 'American colleges were not innocent or passive beneficiaries of conquest and

colonial slavery…the academy never stood apart from American slavery – in fact, it stood beside church and state as the third pillar of a civilisation built on bondage'. This chapter takes up from where Wilder's investigation lets off. Moving beyond colonial colleges, the chapter focuses its attention on the modern university instead. Educational scholars note that the modern university was properly established in the 1920s (Geiger 2015; Loss 2012). As such, this chapter will trace how the relationship between whiteliness and higher education developed from the beginning of the twentieth century to the beginning of the twenty-first. It will be my contention that whilst the expression of this relationship changes its form throughout the period, gradually moving from a position of exclusion to one of inclusion, the core racial dynamic remains the same. As well as outlining how elite universities maintained a racial hierarchy amidst ever-changing social and political contexts, this chapter will also work to dispel the myth that South U.S was solely responsible for implementing racist practices and policies; highlighting the central role elite universities in Northeast U.S throughout the twentieth century.

The chapter focalises its findings through a select few writers; namely, W.E.B. Du Bois, William Faulkner and Joyce Carol Oates. As a collective, these writers demonstrate how the concept and system of whiteness operated in elite higher education institutions at various stages of the twentieth century. Significantly, they all rely on architectural metaphors which revolve around the window. By utilising such metaphors, these writers show how the material impact of physical objects on Black bodies is augmented by racist discourse within elite universities and colleges. Initially, the chapter starts with preeminent scholar and activist W.E.B. Du Bois, who developed an approach to scholarship that supports the central premise of this thesis. Willie Baber (1992, p.351) notes that 'Du Bois was keenly aware of the one-sided war against racist-turn of the century books' and thus decided to counter such literature 'by purposefully combin(ing) the goals of research with the political and imaginative role of the artist'. According to Baber (1992, p.351), Du Bois turned to the artist (as I have) 'in part because of the limitation of social science and part as an academic strategy'. Understanding the role and power of discourse in shaping the material reality of Black people, as well as the artist's ability to capture invisible but felt forces and networks, Du Bois relied on architectural metaphor to articulate the motivations and devastating effect of "caste segregation" inside and outside of higher education in the early twentieth century.[13] The imminent analysis of Du

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[13] Yogita Goyal has analysed in some detail Du Bois's use of the term "caste segregation" throughout the Black scholar's career. He argues that whilst they are clearly not the same thing, Du Bois conceptualises 'race and

Bois's use of a glass metaphor in *Dusk of Dawn* (originally published in 1940) will provide the template for examining the window metaphor in texts by William Faulkner and Joyce Carol Oates later on in the chapter.

Moving further into the twentieth century, Faulkner uses the window metaphor in his canonical text, *Absalom, Absalom!*, (originally published in 1936) to explore the anxieties of elite North U.S universities and their white students in the wake of mass education in the 1920s and 1930s, which threatened to disturb the white hegemony established there since the colonial period. He also demonstrates how racist discourse was disseminated by these institutions in order to nullify the growing threat of racial progress. In *Black Girl, White Girl*, Oates shows how discourse produced by white academics in the post-Civil Rights period continues to be used for this purpose. She highlights how it is used more insidiously than before though, with "benevolent" white liberals claiming to be at the service of the Black students they oppress. Whilst examining the role of discourse, Oates provides the contemporary iteration of the window metaphor, using it to convey the insidiousness of the colour-evasive ideology currently pervading America. Despite the apparent insignificance of race following the Civil Rights Movement, Oates demonstrates that windows can both metaphorically and materially amplify the alienation and violation of Black students in elite, predominately white institutions.

Du Bois, Baudrillard and Breaking Glass

During his lengthy career, W.E.B. Du Bois devoted himself to exposing the intricate, often invisible, but debilitating workings of whiteness in American society. This is demonstrated in his analysis of "caste segregation" in *Dusk of Dawn* which, considering its sheer power and profundity, is worth quoting in full:

> It is difficult to let others see the full psychological meaning of caste segregation. It is as though one, looking out from a dark cave in a side of an impending mountain, sees the world passing and speaks to it; speaks courteously and persuasively, showing them how these entombed souls are hindered in their natural movement, expression, and development; and how their loosening from prison would be a matter not simply of courtesy, sympathy, and help to them, but aid to all the world. One talks on evenly and logically in this way, but notices that the passing throng does not even turn its head, or if it does, glances curiously and walks on. It gradually penetrates the minds of the prisoners that the people passing do not hear; that same thick sheet of invisible

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caste as analogous formations' and 'used the language of caste to describe African-American experience under Jim Crow' (Goyal 2019, p.59). For the purpose of this chapter, I will treat any reference to "caste" as a reference to the formation of race.

but horribly tangible plate glass is between them and the world. They get excited; they talk louder; they gesticulate. Some of the passing world stop in curiosity; these gesticulations seem so pointless; they laugh and pass on. They still either do not hear at all, or hear but dimly, and even what they hear, they do not understand. Then the people within may become hysterical. They may scream and hurl themselves against the barriers, hardly realising in their bewilderment that they are screaming in a vacuum unheard and that their antics may actually seem funny to those outside looking in. They may even, here and there, break through in blood and disfigurement, and find themselves faced by a horrified, implacable, and quite overwhelming mob of people frightened for their own existence (Du Bois 1984, p.131).

In this passage, Du Bois uses the metaphor of glass to masterfully convey the oppressive and dehumanising racial dynamic that has existed between white and Black people, in America, since slavery. Beyond demarcating the 'invisible but horribly tangible' line that stretches between the two racialised groups, as they navigate different worlds in both de facto and de jure systems of segregation, the materiality of glass encapsulates the "logic" that underpins such racially oppressive systems. Reference to an American system of segregation during the early twentieth century will likely recall Jim Crow (a lengthy period of lawfully enforced discrimination and disenfranchisement in South U.S) but it should be stated that a similar situation existed in North U.S as well (Alexander 2012). According to Cary Wintz (1988, p.42): 'Northern Blacks fared hardly better than their Southern counterparts (at this time). Throughout North U.S, theatres, restaurants and hotels discriminated against Blacks (sic), often in violation of civil rights laws.' Although Black and white people ostensibly operated in closer proximity in North U.S, they were actually locked into a system of de facto segregation which sustained racial hierarchies. How this corresponds to Du Bois's use of the glass metaphor is made clearer after reading Jean Baudrillard's *The System of Objects*. In a broader discussion about the 'structures of atmosphere', Baudrillard (2005, p.42) notes that:

Above all…glass is the most effective conceivable material expression of the fundamental ambiguity of "atmosphere": the fact it is at once proximity and distance, intimacy and refusal of intimacy, communication and non-communication. Whether as packaging, window or partition, glass is the basis of a transparency without transition; we can see, but cannot touch.

This seems to encapsulate Du Bois's point perfectly. The proximity of the social world (namely, the white world) to Black people in Northeast U.S during the early twentieth-century does not constitute an intimate relationship (which implies a level of knowledge and understanding) as might be logically assumed, for the white world does not (and does not want to) know or understand the people behind the glass. Despite the promise of communication that proximity provides, the white world 'do not hear' the 'courteous' and

'persuasive' speakers who try to show them how Black people are 'hindered in their natural movement, expression and development' and how 'their loosening from prison would be a matter not simply of courtesy, sympathy, and help to them, but aid to all the world'. As Baudrillard (2005, p.43) highlights, glass 'sets up an invisible but material (or horribly tangible) caesura which prevents such communication from becoming a real opening in the world'. All protest is thus doomed to fall on deaf ears, even if 'they (behind the glass) get excited…talk louder…gesticulate'. For although 'some of the passing world stop in curiosity…they laugh and pass on. They still either do not hear at all, or hear but dimly, and even what they hear, they do not understand'.[14] Those in the white world have no interest in actually knowing the Black people on the other side of the glass. When 'here and there' a Black person presumes to 'break through in blood and disfigurement' they 'find themselves faced by a horrified, implacable, and quite overwhelming mob of people frightened for their very own existence'. A Black person breaking through the glass and making themselves known to the white world simply means risking the consequences of its open hostility.

The fear underpinning such hostility reflects a "logic" system that associates Black people (Black men in particular) with crime, violence and hypersexuality; characteristics that are used to evidence Black people's desire and capacity to wipe out the white race entirely, whether through murder or miscegenation. Miscegenation, it should be noted, was a particular concern for white people in the early twentieth century because of biological understandings of race prevailing at the time. According to Melissa Stein (2012, p.143):

> Scientists' sustained attention to race and disease represented a nexus of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century anxiety about contagion, race, suicide, evolution and degeneration. For these scientists, variations in disease susceptibility and morality indicated pervasive biological difference between the races and thus naturalised a racial hierarchy premised on such differences.

The grounding of race in biology meant scientists (both in North and South U.S) stoked white people's fear of Black people's blood. By positing that such blood would threaten the purity, power and even the preservation of white people's lineage, scientists justified and even necessitated the prohibition of racial intermixing on a social and sexual level; which, as Stein

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[14] This comment on the refusal of white people to listen to Black people is reiterated by Reni Eddo-Lodge (2017, p.x) in her award-winning book, *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race*: 'Their eyes glaze over in boredom or widen in indignation. Their mouths start twitching as they get defensive. Their throats open up as they try to interrupt, itching to talk over you but not really listen…even if they can hear you, they're not really listening'.

implies, was primarily about preserving a racial hierarchy. Du Bois's image of a bloodied Black body bursting through glass into the white world would have therefore had extra resonance in the early-twentieth century. Though less tethered to a particular time, the disfigurement of Du Bois's hypothetical Black figure also speaks to long-standing fears of Black people's bodies. In his essay 'Crippin' Blackness', Viji Kuppan (2018, p.65) outlines how race and dis/ability have been intersecting systems of oppression since slavery: 'Carnal practices of injury and mutilation were not only to quell (even the possibility) of insurrection but were used to undergird ideas of Black imperfections, monstrosity and depravity'. This violent method of repression continued in the early-twentieth century with freak shows, which 'reinforced ideas about the monstrous and defective racialised and disabled Other', as well as Ugly Laws, which were 'used to eject "undesirable" bodies from public spaces' (Kuppan 2018, p.67). Ultimately then, Du Bois's image of a Black body breaking through glass in 'blood and disfigurement' reflected the racist projections of the white gaze operating at the time. As the above references to science, law and entertainment suggest, these projections were curated, consolidated and circulated by the core institutions of American society in order to compel and justify the continued subjugation of Black people.

By drawing attention to racist projections of the Black body, Du Bois uses the glass metaphor to point to another, more deep-rooted fear felt by white people: having to acknowledge the myth of their own superiority. As was explained in the introduction and is evidenced in the analysis above, whiteliness is legitimated by associating blackness with negative connotations. By emphasising the lasciviousness, monstrosity and violence of Black people, white individuals and institutions necessitate the leadership and control of rational, objective and moral white people.[15] The emergence of a Black person into the white world, where they might actually be seen and heard properly thus threatens to undermine the "logic" underpinning whiteliness. This means that being hostile and keeping them back behind the glass becomes of paramount importance. Reference to glass is not incidental here for it once again provides the perfect metaphor for the process Du Bois is describing. According to Baudrillard (2005, pp.42-3 [original italics]): 'Glass works exactly like atmosphere in that it allows nothing but the *sign* of its content to merge, in that it interposes itself in transparency…between the materiality of things and the materiality of needs'. The function

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[15] As George Yancy (2008, p.3) explains: 'Whiteness comes replete with its assumptions for what to expect of a Black body (or non-white body), how dangerous and unruly it is, how unlawful, criminal, and hypersexual it is. The discourse and comportment of whites (sic) are shaped through tacit racist scripts, calcified modes of being that enable them to sustain and perpetuate their whitely-being-in-the-world'.

of glass is thus a useful analogy for the process of reducing real, multi-dimensional Black people to the negative sign of blackness in order to serve white people's need to maintain and perpetuate the myth of white superiority. The pertinence of the glass metaphor is reinforced by the connotations conventionally attributed to the material itself. In the words of Baudrillard (2005, p.43):

> (Glass) is of a moral order: it's purity, reliability and objectivity, along with all those connotations of hygiene and prophylaxis which make it truly the material of the future – a future, after all, that is said to be one of disavowal of the body and of the primary and organic function, in the name of a radiant and functional objectivity.

Purity, reliability and objectivity are all core connotations of whiteness which, as Baudrillard asserts, combine together to suggest the 'disavowal of the body'; the ultimate achievement for a system that insists on the association of whiteness with the mind (Dyer 1997). In this sense then, glass can be considered an important ideological instrument of whiteliness.

This is not actually the stretch it may seem. It was noted in the introduction that current connotations of whiteness and blackness were properly established during the Enlightenment period. Hisham Elkadi (2006, p.8) highlights in his book *Culture of Glass* that 'the political and philosophical environment of the seventeenth century led to the abandonment of stained glass and more use of clear glass'. This was because 'the age of enlightenment and rationalism favoured clarity and quantity of light in architecture rather than the aura of mysticism introduced by stained glass' (Elkadi 2006, p.8). Given its clear role in projecting the core values of the Enlightenment period, I argue that glass has historically been used to amplify the key ideological components of whiteliness. This idea is reinforced by The Great Exhibition of 1851, which was situated in a newly designed building called the Crystal Palace; a structure that was made almost entirely from large plates of glass. Ostensibly, The Great Exhibition ('forerunner to all future world fairs') was 'designed to highlight the highest achievements in art, design, science and industry throughout the world' (Merrill 2012, p.322). However, in displaying colonised peoples and cultures in a series of exhibitions, it more pointedly proved the global reach and might of whiteliness. As Lisa Merrill (2012, p.323) reports: 'Spectators entered into this kind of "ideologically loaded space" that helped construct and reinforce a visual rhetoric which, for the price of admission, sold "difference" and "otherness" – whether in material products or people – as spectacle; a commodity to be gazed or gawked at along with other objects of art and industry'. Significantly, Elkadi (2006, p.35) highlights that 'the form and material of (this) building served the projection of cultural and economic wealth

rather than serving the identities of the users'. In other words, by seemingly eroding the line between outside and inside, the transparent material was used as an ideological tool to further project whiteliness, as it exposed and magnified white people's dominance over the world. This ideological function of glass is subversively exploited by Du Bois in *Dusk of Dawn*, who uses the value-laden material to magnify the mechanisms of whiteness that create such oppressive racial dynamics in early-twentieth century America.

Glass and Higher Education

According to Du Bois, Black people would be able to break free of their glass container and the ideological system which held it in place if a select group of them, a "Talented Tenth", endeavoured to rise above it first and enter the realm of higher education. The reason Du Bois felt the "Talented Tenth" were able to escape the confines of the glass container becomes clearer after considering his use of a different racialised metaphor, the Veil. Donald Gibson (1996, p.xi) highlights in the introduction to *The Souls of Black Folk* that, like the glass metaphor, Du Bois's veil suggests 'separation, literally, through segregation, and, psychologically, through the attitudes of whites (sic) toward Blacks (sic)'. Although he acknowledges 'just exactly what Du Bois means by living above the veil is not entirely clear', Gibson (1996, p. xiii) speculates that 'it doubtless implies escape from the confines of the veil through the capacity to compete successfully with whites (sic), with those who live outside it'. Essentially then, the "Talented Tenth" could escape because of their ability to cohere to white standards and values (i.e. intelligence and rationality). Du Bois's own escape is communicated at the end of *The Souls of Black Folk*, where the scholar (1996, p.79) concludes with the hope that:

> If somewhere in this whirl and chaos of things there dwells Eternal Good, pitiful yet masterful, then anon in His good time America shall rend the Veil and the prisoned shall go free. Free, free as the sunshine trickling down the morning into these high windows of mine, fresh as yonder fresh young voices welling up to me from the cavers of brick and mortar – swelling with song, instinct with life, tremulous treble and darkening bass.

Du Bois's spatial positioning is important to note here because it speaks to his theory about racial progress. As the above passage shows, there is a clear division between the scholar and the 'fresh young voices' who still dwell in the 'caverns of brick and mortar' or indeed 'the dark cave of an impending mountain'. Significantly, this division is again imposed by glass. Or, more specifically, the glass pane of windows. The malleable metaphor is meant to figure here differently though. Where the glass on the ground separated Black people from the white

world and reduced them to negative distortions of who they truly are, in this iteration, glass signals the righteous, self-imposed isolation of a scholar committing himself to an important cause.[16]

Du Bois considered his academic work essential because, for him, Black people who had the ability to attend higher education institutions (or situate themselves behind such 'high windows') should use the acquired skills and knowledge to help those who did not. Looking back at the period in which he developed this theory, Du Bois (1984, p.70) notes how he:

> believed in the higher education of the Talented Tenth who through their knowledge of modern culture could guide the American Negro into higher civilisation. I knew that without this, the Negro would have to accept white leadership, and that such leadership could not always be trusted to guide this group into self-realisation and to its highest cultural possibilities.

Du Bois's distrust of white leaders was well founded given their corruption of HBCUs. Jalil Bishop Mustaffa (2017, p.716) shares the point made by Allen and Jewell that whilst 'white missionaries' donations were crucial in establishing early HBCUs', this assistance 'granted white people influence or positions on trustee boards. Operating on the premise that Blacks (sic) were helpless or inferior, these white "allies" prioritised agricultural techniques and trades in HBCU curricular'.[17] Mustaffa (2017. P.716) condemns this as a 'form of cultural violence and direct violence' as she contends that 'curriculum management was about marginalising culture and knowledge and preserving an exploitative labour force'. The coercion of Black people into pursuing vocational subjects instead of liberal art ones at HBCUs demonstrates how despite ostensibly serving the interests of Black students, these institutions were deeply connected to the system of white dominance in America. An increased focus on agricultural and mechanical education meant that Black people were essentially being restricted to poor paying jobs where there was little if any room for social or economic advancement. This issue particularly concerned Du Bois and reinforced his belief that if a

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[16] African-American writers have consistently used verticality as a metaphor to explore different modes of resistance to racial oppression in the US. As well as Du Bois, notable examples include Nella Larsen (1929) with *Passing*, Ralph Ellison with *Invisible Man* (2016 [originally published in 1952]) and Colson Whitehead (2000) with *The Intuitionist*. It will be argued in Chapter Five that, despite Du Bois framing racial progress as a literal and metaphorical ascent towards higher education, there is historical precedent which suggests liberation is more likely to be achieved by descending into the Underground.

[17] The influence and ideology of white philanthropists in relation to American HBCUs is highlighted in Ellison's (2016, p.45) *Invisible Man*. Here, the founder of the Invisible Man's college outlines his vision for the attending students: 'As you develop you must remember that I am dependent upon you to learn my fate. Through you and your fellow students I become, let us say, three hundred teachers, seven hundred trained mechanics, eight hundred skilled farmers, and so on. That way I can observe in terms of living personalities to what extent my money, my time and my hopes have been fruitfully invested'.

selection of brilliant Black people pursued a liberal arts education in the elite institutions then racial progress would be secured.

The reality of elite higher education in Northeast U.S did not bear out Du Bois's belief in the early-twentieth century. A social studies report produced by Atlanta University (and edited by Du Bois) in 1910, revealed that 'today, no Negro has been admitted to Princeton, and at Yale and some other leading institutions, they are rather endured than encouraged' (Du Bois 1910, p.28). In fact, by 1900, Harvard had only graduated 11 Black people, which was the most from what Du Bois called the 'larger universities'. Oberlin, a 'second rank institution' had graduated the greatest number at 128 (Du Bois 1910, p.29). For those few Black students who did attend elite institutions in North U.S, Du Bois's (1968, pp.134-5) own experience at Harvard highlights the kind of hostile environment they were likely to be exposed to:

> Following the attitudes which I adopted in the South, I sought no friendships among white fellow students, not even acquaintanceships. Of course I wanted friends, but I could not seek them. I made no attempt to contribute to class periodicals, since the editors were not interested in my major interest. Only one organisation did I try to enter, and I ought to have known better than to make this attempt. But I did have a good singing voice and loved music, so I entered the competition for the Glee Club. I ought to have known that Harvard could not afford to have a Negro on its Glee Club travelling about the country. Quite naturally I was rejected.

Du Bois's testimony shows that, despite infiltrating an elite academic institution, he was completely isolated from the people, activities, and general culture that operated there. Recognising that he would be rejected by any white person or organisation he attempted to engage with, Du Bois imposed a (necessary) strategy of self-segregation. Even though Du Bois (1984, p.36) attended Harvard in the early 1890s, the reaction such behaviour elicited would be recognisable today: 'For the most part I do not doubt that I was voted a somewhat selfish and self-centred "grind" with a chip on my shoulder and a sharp tongue'.[18] Such a response (which serves to reify a certain image of Black people who refuse to be cowed by mechanisms of whiteness) is particularly frustrating when, after setting aside all instincts to ignore university life, Du Bois's every fear and suspicion of racially motivated exclusion is confirmed by the Glee Club. The overall feeling that this stirs in the brilliant Black student is summarised

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[18] As we will see in Chapter One's analysis of *Black Girl, White Girl*, Minette's refusal to assimilate into the culture of her college results in a similar characterisation: 'Minette had made herself generally disliked in Haven House and elsewhere on campus, for her fiercely outspoken and independent ways. She'd snubbed friendly overtures and spoken out bluntly in situations where others spoke more diplomatically or evasively' (Oates 2007, p.57).

by his poignant statement that: 'I was in Harvard but I was not of it and realised all the irony of "Fair Harvard". I sang it because I liked the music' (Du Bois 1984, p.37).

Reflecting on this account of life at Harvard in the late-nineteenth century, it seems fair to say that even as one of the "privileged" few Black people who were able to attend an elite institution in North U.S, Du Bois was made to stay behind the 'thick sheet of invisible but horribly tangible plate of glass' and 'look out from the dark cave in a side of an impending mountain'. Keeping Du Bois at arms-length, behind the glass, allowed white staff and students to restrict him to the negative and debilitating sign of blackness and thus maintain the "logic" of whiteliness. This is something that Du Bois struggled to accept, as it undermined his entire approach to racial progress. Willie Baber (1992, p. 350) notes that Du Bois's 'beliefs in achievements, excellence, and democracy…curtailed (his) life-long search for a strategy suitable for fighting back'. Aspiring to and even exhibiting the skills and qualities ideologically reserved for white people in America was not (and has never been) enough to overcome a system of white dominance, which continued to subjugate Black people even when they were in extremely close proximity to white people. As Baber (1992, p.350) puts it: 'He had studied in Germany, acquired a doctorate from Harvard, and published *The Philadelphia Negro* and numerous studies of the Negro condition while at the University of Pennsylvania and Atlanta University; all of this was noted but proved ineffective against the power of the colour bar'.

As the twentieth century progressed and the policy of mass education emerged in the 1920s, the ostracization of Black students in elite North U.S institutions intensified. According to Roger Geiger (2015, p.474):

> Greater number of Black students combined with increasing public intolerance may have made the interwar years (1918-39) the low point for academic race relations in the North. In 1927 at least 1,500 Blacks (sic) attended predominately white institutions, 115 at the University of Illinois and 114 at the University of Kansas. There and elsewhere, Black students were systematically excluded from campus residences, social activities and some facilities.

This is corroborated by Stephanie Evans (2009, p.54) who argues that 'no matter how many students attended college, they were still seen as ignorant, sex craved brutes as portrayed by D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and possessing no more wit or mental stability than the air-headed habitual liar represented by Butterfly McQueen's *Gone with the Wind* (1939) character "Prissy"'. Furthermore, 'Black men who struggled to get an education also 'fought with stereotypes of animal physicality, self-aggrandisement, and buffoonery, in the "Buck", "Jim

Dandy" and "Zip Coon" stereotypes' (Evans 2009, p.54). If that was not enough, Black students who attended North U.S universities were also 'subject to demeaning lampoons in student newspapers and ridiculed in student minstrel shows' (Geiger 2015, p.474). Despite their physical presence in the elite educational institutions, Black students were being pushed back behind the glass and held ever more firmly in place.

The ability of architectural metaphor to amplify and expose the relationship between discourse and whiteliness in higher education, seen here and throughout the analysis of Du Bois's glass metaphor, is something that William Faulkner exploits with his use of the window metaphor in *Absalom, Absalom!* This dense, complex novel revolves around Thomas Sutpen, a white working-class man who seeks to obtain power and privilege by building a grand house, the Sutpen's Hundred, and producing a lineage that confirms and consolidates his racial and class status. The novel is told in fragments, as multiple narrators share their respective versions of Sutpen's story, which ultimately ends in ruin. For one of these narrators, Shreve, a white student at Harvard University, this is because Sutpen unwittingly crosses fixed racial boundaries. It is to this particular narrative, which is positioned as the most authoritative and convincing of all accounts, that the chapter now turns, as it moves from an analysis of higher education in the early-twentieth century to the interwar years. Significantly, the move from Du Bois to Faulkner not only marks a development in the historical period being examined but also the racial dynamic as well. As Faulkner's novel reveals and reflects on, the emergence of mass higher education in the 1920s meant that America transitioned from a policy of segregation in the early-twentieth century to one increasingly of integration during the interwar years. As we will see, strong resistance from elite universities and colleges, which raised fees and established exclusionary personality tests whilst propagating racist discourse across America, meant that this policy of integration was not properly implemented until the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s.

Absalom, Absalom! and the Threat of Open Windows

According to Roger Geiger (2015, p.35), the 'growth of racial prejudice on Northern campuses in the early-twentieth century is a story seldom told'. Though it may come as a surprise to some of his readers, William Faulkner is one writer who has in fact told this story. In *Absalom, Absalom!*, Faulkner exposes how elite higher education institutions in Northeast U.S utilised their position as authoritative sites of knowledge production to disseminate racist discourse and consolidate a racial hierarchy increasingly under threat by

mass higher education. In addition, Faulkner examines the characteristics of whiteness that inspired anxieties about the new educational policy and the institutional response to it. The nexus for this exposé is the malleable metaphor of the window. In contrast to Du Bois's work, where glass is shown to first separate Black people from the social world and then a few Black scholars from the rest of the Black community, there is no division between academia and Black people in Faulkner's architectural formulation, as a Harvard window is left wide open to signal the feared effects of the emergent policy of mass higher education. With this use of the window metaphor, Faulkner dramatizes the terror of white academics and demonstrates how it intensified the ever-increasing threat of Black students descending onto elite university campuses and transgressing fixed social boundaries. However, whilst opening the window and thus removing the glass serves to acknowledge the growing anxiety about mass higher education, it also signals how white academics alleviated such concerns. By having Harvard student Shreve (a characteristically white and thus authoritative narrator of the novel) open the window up and leave only its outer frame in place, Faulkner shows how white academics used discourse to help frame stereotypes of blackness, rooted in "science", in order to repel Black students from the university space and restore racial hierarchy during the interwar years.

Critics have failed to identify let alone focus on Faulkner's exploration of the relationship between whiteness and elite North U.S universities when analysing his novel, *Absalom, Absalom!* Indeed, the fact Harvard features in the text tends to be trivialised by critics, if it is commented on at all. For instance, in Philip Weinstein's (1992, p.132-3) analysis of the novel, he notes in a small aside that: 'Harvard is a passive backdrop, producing Shreve and a dormitory but little else'.[20] As I will show, situating Shreve in the symbolically charged space of Harvard is not at all incidental to Faulkner's work.[21] It is a conscious manoeuvre that allows Faulkner to comment on the role elite institutions in Northeast U.S play in perpetuating whiteliness. One reason that critics have overlooked such social commentary is because they have underestimated the importance of Shreve's characteristic whiteness in the novel. Marta

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[20] James Snead (1986, p.130) also argues that: '*Absalom, Absalom!* is not primarily either about Sutpen's House or about Harvard or Jefferson in 1909. The narrator of the novel "sets" us in these contexts, but the individual narrator's hardly mention the physical setting in which they find themselves relating their stories. Quentin, Rosa, Shreve, and Mr Compson engage their listeners, but ignore their environments'.

[21] Natasha Warikoo (2016, p.17) reinforces the significance of specifically situating Shreve in Harvard University when she notes how 'ordinary Americans' view 'Harvard as a symbol of excellence, opportunity and meritocracy'. In fact, she says, the 'name connotes excellence, exclusivity and achievement to many around the world'.

Puxan-Oliva (2007, pp.550-1) notes that 'Shreve's terrible prediction about white supremacy and white purity has been benevolently interpreted (as parody or sarcasm for instance) or qualified as exaggerated…other times it has simply been disregarded, explicitly considered as not relevant to the comprehension of the novel'. Though not necessarily worded in this way, there seems to be a sense amongst some critics that reading Shreve's racist statement as a reflection of his own internal racism is over-simplistic or even naïve. Perhaps this is partly because it contradicts what appears to be one of the novel's central points, which is that racial categories are arbitrary constructions that prove destructive to all. Or perhaps it is due to the difficulty of reconciling Shreve's racism with a white Harvard student who is not from South U.S. Either way, as I will show, Shreve's racialisation does in fact inform his influential and ideologically driven account of the Sutpen legend, which emphasises the threat racial intermixing poses to the future of the white race.

In an effort to both reflect and expose the workings of whiteliness, Faulkner emphasises Shreve's racialisation throughout the novel and draws attention to the associated characteristics which grant those racialised as white their authority and power. This is demonstrated by the description of Shreve's body as a 'naked torso pink-gleaming and baby smooth, cherubic, almost hairless, the twin moons of his spectacles glinting against his moonlike rubicund face' (Faulkner 1995, p.181). As Richard Dyer (1997, p.21) points out, the paradox of whiteness means that 'white must be seen to be white, yet whiteness resides as a race in invisible properties and whiteness as power is maintained by being unseen'. The string of adjectives used in the description above, 'gleaming', 'glinting', 'smooth', 'hairless', and especially 'moonlike' captures this paradox by conveying a translucence that renders Shreve both visible and invisible at the same time. Significantly, such translucence creates the impression that Shreve's body blurs into the surrounding space. It thus suggests a synergy between the student and Harvard University, with the implication being that Shreve is an extension and central characterising figure of the elite institution. In other words, Faulkner's depiction of the white student reflects the whiteness of the university itself.

Such synergy is important considering the additional characteristics that are attributed to Shreve as a result of his whiteness. For example, it is striking that, in the description above, the student's naked body is said to be specifically 'baby' smooth, as this makes overt what is suggested implicitly by the words 'pink' and 'hairless'; that Shreve is infantilised in the novel

and, by extension, marked as innocent.[22] Shreve's innocence is reinforced by the description of his body as 'cherubic', which is repeated later in the novel:

> His (Quentin's face) was lowered. He spoke still in that curious, that almost sullen flat tone which had caused Shreve to watch him from the beginning with intent, detached speculation and curiosity, to watch him still from behind the expression of cherubic and erudite amazement (Faulkner 1995, p.256).

A 'cherub' (©2019) can be defined as both a 'beautiful and innocent child' and a being 'who is reputed to excel specially in knowledge'. The relevance of this particular connotation is confirmed in the passage above as Shreve is said to be conveying an expression of 'cherubic *and erudite*' amazement (my italics). This establishes a clear connection between Shreve, whiteness, innocence and knowledge, which is reinforced by the fact Shreve is said to watch Quentin with 'intent and detached speculation'. Here, Shreve assumes the analytical distance and objectivity that Dyer (1997, pp.38-9) argues is 'crucial to the development of white identity'. Such positioning is important considering Shreve's role as co-creator of the Sutpen legend. By implying that the knowledge Shreve produces is innocent, or devoid of personal interest or ideology, it creates the impression that the white student's narrative is a reflection of the "Truth" and thus grants it additional authority.[23] Hyatt Wagoner comments on this aspect of Shreve's narrative when discussing the student's unfounded claim that Charles Bon was being exploited by a dishonest lawyer. The critic states that: 'This is one of the most extreme examples of the conjectural method of the whole search that Quentin and Shreve are engaged in, and it is made to seem natural [and] right because Shreve, who cannot be accused of excessive closeness to the material, offers the speculation' (Waggoner 1967, p.178). Shreve's apparent distance and objectivity from events, which Faulkner highlights is a reflection of his characteristic whiteness, grants him an authority over knowledge that is not extended to the other characters in the novel. This includes Quentin, with whom Shreve shares the university space and construction of the narrative.

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[22] Critics have identified innocence as being an intrinsic element of Shreve's character, with Robert Warren (1966, p.9), for example, casually referring to him as the 'innocent Canadian' when making a broader argument about his relationship with Quentin. Significantly, P.J. Heather details how 'classic English literature, proverbs and sayings, observe that the ideas of purity and innocence are…intimately presented in the minds of our people…when white is introduced' (in Dyer 1997, p.73).

[23] As Thomas Albert Howard (p.84) suggests, this is because from the Enlightenment period onwards: 'To obtain scientific and professional validation, the pursuit of objectivity became the goal, the high road to intellectual respectability and disciplinary autonomy'.

Shreve emerges as the singular authority in the elite space of Harvard because of Quentin's inability to cohere to the core characteristics of whiteness. Passionate instead of rational, caught up in the past instead of detached from it, Quentin is essentially depicted as having "non-white traits".[24] This is reinforced by *The Sound and the Fury*, where Quentin also figures as a Harvard student. In her reading of the novel, Taylor Hagood (2011, p.17) highlights that 'the white aristocratic male southerner' feels 'marginalised' when 'the three boys whom he encounters on the last day of his life think "he talks like they do in the minstrel shows…like a coloured"'. Similarly, in *Absalom, Absalom!*, Quentin's association with so-called 'coloured' attributes ensures that he, in direct contrast to Shreve, feels estranged from Harvard. Whilst Shreve is shown to be so connected to the university that the very boundaries of his body blur into it, Quentin can only comment on the 'strange lamplit table…strange room…strange iron New England snow' (Faulkner 1995, p.173). Coming moments after Shreve's introduction to the novel, where the snow on the Canadian's overcoat sleeve establishes both his whiteness and synergy with the surrounding environment, this aversion to the university space indicates that what fundamentally alienates Quentin from Harvard is his failure to pertain to the ideals of whiteness.[25] Considering what was said about the metaphorical function of light in the introduction, the fact that Quentin finds the illuminated table 'strange' subtly suggests he does not possess the rationality or intellectual authority attributed to Shreve or the elite educational institution itself. As will be shown, elite universities and their white academics exploited this authority and power in order to perpetuate racist stereotypes and combat the perceived threat of mass higher education in the interwar years.

Windows and Mass Higher Education

The emergence of what came to be called "mass higher education" during the interwar years posed a clear threat to elite institutions invested in the systematic dominance of white people. Incorporating previously marginalised social groups, including Black people, into universities and colleges granted them access to mechanisms of power which could be used to destabilise prevailing hierarchies that underpinned American society. Foundations for mass higher education were first laid by the Land Grant Movement in the late-nineteenth century which

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[24] Donald Kartiganer (1963, p.366) notes how the 'difference between them (Shreve and Quentin) still outrank the similarities: the Deep South vs Canada; warmth vs frigidity, Shreve's basic indifference and ironic aloofness to the Sutpen's story vs Quentin's passionate involvement, which is ultimately his destruction'.

[25] 'There was snow on Shreve's overcoat sleeve, his ungloved blond square hand red and raw with cold, vanishing' (Faulkner 1995, p.173).

provided both 'access to college for the industrial classes, meaning all non-professionals who worked in the productive economy' and 'education in the practical arts, meaning the applied fields of knowledge' (Geiger 2015, p.284). According to Geiger (2015, p.532), 'the Land Grand Movement effected American higher education directly through the institutions it spawned and indirectly through the values it inculcated of broad access and advanced instruction in practical fields'. Open to all who had the necessary qualifications and backed by public funding (meaning admission fees could lowered) public universities and colleges saw their numbers rise significantly. Ideologically opposed to this opening up of higher education, elite institutions (whose 'foremost enrolment objective' was 'to retain the patronage of eastern-upper class [read: white] families') actively implemented policies and practices that would prohibit the entry of those who were not of the desired demographic (Geiger 2015, p.448). Christopher Loss (2012, p.30) reports that 'elite private schools in the North-East – led by Harvard, Yale and Princeton – raised tuition and established selective and exclusionary admission policies to slow the rate of institutional growth'. In Loss's view (2012, p.49) this was racially motivated as 'the interest in personality (an integral part of the new exclusionary admission policies) was partially predicated on the desire to cull Jewish and other supposed racial and ethnic undesirables from the admission cycle'. Such "undesirables" were thought to be 'depleting the nation's intellectual capacities' (Loss 2012, p.21). As Stephanie Evans (2009, p.50) notes, 'despite mass migration to the North (following the First World War), New England Schools that historically had been at the forefront of Black education all but shut off opportunities for African-Americans'. Ultimately then, 'by devaluing anything Black, particularly an HBCU degree, and limiting Black enrolment at PWIs, older white Northern colleges maintained their claim as elite, "superior" institutions' (Evans 2009, p.51).

Faulkner uses the symbol of the window to convey both the threat of mass higher education and the response of elite North U.S universities to it. With the night drawing on as Shreve and Quentin co-create the Sutpen narrative, we are made increasingly aware of the dormitory's penetrability; with Quentin said to take note of each time Shreve decides to leave the room and to watch the dormitory's open window in utter horror: 'He lay still and rigid on his back with the cold New England night on his face and the blood running warm in his rigid body and limbs, breathing hard but slow, his eyes wide open upon the window' (Faulkner 1995, p.373). Betina Entzminger (2006, p.101) argues that this window's threshold 'represents the familiar boundaries between our culture's definition of Black and white, male and female, gay and straight', making it a 'liminal space'. Quentin is all too aware of this fact. He knows

that the window provides the final dividing line between himself and the realities of race he is unwilling to accept. To use Du Bois's formulation of the metaphor, the glass that comprises Harvard's window distorts the image of Black people restricted (as a consequence) to the other side and allows the Southerner (as well as the other Harvard students) to reduce them to negative signs that reinforce a system of white dominance. This explains why the threat of large groups of Black people breaking through the glass, or crossing the university's threshold, in blood and disfigurement, fills Quentin with such fear. He knows that the myths of white superiority will be imminently challenged, exposed and undermined.

Quentin's association with "non-white traits" and subsequent alienation from Harvard leaves him feeling particularly anxious about the presence of more Black bodies within the university space. The comparison other (presumably white) students make between Quentin and minstrel performers in *The Sound and the Fury* (mentioned earlier) suggests that the Southern student is particularly caught up in, and perhaps aware of, the system of disavowal that substantiates traditional conceptions of race and racial hierarchy. In an interesting convergence with Du Bois's glass metaphor, Eric Lott (1993, p.8 [original italics]) notes how 'the blackface mask (was) less a *repetition* of power relations than a *signifier* for them – a distorted mirror, reflecting displacement and condensations and discontinuities between which…there exists a lag, unevenness and multiple dimensions'. In effect, minstrel performance allowed white people to play with the racial illogic that sustained a system of white dominance in the real world. For minstrelsy was a 'socially approved context of institutional control' (Lott 1993, p.6). It 'facilitated safely an exchange of energies between two otherwise rigidly bounded and political cultures' (Lott 1993, p.8). Crucially, this meant that in minstrelsy, 'racial boundaries might be contested and transgressed' (Lott 1993, p.140). Minstrelsy provided 'a channel for the black cultural "contamination" of dominate culture' (Lott 1993, p.7). The popular form of entertainment thus troubled the idea that race was a biologically based phenomenon that could contained by systems of segregation. Whilst Lott (1993, p.153) reveals that people who engaged with minstrelsy were subsequently 'conjoined to a sense of terror', the degradation and ridicule of Black people in a contained environment ultimately 'held the terror in check'. Similarly, mass higher education threatened to release Black culture beyond its normal bounds and thus expose the reality of race and myth of white superiority, which triggers the terror on Quentin's face as he stares up at the open window.

Incidentally, the fallacies and fears regarding the legitimacy of whiteliness became a major concern during Faulkner's time of writing because of changing attitudes towards the

concept of race. As Philip Weinstein (1992, p.42) notes: 'Race relations and distinctions shifted in Faulkner's own career from the status of topic to obsession'. This was partly because of a 'turning point' in the 1920s, 'when "biologistic" accounts of race rooted in nineteenth century science began to give way to new models grounded in ethnicity...to "soften" conceptually, from a natural absolute to a more culturally contingent phenomenon, a matter of affiliation and practice' (Watson 2011, p.x). This posed a threat to systematic white dominance because if race was no longer about biology, about a genetic predisposition that could be averted through the prohibition of miscegenation, but was in fact about cultural traits, which could be adopted simply through continual close contact, or 'affiliation and practice', then the negative characteristics attributed to Black people could be easily absorbed by their white counterparts. Worse, if race was a culturally contingent phenomenon, then the notion that these negative characteristics were inherently racial at all became a point of contention and not a statement of fact. The logic and justification of whiteliness would be subsequently shattered. Moreover, if the developing theory of racial traits being a matter of 'affiliation and practice' was to be believed, the growing presence of Black students in elite institutions would mean the contamination of their standards, values and general culture; thus ultimately undermining the function of one of the great pillars of systematic white dominance in America.

This threat is conveyed by Faulkner as he develops his depiction of Harvard. With the night and narrative wearing on, an encroaching blackness increasingly imposes itself upon the white space of the institution: 'The frozen and empty quad beyond the opposite wall were, with two or three exceptions already dark, soon the chime would ring for midnight' (Faulkner 1995, p.293). Though the symbolic properties of this darkness are somewhat ambiguous and open ended, one interpretation is that, by merging it with white snow, Faulkner is signalling the dissolution of racial absolutes. Given the onset of mass education during the time Faulkner was writing, I also argue that the encroaching darkness signifies the threat of physical Black bodies infiltrating the elite institution. Even though his position of power is also threatened by the advancing spectre of mass education and racial intermixing, Shreve neither expresses, nor is said to exhibit, any of the anxiety evidenced by Quentin. It is even Shreve who opens the window and thus seemingly removes the perverting pane of glass to invite Black students to move on through. Rather than suggest that Shreve's actions signify how progressive elite North U.S institutions and their white inhabitants were during the interwar years, I argue that such behaviour speaks to Faulkner's desire to both reflect and expose the workings of

whiteness in elite higher education. As Ulfried Riechardt (1997, p.622) writes: 'Faulkner's novel is located in a complicated tension between exerting power through representation and, at the same time, showing the mechanisms of "alter-ation", historical and "racial"'. By opening the window, Shreve serves to signal both the development of America's mass educational policy and the workings of whiteness that allowed elite institutions to prohibit further progress.

Instead of succumbing to fear, Shreve uses his socially sanctioned account of the Sutpen legend to repel the encroaching darkness, and the Black people it represents, to ultimately maintain racial order. Barber Hooper (in Soja 1996, p.115) notes that when 'borders are crossed, disturbed, contested and so become a threat to order, hegemonic power acts to reinforce them: boundaries around territory, nation, race, gender, sex, class, erotic practice, are trotted out and vigorously disciplined'. Shreve uses his status as a characteristically white Harvard student to reinforce order in the way that Hooper describes. Whilst opening the window acknowledges the emergence of mass higher education by creating an entryway into the institution, it also leaves in place the structure and image of a frame. Like those university students who lampooned Black people in minstrel shows and ridiculed them in newspapers, Shreve is engaged in a process of *narrative framing* as he perpetuates negative stereotypes of blackness that support racist claims made by science. As Cary Wintz (1988, p.10) points out, despite the concept of race evolving during the interwar years, prominent scientists at elite North U.S universities still spread the idea that Black people were racially distinct and inferior as a result of their biology:

> Northern social scientists were hardly more tolerant than their Southern counterparts; armed with theories of eugenics and with IQ data gathered from recruits during World War One, they expressed concern about the intellectual and physical inferiority of Blacks (sic) and alarm over miscegenation and mongrelised America. They supported racist doctrines and interpreted history in a manner that justified white supremacy and the disenfranchisement of Blacks (sic).

Shreve uses his narrative to frame the Sutpen story in such a way that it compounds this idea that Black people were ready to contaminate and dilute the white race. As Marta Puxan-Oliva (2007, pp.550-1) points out, it is Shreve who is 'responsible for the major change of meaning from the story of family conflicts to racial conflict' and, after realigning the trajectory of the Supten story, it is Shreve who 'construct(s) the image of Bon on the basis of racial prejudice and stereotype'. Shreve's agenda is made most clear at the very end of the novel when he makes his most efficacious comment on blackness, declaring that: 'In time, the Jim Bonds are

going to conquer the Western hemisphere' (Faulkner 1995, p.378). Jim Bond is (at least according to Shreve) the "mulatto" offspring of Charles Bon's son and so his declaration plays on the white fear of miscegenation. By increasing white paranoia about racial intermixing, by fuelling anxieties about the imminent threat to whiteliness, Shreve encourages a more vigorous and discriminating policing of racial borders. More specifically, as a student responding to a threatening blackness descending upon the Harvard lawn, Shreve encourages a more vigorous and discriminating policing of elite university borders and consequently helps preserve its function as a pillar of white hegemony.

The Aftermath of *Absalom!*

Despite the fears about mass higher education that are felt, negotiated and nullified through the window metaphor in Faulkner's *Absalom!*, the number of Black people attending elite institutions did not significantly rise from the 1920s to the 1960s. William G. Bowen et al. (2000, p.2) point out that whilst there was some general advancement in higher education at this time, with the 'percentage (of Black students) graduating from college (rising) from 1.6 to 5.4 percent', 'little progress occurred in opening elite occupations to African-Americans'. In fact, Black people made up 'only 1 percent of enrolments of selective New England colleges in 1965' (Bowen et al. 2000, p.2). The reasons for this are clear: 'Selective colleges did not significantly modify their regular standard for admission and financial aid. Their academic requirements were too demanding to accommodate more than a tiny number of African-American students, and their tuition fees were more than most of those who were admitted could afford' (Bowen et al. 2000, p.5). Consequently, it was not until the Higher Education Act of 1965 that Black people's relationship with elite higher education began to significantly change. According to Loss (2012, p.176), 'it is difficult to overstate the importance of HEA's financial aid title' because 'where the GI Bill and NDEA (National Defence Education Act) increased educational opportunities for specific categories of citizens in exchange for past or future service, the HEA…now held out the promise of the same to everyone else'. By focusing funding on HBCU development and a more (genuinely) diverse demographic of students, the HEA ultimately helped 'triple Black enrolment between 1968 and 1978, pushing it above a million for the first time in the mid-1970s' (Loss 2012, p.178). Importantly, the number of Black students attending elite institutions increased after the introduction of the Higher Education Act as well.

This development in the demographics attending elite higher education institutions was in large part due to the pressure applied by mass student protests, which played a pivotal role in the Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the tumultuous 1960s. The student-led campaign against social injustice, which initially focused on issues in South U.S, soon spread across the entire country as Black Power captured Black people's imagination as a movement and ideology. According to Sandra Flowers (2014, p.183) the emphasis Black Power placed on 'self-pride and empowerment' meant that 'campuses from Harvard to Berkeley and at all points in between witnessed the rise of Black student unions, demands for Black Studies programmes, Black faculty, modified recruitment and admission policies for Black students, and the separatists self-segregation of all-Black dorms on predominately white campuses'. Angela Davis's account of her time at Brandeis University, in Boston, serves as one anecdotal example of how Black people shook up these predominately white campuses, which had previously been able to withstand and repel (with relative ease) the threat of what figures as an encroaching blackness in Faulkner's *Absalom!*. Davis (1976, p.145) writes: 'It was quite a subdued year on campus – until the smug sense of comfort which reigned over this white liberal college was abruptly shattered by the appearance of Malcolm X'. Davis goes on to say that X proved both 'disorientating and disturbing' for the white people who watched him speak (Davis 1976, p.145). This kind of disorientation and disturbance became so widespread on college campuses that 'when Black student enrolment at predominately white institutions grew to as few as 50 to 100 students, even those few students could pressure administration into making concessions' (Flowers 2014, p.183). Universities had never been met with such virulent resistance before. Martha Biondi (2012, p.1) highlights that 'Black students organised protests on nearly two hundred college campuses across the United States in 1968 and 1969' ('most notably at the University of California; Berkeley; Cornell University; Harvard University; Rutgers University; and Howard University') and argues 'this dramatic explosion of militant activism set in motion a period of conflict, crackdown and negotiation and reform that profoundly transformed college life'.

The ideological strain of student protests was instrumental in determining such a transformation. As Loss (2012, p.192) explains, Black Power's emphasis on 'interest-group strategy' convinced young Black people that 'for diversity to work it not only had to address the personal needs of individuals and groups, it also had to change the very system that negotiated between individuals and groups'. As such, 'advocates of Black Power sought to harness the most precious resource available at the university – education. By harnessing

"Black knowledge" and creating Black Studies, Black students believed they could undo the knot of alienation, transforming themselves and society' (Loss 2012, p.192). This ideological belief also extended to gender, with Biondi (2012, p.260) noting how 'an outpouring of Black feminist organisations, manifestos, cultural production, literary anthologies, and polemical writing marked the 1970s, helping to set the stage for a new generation of academic scholarship in Black Women's Studies'. With Black Power's "interest-group strategy" encouraging Black students to campaign for a totally revised curriculum, 'nearly five hundred schools…established Black Studies departments, centres, programmes or classes' (Loss 2012, p.192). The fears depicted in Faulkner's *Absalom!* were thus finally coming to light. As the twentieth century advanced into the 1960s and '70s, Black students began to harness the power of elite, predominately white institutions in Northeast U.S and, by introducing new cultural sources, values and standards, ensured that an alternative knowledge system which undercut systematic white dominance was in place to receive social sanction and become an authoritative vessel of "Truth".

However, despite impressive concessions won by student protests, it was not an unequivocal victory by any means. The number of Black students attending Ivy League institutions may have risen (from 2.3% in 1967 to 6.3% in 1976), as well as 'prestigious' colleges generally (1.7% to 4.8%) but their campaign to transform the culture and thereby the system ruling these institutions was met with constant resistance (Bowen et al. 2000, p.7). Black Studies, for instance, 'was seen by many as an academically suspect, antiwhite, emotional intrusion into a landscape of rigour and reason' (Biondi 2012, p.174). 'Leaders…regularly complained about the lack of support and acceptance from its administrators and colleagues and the seemingly unending quest to "prove" its legitimacy' (Biondi 2012, p.200). Clearly, the racist distinctions made between white and Black people, as discussed in the analysis of *Absalom, Absalom!*, still pervaded these institutions, irrespective of the increasing amount of Black people attending them. In fact, it must be remembered that Black people still only constituted a small minority of the overall studentship and were therefore still quite likely to experience overt abuse, microaggressive assaults and a general sense of alienation. Significantly, this not only became more difficult to detect but more difficult to discuss (and less likely to be believed) because of the emergence of a colour-evasive ideology that characterised the post-Civil Rights era in America. It is to this period that the chapter now turns, as I conduct a brief analysis of Joyce Carol Oates's *Black Girl, White Girl* and its utilisation

of the window metaphor to reflect racial dynamics in elite universities and colleges at a time that is often considered to be "post-racial".

Crack: *Black Girl, White Girl* and the "Post-Racial" Window

The insidiousness of the colour-evasive ideology that took hold of America and its elite academic institutions after the Civil Rights Movement is on full display in Joyce Carol Oates's novel *Black Girl, White Girl*. Published in 2006 but set in the academic year of 1974-5 (and thus the immediate aftermath of Black Power, student protests and the increased integration of Black students in predominately white institutions) this novel is an ideal source from which to consider how racial dynamics in elite universities and college changed following the Civil Rights Movement. The story centres on an earnest yet ostensibly "good white liberal", Genna Hewett-Meade, who, in her capacity as narrator and historian, reflects on the troubled relationship she established with her Black college roommate and scholarship student, Minerva Swift, which ended with the tragedy of that young woman's death. Despite alluding to a series of microaggressions Minette was subjected to whilst studying at Schuyler College, Genna dismisses the relevance of race and the reality of racism in the elite educational space. Indeed, as is typical of colour-evasiveness, she trivialises and undermines (whilst contributing to) the violation and alienation her Black roommate was forced to endure at the college. Like Faulkner, Oates uses the window metaphor to capture the racial dynamic operating in the elite higher education institutions of her time. The most obvious divergence from Faulkner (and indeed Du Bois) is the spatial position Black people occupy in relation to the architectural object. Where in the pre-Civil Rights texts Black people are largely kept at a distance from the university, here, they reside within it. Nevertheless, Oates's use of the window in *Black Girl, White Girl* indicates that this new positionality does not fundamentally alter the racial hierarchy which has historically underpinned American society. The window not only marks, metaphorically, the colour-evasive ideology which permeates post-Civil Rights society, it also intensifies, materially, the alienation Minette is made to suffer whilst attending Schuyler College.

The fact that Oates uses a window to capture the racial dynamic that emerged in America's post-Civil Rights, colour-evasive society is made apparent in the opening chapter of the novel, which is simply entitled 'Crack'. Devoid of context, 'crack' can be interpreted in a variety of ways, with the most obvious being that it refers to some sort of splitting, or fracturing. Importantly, 'crack' can also mean to reveal or figure something out; like a code.

Aside from the literal cracking of Minette's window in the opening chapter, we see the metaphorical cracking of the popular post-Civil Rights perception that race does not matter in elite educational institutions. The window is an ideal object through which to carry out this investigation. As has already been discussed, Baudrillard claims that glass is an inherently moral material because it projects purity, reliability, objectivity and fairness. The transparency of this material, it should be added, also motions towards a sense of morality because of its association with honesty. A glass structure encourages the idea that nothing untoward is taking place beneath or behind its surface because the observer looking in would see, and those inside would tell them about it anyway. Even the smoothness of the glass signifies concepts like tolerance and harmony, with all the molecules (or students and staff members) that comprise it coming together to create the sense of a perfect, "post-racial" utopia.

Incidentally, Hisham Elkadi highlights that glass is increasingly being used by architects around the world because of such associations with morality and equality. According to him, it 'represents the "high tech" movements in architecture, the global neutral architecture of the international style and the liberal views of multi-cultural societies' (Elkadi 2006, p.43). However, as the scholar (2006, p.48) points out, 'while glass seemingly provides a wider transparency and social transformation, it actually denies any real interaction'. The sense of openness, inclusiveness and progressiveness glass creates is entirely superficial. In his analysis of the architectural changes made to the Reichstag in Berlin, for instance, Elkadi argues that 'the glass dome…has replaced one form of representation of presentation of power with another illusive and more subtle one' (Elkadi 2006, p.48). Similarly, by drawing attention to Minette's broken window in Schuyler College, Oates highlights how the current, post-Civil Rights perception of the elite academic institution being a "post-racial" space serves to conceal a more subtle but no less pervasive system of racial oppression. When observing the window in question, Genna notes that 'where no crack had been, now there was an elaborate spider web crack that looked as if the slightest touch would cause it to shatter and fall into pieces on your head' (Oates 2007, p.8). What was once transparent and smooth; honest and objective; fair and harmonious, is no longer so. An 'elaborate spider-web' has tainted the glass. The spider web can be taken to represent the oppressive racial system that underpins elite universities and colleges. The cracking of the window thus highlights how its projection of a "post-racial" environment is an illusion which masks the much more insidious reality of systematic white dominance in the post-Civil Rights college.

The challenge for us as readers is to recognise this reality. Genna certainly does not. After stating that 'the slightest touch would cause it (the window) to shatter and fall into pieces on your head' (Oates 2007, p.5), Genna proceeds to press her fingers against it and notes that, in fact, 'the glass didn't break' (Oates 2007, p.7). For the glass, or the illusion, to truly shatter (as opposed to just crack), Genna would have to recognise that a racist act had just taken place. If she did, sharp shards of glass, symbolic of the harsh reality of racism in college, would have 'fall(en) into pieces on (her) head', piercing the idea that Schuyler is a "post-racial" institution. As it is, Genna refuses to accept such a reality. In her mind, the window was struck by a broken branch during an overnight storm. No other explanation works in the era of colour-evasiveness, where race and racism have been rendered relics of the past. This is certainly the notion that Genna subscribes to, which is made more explicit later in the novel when the white narrator comes to the conclusion that: 'It would be irresponsible to suggest to Max (her father) that there was "racism" at Schuyler College for truly I did not think there was'. The fact Genna places the word 'racism' within inverted commas rhetorically reinforces her doubt, or disbelief, that the concept has any bearing on reality anymore, which is a remarkable conclusion to have reached considering that it comes after Minette has received a letter stating 'N*** GO HOME', after the word 'NIG' has been scrawled across Genna and Minette's dormitory door, and after the picture of the "Hottentot Venus" has been slipped under the door as well.[26] The sort of wilful ignorance that Genna exhibits in the face of clear and damning evidence of racism at Schuyler College defines the insidious illogic of the colour-evasive era and serves to jeopardise the mental and physical wellbeing of Minette as her experience of racist abuse is waived away and thus left to continue and even intensify unopposed.

Genna's wilful ignorance about racism and refusal to seriously entertain Minette's version of events seems to belie the concern she expresses for her Black roommate. However, as it was noted in the introduction, the white narrator's concern for her Black roommate is entirely wrapped up in her desire to impress a certain image of herself upon the

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[26] I have decided to use asterisks when referring to the abhorrent racial epithet which appears in Oates's text. This is not to sanitise and re-write literary history, but to acknowledge and partially mitigate against the impact and violence such a hateful word continues to enact in society today.

reader.[27] As is typical of white liberals, Genna makes a show of caring for Minette so that she can appear to be a "good person". For example, Genna is quick to report to her reader that:

> My window was conspicuously smaller than Minette's window, emitting less light. Earlier this month when freshmen arrived on Schuyler campus, I had been the first to occupy the suite and it seemed natural to me, to claim the less attractive part of the room for my own (Oates 2007, p.8).

This is quite a striking reversal of the spatial and racial relationship depicted in *Absalom!*, with the Black student not only being incorporated into the elite educational institution but also being invited to get comfortable and take up a larger portion of space than the white student currently residing there. That Genna makes her decision on racial grounds is supported by the disclaimer that she 'hated the possibility of being perceived as the spoiled, privileged white girl of my class' (Oates 2007, p.9). Unlike in Faulkner's novel, the white student seems to renounce her privilege and use her position to include and accommodate her Black counterpart. Genna's desire to promote this interpretation of events is reinforced by her announcement that the sacrifice of taking the 'less attractive' part of the room 'seemed natural and right to me'. Benevolence, we are encouraged to believe, is an instinct for this good, white liberal.[28]

Ironically, Genna's apparent benevolence actually serves to make matter worse for Minette, as it intensifies the alienation and violation of the Black student. This is highlighted when Genna compares the views permitted by the two different dormitory windows. After noting that her own window 'overlooked a crumbling brick wall of the residence next door', Genna indicates that Minette's, in contrast:

> had an aerial view of the "historic" Schuyler campus; a corner of the quadrangle of tall sculpted-looking plane trees and carefully tended grass; the dazzling white eighteenth century bell tower of Schuyler Chapel; the aged-brick façade of the Federalist mansion once owned by the college founder, the President's house, sometimes called Elias Mead House (Oates 2007, p.9).

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[27] According to Cheryl Matias (2016, p.87 [original italics]), the kind of wilful ignorance exhibited by Genna actually serves to impress this image of innocence further, as the 'epistemology of racial ignorance is an *active suppression* of knowledge that deliberately represses awareness in order to feign racial innocence and unawareness, a process that then releases racial culpability'.

[28] Robyn Weigman argues the desire to throw off racial privilege and assume a position of injury is increasing due to the evolving conceptualisation and negotiation of race. According to Weigman, 'the conscious agency that defines the becoming white of the pre-white ethnic (highlighted by early work in Critical Whiteness Studies) is strategically dissolved in the present, where the ordinary person is theoretically divested of taking a committed interest in the perpetuation of white racial privilege' (Weigman 1999, p.142). The conscious divesting of these privileges means that white people like Genna come to believe they no longer profit from being white, deepening their sense of racial injury and disadvantage.

Where Genna's window 'overlooked a crumbling wall', we are told that Minette 'had an aerial view of the "historic" Schuyler campus'. This seems to reinforce Genna's claims of kindness until the reader takes a closer look at the view she describes. Sara Ahmed (2012, p.38) highlights that 'the act of naming, of giving building names, can keep a certain history alive: in the surroundings you are surrounded by who was there before. A history of whiteness can be a history of befores'. In the midst of buildings that not only carry the name of their white owners but were also once singularly occupied by white students and ultimately built off the back of slave labour, Minette is surrounded by a history of exclusion and oppression. By determining that Minette should look upon such a view, Genna forces her to confront this history and realise her out-of-placeness in the institution. The consequences of Genna's decision is emphasised by the image of the 'dazzling eighteenth century bell tower of Schuyler Chapel'. Whilst 'dazzle' (©2019) is usually taken to be an unambiguously positive adjective, it actually means to 'overpower, confuse, or dim (the vision), esp with excessive brightness'. So here, the idea that the 'white' of the historic, eighteenth century bell tower (which carries connotations of racialised power and coercion due to associations with slave plantations) is 'dazzling', suggests that it has the propensity to overpower and confuse (or disorientate) Minette with the intensity of its force.[29] In doing so, it threatens to leave the Black student at least temporally paralysed with fear and anxiety, as she recognises her strangeness in the hostile space. The fact that the bell tower works in conjunction with the window to elicit this reaction reinforces the idea that Schuyler College is underpinned by an oppressive system of white dominance which comprises the very foundations of the institution; a system that Genna further exposes her Black roommate to.

Significantly, the role that the bell tower and window play in intensifying the alienation and violation of Minette indicates that objects can serve as material sites of oppression and are not just compelling metaphors for race relations in the higher educational institution. As it has been argued, the sight of the bell tower, which is only permitted because of the view the window provides, is liable to have a debilitating impact on the onlooking Black student. These material objects form an important part of the racist system that Oates exposes

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[29] The association between the bell towers of slave plantations and of Schuyler College was realised at Cambridge University, UK, recently when St Catharine's College 'admitted that a bell it had on display for decades was originally from a slave plantation in Guyana' (Turner 2019). Significantly, this bell was 'believed to have been a plantation bell, used for regulating the work-schedules of slaves on the sugar plantations' (Turner, 2019).

through her use of the window metaphor. Crucially, the affect these architectural objects have on the Black student are due to a combination of Genna's actions and attitudes, as well as the college's history of racial oppression. This reinforces the idea that objects do not inherently contain forces of power but serve as vessels through which networks of power (comprised of bodies, discourse and objects) can operate, change and intensify. As this chapter's analysis of Du Bois, Faulkner and Oates's work has shown, the core racial dynamics of this network has remained the same throughout the twentieth century, even as their exact expression has changed. The dehumanising stereotypes that kept the vast majority of Black students excluded from elite universities during Du Bois's time, were employed by white academics in response to mass education in the 1920s and 30s, and continued to alienate and subjugate Black students even as they entered the esteemed higher education spaces following the Civil Rights Movement. The next chapter, which carries out a more extensive analysis of *Black Girl, White Girl*, will further demonstrate how architectural objects can metaphorically and materially amplify and intensify the impact of the racist network in elite higher education institutions. Focusing exclusively on the desk, this chapter will examine Genna's desire to accommodate her Black roommate and show that, within elite, predominately white universities and colleges, Black students' study spaces can double up as debilitating sites of coercion and control.
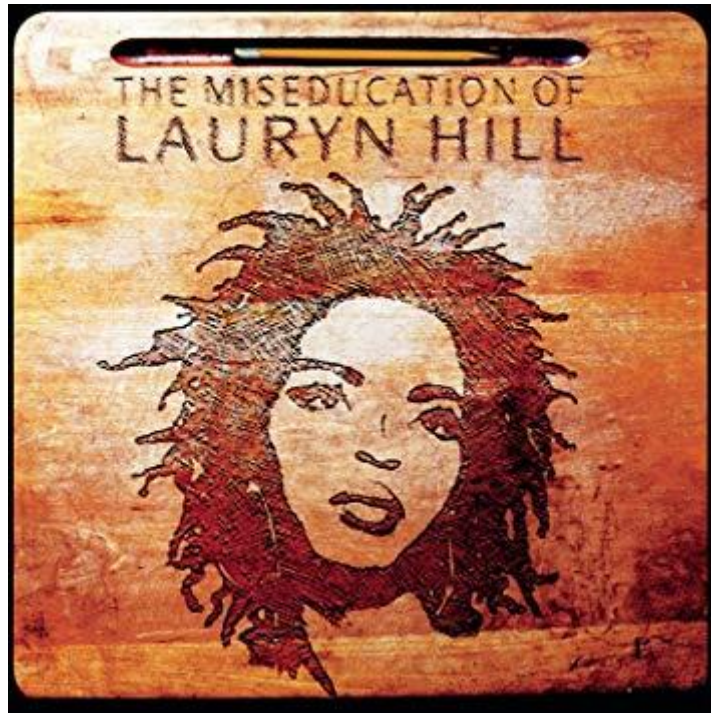
Figure 2 (Ruffhouse Records ©2019)

Desks

It is significant that the album cover to Lauryn Hill's seminal LP, *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* (1998), is configured as a school desk. Not only does it serve as one example of how Hip Hop critically engages with formal education, it also reinforces the previous chapter's argument that, despite several developments in educational policy during the twentieth century, America's racial hierarchy (within and beyond higher education) fundamentally remained the same going into the new millennium. As her unmistakeable riff on Carter G. Woodson's book title suggests, Hill uses the desk to represent and reiterate the scathing critique on America's educational system in *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (originally published in 1933). Here, Woodson asserts that far from educating Black students, American schools, colleges and universities erode their self-esteem until they become complicit proponents of a system of white dominance:

> The same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worthwhile, depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other people. That Negro thus educated is a hopeless liability of the race (Woodson 2010, p.7).

For Woodson, formal education stops Black people from flourishing in American society by enforcing the idea that they are culturally and intellectually inferior to their white counterparts. This makes nurturing talent, or 'spark(s) of genius' seem a futile endeavour and thus resigns Black people to pursuing and even advocating for low-paying vocational work that keeps them in their lowly social and economic position.[30] Despite releasing *The Miseducation* over sixty years later, long after the Civil Rights and Black Power Movement had inspired new legislation, policies and programmes promoting Black people's rights and culture, Hill's album indicates that the 'educational process' identified by Woodson continued to degrade and debilitate Black people at the turn of the century. As the quintessential symbol of formal education and its disciplinary procedures, the desk perfectly encapsulates this process. The horizontal lines (pervasive with the pencil holder and less obviously running at even intervals across the desk) amplify the object's function as a coercive instrument which assimilates Black people into America's racial hierarchy.

Hill's reconfiguration of the desk space on her album cover signals her refusal to be regulated in the way educational institutions prescribe. By leaving the pencil in its place, the musician makes it clear that she is not engaging with the culture of the classroom and is intent on making a mark of her own. This is demonstrated quite literally with the image of Lauryn's face scratched into the surface of the desk, which fails to follow the patterns of movement, or the regulating procedures, subtly enforced by the horizontal lines underneath. That this constitutes an act of resistance is amplified by Hill's hair dispersing in several different directions on the desk. As Remi Joseph-Salisbury and Laura Connelly (2018, p.4) report:

> Whether it was "slave masters" shaving enslaved people's hair, jealous white women cutting the hair of Black enslaved women or even the institution of regulations in law, white social control of Black hair has long been deemed necessary to the maintenance of a white supremacist order. In this regard, white supremacy is dependent upon the degradation and subordination of blackness. Black pride in stylisation, aesthetic and beauty…runs counter to, and in turn poses a threat to white supremacist ideology.

By carving her face into the centre of the desk and having her hair reach out at different angles, Hill counters the 'white supremacist ideology' which attempts to undermine Black pride in 'stylisation, aesthetic and beauty' in order to secure the 'degradation and subordination of blackness'. For the viewer, the image consequently becomes an important counter-narrative to conventional discourse about what is acceptable in terms of the

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[30] An accusation that was levelled at Booker T. Washington by W.E.B. Du Bois (1996) in *The Souls of Black Folk.*

appearance, attitude and place of Black people in American society. Considering that an album cover is designed to signify the content contained within, the suggestion is that Hill's music will also serve as a counter-narrative that undermines a debilitating system of white dominance.

The power dynamics that play out on Lauryn Hill's album cover (and throughout the album itself) speaks to those which emerge in *Black Girl, White Girl*. As mentioned previously, Oates's novel was first published in 2006 but set in the academic year of 1974-5, whilst Lauryn Hill's album was released in 1998. A comparison between the two texts is compelling because it suggests that the treatment of Black women in formal educational spaces has remained consistent throughout the post-Civil Rights period; even with more Black students going on to pursue a higher education than ever before.[31] Furthermore, whilst Lauryn Hill's desk may be more representative of the elementary or high school model, this only goes to show that a system of regulation and control stretches right across formal education and constitutes a comprehensive system of racial oppression. Indeed, despite the distinct stages of American education and different orientations of the desk space each text subsequently explores (with the elementary/high school desk a more public and explicitly disciplinary architectural object than the higher education model) both Lauryn Hill and Joyce Carol Oates position the desk as an intensive site of racial oppression for Black women. Unlike Lauryn Hill, Minette proves unable to establish a counter-narrative capable of adequately combatting the unrelenting system of white dominance surrounding her. Caught within the confines of an elite higher educational institution, Minette is constantly coerced into following the social order and, in the absence of a support network or expressive outlet, proves unable to cope in her alienating environment.

This chapter will extend the above analysis of the metaphorical and material desk space in a close reading of *Black Girl, White Girl*. By highlighting how Genna violates Minette's desk in order to examine the various materials situated on its surface (or what she considers to be important "cultural artefacts"), the chapter will show how "benevolent" white people utilise racial privileges and power in order to reinforce racial oppression. Frustrated by her inability to make sense of Minette, Genna frequently examines her roommate's personal effects. This

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[31] William B. Harvey et al. (2004, p.338) highlight that 'in the year 2000-2001, more than 1.7 million African-American students were pursuing a college education, and slightly more than 42% or 734,000 of them were enrolled in two-year institutions'. They do go on to clarify, however, that 'four-year PWIs (predominately white institutions) accounted for about 760,000 African-American students, but this figure represented only about 8% of the total enrolment of these institutions' (Harvey et al. 2004, p.338).

seems to be motivated by Genna's desire to "know" Minette better but is really driven by a need to create a narrative about her Black roommate that reflects the white student's pre-existing ideas about blackness. Pointing to the fact Minette's mental health clearly declines after this sustained period of silent surveillance, the chapter will emphasise how white people's manoeuvring of certain objects in elite higher education institutions can have a damaging affective impact on the Black women who reside there. Finally, the chapter will end by exploring how Genna's role as narrator and successful academic allows her to propagate harmful ideas about Black women that elide her role in causing such women serious harm. Before turning to this analysis, the chapter will first discuss my methodological approach to destabilising the desk in *Black Girl, White Girl* and pose some preliminary thoughts about its function at different stages of formal education.

Damaging Desks

The quest to "know" Minette and reduce her to recognisable signs of blackness takes Genna all over Schuyler College but returns her most frequently to her Black roommate's desk. This is a fitting development as the desk is a major focal point for knowledge production and acquisition in higher education. In fact, Marc Depaepe et al. (2014, p.14) argue, after citing various photos, illustrations, titles, slogans and textbook covers, 'in the material culture of educational research the school desk is distinctly in evidence as a metaphor for and icon of educational practices' in their totality. As well as being a particularly intense pressure point for racial oppression in elite universities and colleges, the desk is also representative of the racial dynamics operating at the institution as a whole. Like Lauryn Hill, Oates utilises the symbolically charged desk space to bring together and crystallise a more general and sweeping critique of higher education in the post-Civil Rights period. The author's use of the desk space reiterates the role literature plays in capturing and impressing the weight and nuance of social justice issues. Not only does it expose and elucidate complex and intangible forces and networks by making them material, literature also creates striking images which resonate with the reader and compels them to deliberate rather than dismiss the import of the revelations being conveyed.

It is important to note that there is an inherent danger which comes with drawing an uncomplicated connection between desks and oppressive educational institutions. In their overview of the educational research on the school desk, Depaepe et al. (2014, p.21) bemoan how it has 'mainly been viewed…as part of the intended Foucauldian disciplining and/or

normalising paradigms at a more or less scientific level'. A Foucauldian reading of the desk is certainly tempting, especially when addressing more elementary levels of education. The fact it helps to atomise and anonymise students whilst simultaneously subjecting them to the watchful gaze of the state representative towering above them (i.e. their teacher) means the desk seems to fit Foucault's theory of the carceral perfectly (Foucault 1995). The issue with taking this theory as a template for analysis, however, is that it often reduces power to an abstract force which works through stock pieces of state apparatuses and/or people. It does not focus closely enough on the 'materiality and experiences of violence' (De Lissovoy 2012a, p.746). Or the moments of what De Lissovoy (2012b, p.473) calls 'intentionality'. That is why, despite the bell towers, windows and constant surveillance in *Black Girl, White Girl*, this chapter avoids focusing extensively on Foucault's theory of the carceral. Instead, it seeks to place emphasis on the way the individual white student utilises the specific object of the desk in order to subject their Black roommate's body to a series of microaggressive assaults; defined as 'the layered, cumulative and often subtle and unconscious forms of racism that target people of colour' (Huber and Solórzano 2015, p.302). As Critical Race Theorists and Critical Whiteness scholars stress, it is important to examine these everyday forms of racial oppression because, although they are often seen to be 'relatively innocuous', 'the microaggression is always an iteration with institutional and macro white supremacy' (Johnson and Joseph-Salisbury 2018, p.145).

Such an emphasis on materiality, intentionality and affective experience in everyday encounters (which characterises this thesis as a whole) is an attempt to move away from abstract, general and well worn (if seminal) theory and draw attention to the fact particular people use objects to inflict pain on individual Black subjects as part of a wider system of racial oppression in higher education. The prominence of Lauryn Hill's face on the desk of her album cover is especially effective in conveying how real people are at the receiving end of the "educational processes" scholars like Foucault theorise about. This explains why my thesis relies on cultural mediums generally and literature particularly as primary sources. Even when addressing wider social issues, literature foregrounds the role individuals play in perpetuating or resisting network of power as a result of their everyday interactions. It also demonstrates the emotional and material impact these networks of power have on the individuals they target. This is another reason why Critical Race Theorists examine microaggressions, as 'the microaggression paradigm privileges the perspective and perceptions of the target, placing importance on how she interprets the transgression' (Williams and Nichols 2015, p.78). The

need to centralise the lived experience of the 'target' will become clearer in the forthcoming analysis of *Black Girl, White Girl*, as I expose Genna's insidious instrumentalization of her narrative account to obscure the reality of racism at Schuyler College and intensify her Black roommate's isolation and mental deterioration.

Returning to Depaepe et al. (2014, p.21), one other important issue that they raise regarding a Foucauldian reading of the desk is that it ensures the desk is 'primarily conceived as a static object', upon which power is simply (and abstractly) projected. It thus 'ignore(s) the crucial *contest* between power and human beings foregrounded by the notion of violation' (De Lissovoy 2012b, p.474 [original italics]). Put another way, such a reading seems to leave little room for resistance. By carving her face into the surface of a desk, Lauryn Hill demonstrates how the architectural object can be used to counter the forces of oppression it projects. Commenting on the kind of tactics employed by Hill, Depaepe et al. (2014, p.23) indicate that 'anyone who looks closely at the often-dilapidated school desks will see the traces of lives: ink spots, graffiti and the such like. Throughout the years, pupils have left carvings on school desks, from hearts to satirical texts and cartoons of certain teachers, to real tirades against the real or alleged educational terror'. The deployment of chewing gum (though perhaps less permanent) serves as another example of life and agency operating behind the desk. The intention behind it may be less clear than a satirical cartoon but that is arguably the point. In its utter indecipherability (was it laziness, disdain, apathy, or a sense of rebellion that put it there?) chewing gum, as anyone who has run their finger along the underside of a school desk will attest, fills its unlucky subject with instinctive, physical disgust, and thus brings them firmly back in touch with the body; undermining the link institutions attempt to make between desks, knowledge and the mind.

Etchings of love and romance (A.M 4 J.H) fulfil a similar function as they evidence a whole different paradigm of experience, 'beyond and in spite of power', within the educational space (De Lissovoy 2012b, 479). Fittingly, at the end of each song on Lauryn Hill's album, a classroom of (presumably) elementary aged children discuss the concept of love. Whilst the Hip Hop artist is notably absent from such conversations (she does not respond to the register being taken in the introductory skit) her music serves as an extensive commentary on the subject as well. These reflections on love not only counter but establish alternate paradigms which decentre the atomising and alienating environment of formal educational institutions, centrally enforced by the desk space. Such moments, where students steal precious seconds and minutes scheduled for formal education and thus social conditioning

(on the desk or beyond), constitute small but significant insurgencies that irrevocably alter the composition of the desk (material or metaphorical) in front of them. Whether they inspire laughter, discussion, disgust or more markings, these acts of resistance create a connection between other atomised and anonymised bodies and help build counter- and alternate-narratives that are inscribed into the very core of school life. An example of this connection is once again provided by Lauryn Hill's album cover. Considering that Hill's absence from the classroom space is noted in the introductory skit, there is a chance that the desk featured on the album cover does not belong to her. It could well belong to a listener or fan who, inspired by Hill's acts of resistance, proceeds to scratch her face into the desk as the material embodiment of a bond she feels with the musician. The presence of similar narratives on the desk space, from the response to an inspiring artist, to various gradations of gum life (wet and sticky to hard and flaky) to the different declarations of physical presence (Ma$e woz ere 2k19; this class is $hit) creates a temporal tableau that refutes the Foucauldian notion that the desk is essentially a static site of regulation and oppression.

The Higher Education Desk

What is striking about the above analysis, which explores the integral acts of resistance enacted on the elementary or high school desk, is how it seems to fundamentally depart from the dynamic that emerges between university and/or college students and their respective desk spaces. A crucial difference that can perhaps be described as one of structure versus ornamentation, core versus surface. For where the school student reconfigures the core structure of their desk, the university or college student is much more likely to ornament its surface with various photos, calendars, mugs, books and posters; especially in elite American institutions where (unlike in community colleges) students leave home and take residence in a dorm room. This is illustrated by Chelsea Kwakye in *Taking Up Space* (a book that helps Black women navigate elite, predominately white universities in the UK) where she states:

> At a time at which everything seemed to be strange and bewildering, bringing items from home helped create my home away from home. By items, I mean *anything*. Before we left home, I would scavenge bits of wrapper paper, raid old family photo albums, and pile up my favourite throws and blankets (Kwakye and Ogunbiyi 2019, p.131 [original italics]).

Given the analysis of *Absalom, Absalom!* in the previous chapter, it is interesting to note that Kwakye specifically refers to the university as 'strange'. In Faulkner's (1995, p.173) novel, Quentin baulks at the 'strange lamplit table…strange room…strange iron New England snow'

because, unlike Shreve, his inability to pertain to the ideals of whiteness means he feels alienated from the university space. As a Black woman, Kwakye is likely to feel this even more intensely. To compensate, she notes how: 'I stuck up photographs of my family and friends from home, especially all the important Black women in my life, like my mum and my sister, and surrounded their faces with quotes and Ankara fabric' (Kwakye and Ogunbiyi 2019, p.131). The array of personal effects listed here, as Kwakye attempts to make the university space look and feel more familiar, mirrors how Minette decorates her desk in *Black Girl, White Girl*. It should be noted at this point that Kwakye is recalling her experience of studying at an elite UK university. The different histories and contemporary manifestations of whiteliness in UK and US higher education institutions means that the two experiences should not be entirely conflated. However, it is important to acknowledge that there are indeed commonalities between the two, for this enforces how whiteliness is a global system that transcends national borders and, in the higher education context, results in an aggregate – though not homogenous - experience for Black students. It is for this reason that I will continue to utilise the testimonies of Black British writers and thinkers when deemed appropriate.

As will soon be shown, the ornamentation of Minette's desk in Oates's novel fails to counter the racial oppression she is subjected to by Genna. In fact, Minette's personal effects are actually instrumentalised by the young white woman as she intensifies the microaggressive assaults levelled at her Black roommate. Whilst the projections of individual identity and familial comfort put in place by Kwakye and Minette temporarily counter the anonymising aspect of the desk, they do not distort it in any definitive way. When a university or college student leaves the higher education institution, they remove all personal belongings and thus remove any trace of their time there. Even if the desk has been occupied by the same person for years, there is no connection effected between them and the student they are replaced by. All record of the previous inhabitant is clearly wiped away. There is no sign of dynamic disorder to inspire a sustained counter- or alternate-narrative that significantly combats or decentres the atomising, disciplinary aspect of the desk space.

If we take seriously the desk's function as a symbol for educational practice, there is perhaps a more general comment to be made here about the university or college student's relationship with the higher education institution. It certainly feels like there is more to it than the simple suggestion that, having matured over the years, such students dismiss marking the desk as a juvenile, uncivil and perhaps even criminal activity. In fact, this opinion would surely

attest to how college and university students have, through further socialisation (or disciplining) at home, school and the world generally, bought into the ordering principles of the institution. This is perhaps not too far from the truth. Students are mandated by law to endure the all-consuming, heavily regulated and visibility monitored experience of high school. However, they literally pay to attend college and university in order to procure specialist knowledge and, in an increasingly neoliberal society, secure lucrative employment. These sites of education are thus arguably seen as a means to an end; transient spaces that students attend, or even use, at their own volition and out of their own self-interest, as they look forward to and work towards a successful future; something that is reinforced by Kwakye's insight that the university room is felt to be 'impersonal and temporary' at best. This sense of independence, autonomy and entitlement is affirmed by the apparent absence of disciplinary figures (teachers are replaced by tutors and mentors) and the understanding that desks only need be attended at the individual student's discretion. Even the very idea of what constitutes a desk becomes abstract at university, as coffee shops, trains and kitchen counters all double up as significant sites of work. Taking the above into account, it would not be in the best interests of the student to fundamentally alter the desk space, as they have a clear stake in its preservation; a notion that is emphasised and encouraged by the institution when it allocates specific desks to its students. Marking such a desk would be akin to vandalising a piece of personal property; a marker of racialised power that will be discussed in Chapter Four in the analysis of doors in Zadie Smith's *On Beauty*.

What we see here is the particular perniciousness of higher education. For the student is not really at university or college through a choice of their own making. Society has made it very clear that by attending these institutions, people stand a much better chance of achieving economic stability (if not wealth) and social prestige. In fact, it was noted in the introduction that the very lives of Black and Latino people may well depend on obtaining a higher education. In these institutions, students are not released from figures of authority, with academics, essay guidelines, year reviews, established canons and (for Black men especially) campus police all forming part of a disciplinary process that establishes and maintains social order. The markings of the high school student should not be romanticised, as they clearly do not change the fact that such students have very little power or control in the educational space, but the mere existence of these markings does at least evidence an ability to identify and thus challenge a direct persecutor. The ostensible openness and egalitarianism of the consumer-focused university, with all its rhetoric around meritocracy

and market-driven policies and practices, makes it much more difficult for a student in higher education to do the same (Bernal and Villalpando 2009; Gusa 2010; Stampnitzsky 2006). In a racial context, there is not much incentive for the white student to even try, as the university actually serves them by perpetuating the standards, values and general culture of whiteness, which clears the road for academic success (Allen 2004; Bernal and Villalpando 2009; Charbeneau 2015; Smith 1999; Warikoo 2016).

Resistance in higher education is thus often left to people of colour and Black people in particular. However, such students face their own challenges when it comes to combatting the university system in a significant and sustained way. Given their history of exclusion from elite institution and socio-economic prosperity, as well as being dismissed as irrational, savage and uncivil beings (or even objects) by racist discourse, Black people are under intense pressure to take advantage of a rare opportunity by assimilating into the normative (white) culture (Adams and Erevelles 2016; Smith et al. 2013). This is only intensified by the precarity of their current position in higher education, with Black students' mere presence being challenged on a regular basis by the denouncement of affirmative action and the enactment of violent assaults and/or microaggressions (Giroux 1997; Lipsitz 1998; Loo 1986). All this means that Black students are constantly coerced into not only leaving their desks unmarked but spotless. It is this kind of respectability politics that universities and colleges depend on as they seek to incorporate Black people into the social order. Although respectability politics has long been denounced as a mode of effective resistance, Fred Moten and Stefano Harney (2013, p.20) argue that any attempt to directly confront and combat the higher education institution is ultimately reductive.

> All politics is correctional, so it seems we need correctional institutions in the common, settling it, correcting us. But we won't stand corrected. Moreover, incorrect as we are, there's nothing wrong with us. We don't want to be correct and we won't be corrected. Politics propose to make us better, but we were good already in the mutual debt that can never be made good. We owe it to each other to falsify the institution, to make politics incorrect, to give the lie to our own determination. We owe each other the indeterminate. We owe each other everything.

Moten and Harney argue that direct resistance is reductive because it buys into and replicates some of the fundamental principles underpinning the system of oppression in the first place. For them, any imposed paradigm of being or behaving constitutes social conditioning. As such, politics must be made 'incorrect' and nothing should be pre-determined. There is perhaps

something in the school student's marking of the desk that, in its spontaneity, ambiguity and temporality, speaks to Moten and Stefano's desire for the indeterminate in their conceptualisation of the Undercommons. This subversive concept is something that will be discussed in the analysis of Paul Beatty's *The White Boy Shuffle* in Chapter Five. Here, I conduct a comprehensive close reading of Oates's *Black Girl, White Girl* as I move from the publicness of the elementary/high school classroom, to the more contained (if not private) space of Minette's dormitory room. Through an analysis of Genna's treatment of Minette and her desk, I will show how the desk space can be seized upon by white people as part of an educational process that is designed to reduce Black women to essentialising narratives and coerce them into submitting to the system of whiteliness that operates at elite universities and colleges. Minette's inability to withstand these advances will introduce a discussion about alternative approaches to resistance that continues throughout each successive chapter and eventually culminates in a conversation about the Hip Hop cypher's liberating pedagogical potential in Chapter Five.

Figure 3 (Mondrian 1935)

Minette and Mondrian

When Genna first describes Minette's desk space, she takes great pleasure in the sense of order it projects. The white narrator reports to her reader that the 'desktop was wonderfully neat. There was a geometrical precision to its appearance, like a Mondrian painting. Her textbooks were arranged sensibly upright so that you could see their spines, not haphazardly tossed down amid papers or strewn about articles of clothing as in most college residences' (Oates 2007, p.8). It is telling that Genna praises 'the wonderfully neat' appearance of Minette's desk and 'sensibly upright' arrangement of her textbooks, for this 'geometrical precision' suggests that the Black student is someone who unwaveringly follows formal or

conventional lines; just like the ones running sharply and resolutely across the Mondrian canvas Genna references and is pictured above. Comparing Minette's desk to a painting is significant because it introduces the themes of surveillance and objectification which characterise the white student's relationship with her Black roommate. Aligning Minette's desk with a Mondrian painting specifically indicates that the empowering practices of surveillance and objectification reduces, or flattens out, Minette to a one-dimensional abstraction of blackness. Furthermore, reference to Mondrian indicates that Genna's behaviour is reflective of how racial oppression manifests in the colour-evasive, post-Civil Rights period. As an artist, Mondrian wanted to 'transcend matter and understand the universal' (Harris 2007, p.98). Similarly, Genna constantly declares a desire to overcome the racial barriers that prohibit her from understanding Minette on a more fundamental, or universal, level. As is typical of those who exhibit colour-evasiveness, this rationale is actually used to obscure Genna's coercion of Minette into falling in line with pre-conceived perceptions of blackness (Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich 2011).

These connections between Mondrian, Minette's desk space and the racial dynamic underpinning Genna's relationship with her Black roommate become clearer when we consider Sara Ahmed's (2006, p.15) statement that:

> The lines we follow…function as forms of "alignment", or ways of being in line with others. We might say that we are oriented when we are in line. We are "in line" when we face the direction that is already faced by others. Being "in line" allows bodies to extend into spaces that, as it were, have already taken shape.

In the earlier analysis of Lauryn Hill's album cover, it was noted that the horizontal lines featured on the desk space were not only symbolic of social order but also, due to the historical and political symbolism and treatment of Black people's hair, a system of white dominance specifically. Similarly, the lines that have been established in universities and colleges, and which orientate incoming bodies, coerce students into following the lines of those racially oppressive institutions. As Lauryn Hill implies and Carter G. Woodson asserts, this means forcing Black students to contort themselves into the low, culturally and intellectually inferior one-dimensional images white people have curated in their conception of blackness. Importantly, the lines which compel Black students to replicate such images are deeply embedded in the institution. In Ahmed's (2006, p.15) words: 'We follow the line that is followed by others; the repetition of the act of following makes the line disappear from view as the point from which "we" emerge'. The faintness of the horizontal lines running

across Lauryn Hill's album cover reinforces Ahmed's point that the coercive forces at play in higher education, or the lines that exist there, are so well worn that they blend into the educational space. This is an important point because it indicates that whiteliness is a structural issue and not an individual one. Whilst the individual experience of Black students in elite, predominately white institutions will vary to some degree, all Black students will be exposed to the same constricting structures. These structures are designed to assimilate, coerce and disempower such students, and will do so to varying levels of success. The fact that Minette seems to instinctively arrange the materials on her desk along precise lines (reminiscent of a Mondrian painting) pleases Genna because it implies that the Black student (unlike Lauryn Hill) has instantly settled into the social order long established at her college.

However, Genna's reference to Mondrian also subtly suggests that Minette is not quite as compliant as it initially appears. Mondrian's paintings (which despite originally seeming to evoke a sense of order, on closer inspection contain slight but significant irregularities) have been described by critics as 'so spare that they seem almost to defy interpretation' and as a 'paradigm or model for the anti-developmental, the antinarrative, the *anti-historical*' (McManus 2013 [original italics]). As such, they defy conventional narrative frames and are incredibly difficult to read and understand. Minette is similarly said to have a 'curious aloofness…a maddening quality of abstraction, disengagement' (Oates 2007, p.31). Like Mondrian's critics, Genna cannot interpret Minette to her satisfaction. This 'maddening quality of abstraction' results in a great deal of frustration for the white student who constantly bemoans her inability to work out, or to fully "know" the young Black woman she deems an 'enigma…a riddle, and a dazzlement' (Oates 2007, p.11). Less obviously than Lauryn Hill perhaps, Minette does not follow the lines set out by the higher education institution. She does not pertain to the essentialising, exoticising and restrictive ideas about blackness that Genna clings to. Minette is, as far as Genna is concerned, a 'Black girl who didn't act black' (Oates 2007, p.17). She thus creates a level of uncertainty in the white student about what constitutes the "nature" of Black people.

This is important because it undermines the functioning of whiteliness in and beyond the higher education institution. Homi Bhaba (1996, p.93) highlights how in racial stereotyping 'colonial power produces the colonised as a fixed reality which is at once Other and yet entirely knowable and visible', which, crucially, also renders them controllable and conquerable. Such stereotyping allows colonial power to 'construe the colonised as a

population of degenerative types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction' (Bhaba 1996, p.82). This exposes the real meaning behind Genna's wistful declaration: 'if I could know a single other person…if I could know Minette Swift' (Oates 2007, p.70). The sentiment does not reflect a benevolent desire to get to know her roommate better (as she asserts) but rather a deep desire to bring her Black roommate back into line with the system of white dominance operating at Schuyler College. Minette's refusal to pertain to the stereotypical conceptions of blackness means Genna subjects her to a sustained period of intense inspection and violation, as she attempts to solve the enigma's mystery and bring her back into the white student's realm of knowledge and control.

At this point, it is worth noting the distinction Noah De Lissovoy makes between violation and violence. For De Lissovoy (2012b, p.465):

> Violation acts against what has already been constituted, what already exists as a whole. Violation is an offence against some at least partial integrity. Because of this, power as violation must build at the same time that it breaks down. Its aim is not pure destruction or negation, but rather the moment of prolific assault, invasion, and fragmentation.

In *Black Skin, White Mask*, Frantz Fanon (1967, p.112) recalls how, after being racially marked and abused by the white people around him: 'I took myself far from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object' and reflects 'what else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a haemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood?' Whilst the metaphoric evocation of an 'amputation' is underpinned by ableist attitudes, it marks an attempt to capture the sort of 'assault, invasion and fragmentation' engendered by white people's violation of Black people's bodies and sense of self. This conception of violation characterises Genna's microaggressive behaviour towards Minette throughout her time at college. Despite the white student's protestations and excuses, Genna is shown to invade her Black roommate's space at every opportunity; sitting uninvited next to Minette at lunch, listening to her private phone calls whenever she can and even stalking her off the college ground. However, she proceeds most prominently and consistently to examine the materials lined across Minette's desk (those small attempts to establish some sense of individual identity and home comfort) and turn them into cultural artefacts that reveal, or give some further insight, into her roommate's blackness; a whitely pattern of behaviour that resurfaces in

Chapter Three's analysis of *Americanah*, when a white woman (Kelsey) consults literature to "understand" the workings of Africa in its entirety.

Bad Habits

The way in which Genna violates Minette's personal space can be considered a form of white privilege and power that Shannon Sullivan (2006, p.10) calls 'ontological expansiveness'. According to Sullivan (2006, p.10), this is a 'habit of lived spatiality' whereby white people 'consider(ing) all spaces (as) rightfully available for their inhabitation', 'restrict the privacy and autonomy of non-white people'. It is, she continues, a 'particular co-constitutive relationship between self and environment in which the self assumes that it can and should have total mastery over its environment' (Sullivan 2006, p.10). Sullivan provides several examples of spaces that white people standardly assume mastery over to the detriment of Black people, such as the Black church. In *Black Girl, White Girl*, the higher education institution emerges to be one other. Genna's incessant intrusion of Minette's personal space in Schuyler College demonstrates how white students strip their Black counterparts of their privacy and autonomy, with little if any questioning of their right to do so. For Sullivan (2006, p.63), such behaviour speaks to 'white privilege' which, she says, 'often functions as unconscious: seemingly invisible, even non-existent, and actively resisting conscious efforts to know it'. Although I do not contest the behavioural properties of ontological expansiveness, there is something insidious about framing the violation of Black people's privacy and autonomy as an unconscious habit.

Some patterns of behaviour have certainly been internalised by white people after centuries of institutional inculcation. However, there are considerable dangers that come with framing such behaviour as "unconscious bias" or "white privilege". Not only do these concepts put the focus on individual instead of systematic racism, they also then allow individuals to elide responsibility for their complicity in this system; framing it as an act white people have very little control over. The prevailing logic thus becomes that 'we have to confess to unconscious bias to move towards diminishing institutional racism' (Tate and Page 2018, p.151). As Shirley Anne Tate and Damian Page (2018, p.151) argue, this:

> can re(centre) white supremacy by removing blame and its accompanying shame and guilt which is part of the process of unlearning white supremacy. White fragility emerges as vulnerability, anger, fear, for which the only balm is self-forgiveness because you simply did not actively know; your racism was unconscious after all, unconscious bias being from the premise of inevitability and normalisation.

The idea of not actively knowing about or being able to control "unconscious bias" or "white privilege" is something Genna emphasises throughout her narrative. When recalling another time she intrudes upon Minette's private space, the white student notes: 'I drifted into her side of the room not to touch anything but simply to stand in Minette's space as if somehow, like magic, I might know what it was like to be Minette Swift' (Oates 2007, p.13). Here, 'drifted' suggests that Genna was not in control of her body when she infiltrated Minette's study space and that she was in fact carried away by some sort of external force or, rather, internalised habit. It consequently absolves Genna from any blame for her actions. To employ a word so deliberately highlights how disingenuous and dangerous references to "unconscious bias" and habits of "white privilege" can actually be. For Genna is fully aware of what she is doing as she exploits an increasingly institutionalised idea to impress a certain image of herself upon the reader. Maintaining this aura of ignorance and therefore innocence is much more important to white people like Genna than confronting the uncomfortable reality of their conscious complicity in perpetuating a system of white dominance. It is certainly more appealing than taking on the responsibility and making the necessary sacrifices that a proper readdressing of privilege requires.

Rather than unconscious habit, Genna's move to Minette's study space is driven by an urgent need to "know" her enigmatic roommate. Significantly, white people's need to "know" Black people, or any person of colour, is inherent within the concept of ontological expansiveness itself. As Terrance MacMullan (2009, p.67) notes in *The Habits of Whiteness*, 'ontology is the quest for certainty about the nature of things beyond or before our imperfect perceptions'. Following this definition, ontological expansiveness can be considered a violating act carried out by white people as they strive to fully comprehend the nature of those who, by virtue of their apparent strangeness or difference (something that Genna alludes to in her various descriptions of Minette) are considered beyond or before white people's immediate perception. It is important to stress that the quest for such comprehension does not entail expanding ideas about what it is to be Black. There is no room for nuance here and no intention of subverting stereotypes that have historically been used to justify the subjugation of Black people in America and beyond. Instead, ontological expansiveness is about subsuming an autonomous and complex group of people back into a restrictive, racist realm of understanding, and consigning them to debilitating images of blackness which uphold the social order.

Minette and the Modern Museum

In *Black Girl, White Girl*, Genna regularly inspects Minette's personal effects, which are lined neatly on the young Black woman's desk and overhanging windowsill. In the white student's hands, these personal effects become cultural artefacts capable of exposing, not a new or more nuanced insight into Minette or her family, but a fixed, preconceived "Truth" about blackness. Getting to this "Truth" is important to Genna because it will allow her to reduce her Black roommate to a "recognisable" and thus static, fully known and controllable form of the white imagination. Genna's intentions are suggested when she informs her reader that: 'Alone in our room and Minette away at class I could examine the photographs arranged in a perfect arc on her desk. Never did I touch these photographs. I leaned close, my breath left a faint film on the glass; but I never touched' (Oates 2007, pp.48-9). Minette's photographs were likely placed on the desk to project a sense of individual identity and family comfort in the face of what Kwakye earlier described as being an impersonal, temporary and institutionalised university space. However, given the analysis of its metaphorical and material function in the previous chapter, the reference to glass alerts us to the prospect that these photographs serve as important tools of systematic white dominance. It was noted in the discussion of the Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace, for instance, that glass facilitated practices of surveillance and spectatorship; reinforcing the reduction of colonised peoples and cultures to exotic, one-dimensional objects of intrigue. We see the same dynamic here, as Genna proceeds to 'examine' encased images of Black people with the clinical demeanour of someone attempting to extract information from a strange or even alien entity. By engaging with Minette's personal effects in this way, Genna consequently transforms her roommate's desk from a site of subtle resistance to an exhibition of blackness.

In fact, a more pertinent and revealing parallel for the reconfigured desk space might be the modern museum. According to Tony Bennett (2013, p.89), the modern museum was 'established as a means of sharing what had previously been private, of exposing what had been concealed'. This meant 'arrang(ing) and display(ing) natural and cultural artefacts so as to secure the "utilisation of these for the increase of knowledge and for the culture and enlightenment of the people"' (Bennett 2013, p.24). Whilst the modern museum sought (and still seeks) to increase the knowledge of people, it did not (and does not) seek to introduce new paradigms of knowledge. For 'museums function largely as repositories of the *already known*. They are places for telling, and telling again, the stories of our time, ones which have become *doxa*, through their endless repetition' (Bennett 2013, p.147 [original italics]). Much

like the literary canon, which in manufacturing an ostensibly objective and self-evident tradition of literary excellence subtly (re)enforces values, standards and associations that legitimate whiteliness, 'the museum artefact seems capable of lending such self-evident truths its own material testimony because it is already imprinted with the sedimented weight of those truths from the outset' (Bennett 2013, p.147). In other words, those who engage with an artefact in a museum (or a work from the literary canon) find their current ideological views are affirmed because it is these very ideological views which inform the interaction; ideological views, it should be said, that were developed through previous contact with museum artefacts (or canonical literary works) in the first place. Modern museums (and literary canons) thus contribute to a cycle of experience and knowledge consumption that solidifies and safeguards the logic of whiteliness. An obvious historical example of the process described above is the 'museological display' of the so-called "Hottentot Venus", otherwise known as Sara Baartman (Bennett 2013, p.77).

In every previous draft of this chapter I have now proceeded to discuss Baartman's history in the context of racist and sexist discourse, science, surveillance, objectification, exoticisation, colonialism and systematic white dominance. This has then allowed me to tighten parallels between the modern museum and higher education institution, as I highlight how Genna's treatment of Minette replicates and reaffirms the power dynamics observed between white people and the "Hottentot Venus". Normally I then end the analysis by arguing that we need to consider the additional hierarchies of power which operate within the social category of "woman", pointing to Chandra Mohanty's (2003, p.55) comment that: 'It is the intersections of the various systems of class, race, heterosexuality, and nation…that positions us as "women"'. The final message being that the intersection of various systemic networks enables white women, as part of a racially empowered social group, to oppress Black women.

Recently, however, I was scrolling through my Twitter feed and came across a conversation between several Black women about the legacy of the "Hottentot Venus". They were arguing that the perpetual deployment of the "Hottentot Venus" as an example of the racist treatment Black women have historically been subjected to was emblematic of how Black women are never allowed to rest and are instead reduced to objects of interest and inquiry. Initially skimming the debate, I proceeded to scroll past it; resolved at this late stage in my PhD to stick with and not scrutinise my methodological approach to the thesis. After further reflection (brought about by my dissatisfaction with the lazy ethical stance I had taken) I realised I was at risk of reinforcing the very dynamics I examine and condemn in my reading of Black Girl, White Girl. *Quick to point out the intersecting power systems*

which underpinned Genna's violation of her Black roommate, I was not so conscientious when it came to considering how my position as a non-Black man of colour informed my leveraging of Sara Baartman and impacted discourse regarding Black women as a consequence. Like Genna, I was reducing Baartman to a one-dimensional cultural artefact because I felt it gave me some extra insight into Black women's experience. Of course, preserving history is important (especially when the history of Black people has so often been ignored or erased) but only if that historical account communicates the complexity and multi-dimensionality of the people it considers. There are so many accounts that discuss Baartman's racist treatment that it is time to either focus on her acts of resistance, consider other aspects of her existence or leave her to rest completely (Bennett 2013; Gilman 1984; Yancy 2008). Regressive and harmful approaches to research, often seen in discussions about Baartman need to be addressed as much as regressive and harmful content. Once identified, these approaches must be called out, critiqued and, finally, eradicated. In my own case, I have decided to remove the original paragraphs of the current section but, not wanting to sanitise the space they once took up, I have replaced these paragraphs with an explanation of my editorial process.[32]

The chapter continues…

Despite historical efforts by white individuals and institutions to exclude, objectify, minimise and control them, Black women now populate the most prestigious sites of higher education as active producers of knowledge. This has arguably intensified attempts to force such women behind glass cases through a network of predominately white bodies, discourse and objects; as theorised by Du Bois in the previous chapter and symbolised in *Black Girl, White Girl* by the photographs on Minette's desk. As Genna examines the images of Black people contained within the photo frames, she brings her pre-conceived notions of blackness to the interaction and searches ardently for those ideas to be confirmed. This dynamic reflects how Black women speak about their experience at predominately white universities in the UK. Cecile Wright et al. (2007, p.153) note that Black women in higher education are considered a 'threat' by virtue of 'having entered institutional spaces that are traditionally the

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[32] The debate being raised here about Baartman's legacy is not new. Kornweibel has discussed the controversy Suzan-Lori Park's play *Venus* caused when it was performed in the early 1990s. Kornweibel (2009, p.64 & p.68) reports that Parks was self-avowedly 'obsessed with (the process of) resurrecting', because 'much of African-American history has been unrecorded or "disremembered"'. However, the scholar also notes that some critics commented that the attempt to tell Baartman's story reinforced the objectification of the historical figure. For Kornweibel herself, these criticisms missed the mark because 'the play is not about a historical figure, and not exclusively about history, but about contemporary readers/theatregoers and our complicity with all the problematic discourse that the "Hottentot Venus" has come to represent'. Whatever the case may be, it is clear that the Hottentot Venus's life and legacy has taken on a symbolic significance which does little to honour her as an individual Black woman.

preserve of white men'. This threat, 'this dread of being displaced from an identity that has placed the white subject as being central to the world, propels (white people) to be constantly vigilant to the activities of the figures that make it uncomfortable to hold on to this position' (Puwar 2004, p.49). According to Puwar (2004, p.55), such vigilance 'borders on the paranoiac, an anxiety that unleashes its so called "protective" symbolic and physical violence'. Symbolic violence, or violation (as I am conceptualising it), is enacted through stereotyping. Deborah Gabriel (2017, p.35) asserts that 'dominant, stereotypical constructions form part of the dehumanising process that contributes to the exploitation of Black women and is a mechanism for suppressing our (Black women's resistance)'. For Gabriel (2017, p.26), the 'controlling images of Black women helps to normalise racism and emphasise our outsider status. It is a way of signifying our un-belonging'. By emphasising their 'outsider status', stereotypes are used to coerce Black women into adopting the normative culture of higher education (a culture which substantiates whiteliness) as this offers an opportunity to defy alienating associations attributed to the social group, as well as establish a foothold within an institution of power that these alienating associations ordinarily prohibit Black women from entering. It is my contention that the attitudes and behaviour described above speak to those exhibited by Genna, further enforcing a parallel between the manifestation and impact of whiteliness in predominately white institutions in the UK and US. Once again, whilst these contexts cannot be considered identical and the similarity of Black British and African-American experiences should not be taken for granted, the clear commonalities between them reinforce how whiteliness is a global phenomenon that moves beyond national borders.

This is indicated by further analysis of *Black Girl, White* Girl. Genna continuously reinforces Minette's outsider status as she violates the young Black woman's desk in an attempt to consign her to a dehumanising stereotype. Paradoxically, the white student also presents this outsider status as a position to be aspired to. She reports to her reader that: 'So many times I had stared at her framed family photos, I'd almost come to think I would find myself among them' (Oates 2007, p.102). As it has been said, Genna uses the materials on Minette's desk to reduce her to a recognisable form of blackness. However, this process of exoticising and essentialising Minette also entails elevating the young Black woman to saintly proportions. In an insulting and insidious inversion of Western history, Genna creates the impression that Minette is something of a Christian missionary who has the power to save her primitive white roommate from a damnation determined by race. Early on in the novel she ponders 'why doesn't Minette read the Bible to me?...Don't Christians want to convert

heathens?' (Oates 2007, p.85). And later, there is a revealing conversation with her father, Max Meade, which reads:

> "Minette doesn't seem to want to 'convert me'. I think that I must be just a white girl in her eyes, I can never be a sister."
>
> "Well, honey. There's a sense in which that's true."
>
> "But I *try*. I *try*, Daddy. 'Stand outside the white race' – you've said. I *try so hard*" (Oates 2007, p.266 [original italics]).

Genna's conversation with her father suggests that the white student wants Minette to help her transcend the inhibiting physical reality of whiteness; initially indicated by the comparison she draws between Minette's desk and Mondrian's artwork. She, too, wants to adopt an outsider status. This is supposedly because Genna wants to connect with her roommate on a more fundamental and familial level, with 'sister' implying a level of intimacy and solidarity. Even if this is the case, it should be noted that Genna places all the emotional labour of her personal and social development on the young Black student; not at all uncommon in the higher education institution (Jayakumar et al. 2017). That said, it is more likely that Genna is once again attempting to elide responsibility for the violations she is forever subjecting Minette to. According to bell hooks (1992, p.25):

> Desire to make contact with those bodies deemed Other, with no apparent will to dominate, assuages the guilt of the past and even takes the form of a defiant gesture where one denies accountability and historical connection. Most importantly, it establishes a contemporary narrative where suffering imposed by structures of domination on those designated Other is deflected by an emphasis on seduction and longing where the desire is not to make the Other over in one's image but to become an Other.

By confessing her desire to find herself amongst Minette's family in the framed photo she frequently stares at, Genna attempts to obscure the fact she is there to reaffirm stifling stereotypes regarding blackness. Genna's revelation that she 'leaned close' to the photographs on Minette's desk, so close her 'breath left a faint film on the glass', not only highlights how earnest her desire to find some sign that substantiates her ideas about blackness but also indicates her inability to do so. This failure to find or form a familiar picture of Minette means that the white student frequently returns to and ransacks her Black roommate's desk.

Having raised the subject of confession, it is worth pausing to consider genre in the context of Genna's narrative account. Following a framework set out by Laurence Porter, Genna's narrative corresponds with a specific subsection of autobiography: the apologetic, or

confessional. According to Porter (1976, p.147): 'the apologetic autobiography can be schematised *narrator:public:::child:parent*. The narrator oscillates between the two childlike positions vis-à-vis his public, at times defying them with his naughtiness, and at others, compliantly beseeching them to excuse his errors and love him once again'. The sense that Genna's narrative corresponds with this definition of the apologetic autobiography is amplified by the sections of the novel discussed above. Not only do we see Genna appealing to her literal father (emphasising and at least momentarily fixing her position as daughter and therefore child), we also see her adopt the role of heathen in relation to Minette, the Christian missionary, historically constituted as a child-parent relationship. As Porter indicates, Genna is seeking redemption by distorting the facts of reality. Porter (1976, p.147) highlights how 'in all such confessions…the narrator is blocked in his personal development, immobilised in guilt. He envisages his past nostalgically, as a prelapsarian state…he feels compelled to find justification'. This corresponds neatly with hooks's comment regarding white peoples' desire to make contact with 'bodies deemed Other'. Rather than critically engage with past or contemporary complicity in a system of white dominance, Genna endeavours to waive any historical or personal responsibility in order to alleviate a sense of guilt and remain marked as innocent. Such a consideration of genre indicates how Genna's entire narrative account is driven by a clear political agenda to obscure and sanitise the history of whiteliness (both on an individual and collective level). This is particularly insidious considering Genna's claim, when concluding the confessional, that 'I have wanted it to be utterly truthful…I have wanted not to spare myself' (*BGWG*, p.262). As with Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom,* this novel enforces the need to interrogate the way in which literary texts, particularly those produced by white writers present "truth" as an objective, neutral and self-evident reality.

To return to the scene at hand, it is important to attend to the material as well as symbolic violations Genna enacts at Minette's desk space. As the white student leans into the photographs, attempting to find some semblance of a stereotype behind their frames, it is said that her 'breath left a faint film on the glass'. Reference to 'breath' emphasises the perverse and pernicious sense of desire underpinning Genna's fixation with Minette. It conveys sultriness with a sinister edge, as the white student's face and mouth move disturbingly close to the image of her Black roommate. More importantly, it leaves a clear trace of Genna's presence which could well be observed when Minette returns to the room. The mark thus becomes a message that the Black student is under constant surveillance by an omnipresent being who has her trapped within the confines of a predominately white institution. What is

particularly sinister about the medium through which this message is communicated, a slight mark on a photograph, is that it could easily be (dis)missed by Minette or denied by Genna. This is characteristic of microaggressions, described as 'stealth racial assaults' and 'threats in the air' (quite literally conveyed by Genna's breath on the photograph frames), which can be so subtle and seemingly innocuous that they become difficult to point out and process; potentially leading to accusations and indeed feelings of paranoia (Yosso et al. 2009, p.673). Disturbingly, Genna seems to actively and quite consciously stir and intensify such feelings of paranoia in Minette. At one point in the novel, she reveals how: 'I replaced the magazine on Minette's windowsill in such a way that Minette would notice that I'd picked it up. She would say nothing to me about the magazine nor would I say anything to her but she would notice, I think' (Oates 2007, p.103). To suggest that Genna's intention here is to indirectly illustrate an interest in Minette's life is an exercise in wilful ignorance to say the least. Instead, it seems much more likely that Genna is attempting to incite anxiety and intimidate her roommate into becoming an orderly and thus unthreatening figure at Schuyler College.

Minette's mental health certainly deteriorates as the academic year goes on, which is a development encapsulated by the dramatic decline of the Black student's desk space. Genna reports that: 'Where once Minette's side of our study room was kept orderly and clean as if in subtle rebuke to more casual housekeeping, now it had the look of an eroded beach littered with debris' (Oates 2007, p.196). There is a suggestion that Minette is finding it difficult to keep up with work (which subtly supports the idea that affirmative action sets unprepared and substandard Black students up to fail) but I argue this transformation is the result of being continually subjected to microaggressive assaults. What is particularly incensing about the way in which Minette's anxiety is reported to manifest is that it presents Genna with the opportunity to appear as if she is actually taking care of her roommate. As well as running around writing up notes in the classes Minette misses, Genna proceeds to clean up the desk space in an apparent act of unconditional kindness. She therefore manages to appear like a "sister" or an ally, who helps Minette cope with the difficulties of college life, even as she becomes the primary source of the Black student's distress.

Genna's examination of Minette's desk serves as an example of how white people violate the privacy and autonomy of Black students across elite universities and colleges. On a literal level, the inspection of personal items on Black student's university or college desks is not at all unheard of. Beyond that, the attempt to coerce Black students into adopting unthreatening and compliant personas by violating their personal spaces can be seen in a

number of instances across different academic spaces. From attending conferences and events that revolve around issues of race, or feature an array of Black people sharing their perspectives and experiences, to signing up to courses that focus on aspects of "Black culture", to scrolling through "Black Twitter", to inquiring into the personal lives of Black people over coffee, at the end of presentations, or indeed at their desks, white people exercise the privilege and power of ontological expansiveness to maintain and further consolidate the workings of whiteliness in the face of potential resistance. By inserting themselves in these intimate spaces, white people can ensure their dominance is felt, interrupting and steering conversations in ways that please them and obtaining and obscuring bits of information that help support their particular world view. All the while appearing (and even feeling) that they are supporting Black students by showing an interest in their experience.

It is the earnest desire to inhabit such spaces that can make white people so dangerous. We have already seen how Genna's obsession with Minette's desk leads to the Black student's mental deterioration. There is also another telling moment when Genna notes that, over Christmas, 'I'd hidden away to read Richard Wright, James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, still I could not comprehend my roommate Minerva Swift' (Oates 2007, p.171). Ordinarily, engaging with great Black writers might be seen as a positive, progressive experience for white students. However, by using such seminal texts to 'comprehend' her Black roommate, Genna reiterates her belief that "cultural artefacts" contain an essential and thus one-dimensional view about blackness. It is this sort of attitude, discussed at greater length in the chapter on doors and Zadie Smith's *On Beauty*, that means incorporating previously marginalised aspects of Black culture, such as Hip Hop, no longer feels like the right ambition for committed anti-racists. Considering the above behaviour, who, we must ask, does the institutionalisation of Black culture actually serve? How will the opportunity be leveraged and for what purpose? Does the incorporation of previously marginalised aspects of Black culture not merely serve to intensify the violation of Black students in elite universities? It is my hope that by using Lauryn Hill's album cover to inform my reading of *Black Girl, White Girl,* I am helping to democratise source material in an elitist space, whilst more effectively exposing the workings of whiteliness. However, should I have brought Lauryn Hill into the academic space? Am I actually subjecting Hill and other Black women by extension to further violation by bringing the musician into a realm full of exploitative white and non-Black academics? My personal motivations for doing so are certainly beside the point. As Chester Pierce asserted when he first conceptualised the term 'microaggression':

> Blacks (sic) have to spend mental energy considering whether they are genuinely accepted or just being tolerated…Blacks (sic) use mental and emotional energy discerning the difference between individual supportive whites (sic) and destructive actions by whites (sic) as a collective; and…Blacks (sic) confront additional and unique race-based stress identifying when, where, and how to resist oppression, versus when, where and how to accommodate it (in Smith et al. 2011, p.66).

The fact that the sort of racist behaviour described above exists means that all Black students must immediately try to discern the different agendas of the white (and non-Black) people they come into contact with, which is a stress-inducing task that precludes any material outcomes. As such, Black students in higher education are forced (irrespective of white and non-Black people's intentionality) to operate in universities and colleges with the heightened sense of anxiety and stress increasingly exhibited by Minette as her academic year progresses.

Resistance

Pierce's reference to resistance in the quote above gives pause at this point and prompts a potential re-reading of Minette's increasingly dirty desk. Frances Sobande (2018) highlights how 'the nuances of activism includes elements of it that are subtle, only noticeable to a select few, and may be more indirect than direct'. In light of what has been said about the connotations of conformity initially emanating from Minette's orderly desk, it could be argued that rather than commenting on the Black student's declining mental health, the desk's deterioration constitutes a subtle, indirect and temporary act of resistance directed at Genna and the college more generally. It could be seen as the physical manifestation of Minette's refusal to cohere to the respectability politics Genna wants her to prescribe to. Having drawn comparisons between Minette and Lauryn Hill throughout this chapter, it is important to note La Marr Jurelle Bruce's research on the Black musician's relationship with "madness". For this arguably explains why the Black student dirties her desk in Oates's novel. According to Bruce, there are various categories of "madness" which have been projected onto Hill throughout her career. One such category is 'psychosocial alterity', which is described by Bruce (2012, p.372) as a 'radical divergence from the "normal" within a given psychosocial context'. Bruce (2012, p.372) notes that 'this iteration of madness functions as a variable foil to normative notions of reason and order. Indeed, any person, idea or behaviour that perplexes and vexes dominant logics is vulnerable to the ascription "crazy"'. Bearing in mind Genna's role as narrator and the control she subsequently has over our perception of Minette, the apparent mental decline (or madness) exhibited by Minette could be due to a mis-reading (conscious or otherwise) that is predicated on conventional psychosocial logics which inform the white

student's understanding of how Black people ordinarily behave. Like Lauryn Hill, who Bruce (2012, p.384) claims eventually embraced the "crazy" label and used it as a 'signifier of political resistance and countercultural epistemology', Minette could have dirtied her desk in order to signify resistance against the racially oppressive system that ordinarily regulates Black women's behaviour in the higher educational institution.

If this is the case, Minette's counter-hegemonic strategy proves unsuccessful. After being forced to leave her room and take residence in a different building from Genna, Minette dies in a fire. Seemingly an accident, Oates leaves enough ambiguity in the retelling of the event for the reader to infer that the Black student actually committed suicide. Although Chapter Five will highlight how suicide is presented as a viable option for countering racial oppression in *The White Boy Shuffle,* it is very hard to read resistance in a novel where Minette is not only denied any opportunity to speak directly to the reader, but is also at the mercy of a duplicitous narrator intent on projecting a positive image of herself. This issue of narrative voice, or discourse, is one that Oates alludes to throughout the novel. For instance, it is telling that when watching her former roommate crossing the college quad, Genna notes 'as always she walked with a punishing deliberateness, eyes fixed and unwavering, glancing neither to the right nor the left, not so much disdainful of her surroundings as indifferent' (Oates 2007, p.221). This observation is typical of Genna who is forever framing Minette as an 'indifferent individual', who neither cares about "being Black" or acknowledging / deferring to her white roommate. It is what prompts the narrator to present herself as a victim who is subject to unwarranted 'punish(ment)' from Minette. By interpreting Minette's behaviour in this way, Genna subtly suggests that it is the young Black woman who is in a position of power. A closer analysis of the scene set out above reveals quite a different reality, however. Rather than indicating 'indifference', the fact that Minette walks with 'deliberateness', her 'eyes fixed and unwavering', more logically communicates discomfort and self-consciousness, which is perfectly understandable considering the young Black woman is constantly subjected to surveillance. Genna's skewed perception and retelling of this scene, as well as her relationship with Minette generally, is an attempt to paint herself as an innocent, well-intentioned white victim who is at the mercy of an enigmatic and empowered Black woman. This narrative, which allows her to get way with violating Minette without reproach, is dangerous because it is likely to be accepted by an inattentive reader as objective fact.

The validity of Genna's narrative is enhanced by her occupation as a celebrated academic. After Schuyler College, Genna recalls how she went on to write a doctoral

dissertation which 'caused something of a stir in academic circles' and 'highly acclaimed', went on to win 'several awards' (Oates 2007, p.266). This is significant because it means that any narrative she produces is likely to be widely circulated, at least within the academic world, and treated as a valuable piece of testimony that reflects the "nature" of Black women (volatile, unstable and ultimately unsuited to academia) and the instinctive benevolence of the white women who try to support them. It is consequently a piece of white feminist scholarship that does double damage. Black students who read the text will have their outsider status reinforced and may then feel pressure to adopt an unthreatening persona, lest they be subjected to the psychological and physiological damage Minette is shown to experience. On the other hand, white students, buoyed by further evidence of their inherent innocence and well-placed intentions, as well as Black women's unruly and destructive way of being, may feel encouraged to continue unreflectively exercising their privilege and power; violating the autonomy and privacy of those who, like Minette, appear to deviate from the cultural norms of the college or university.

Genna's insidious manipulation of narrative voice reinforces why counter-narratives are considered so important by Critical Race Theorists. As Dolores Bernal (2002, p.116 [original italics]) puts it: 'By incorporating a counter-storytelling method based on the narratives, *testimonios*, or life histories of people of colour, a story can be told from a non-majoritarian perspective – a story that white educators usually do not hear or tell'.[33] However, there is an issue that still remains. For William Tate (1994, p.264), even if Black and other people of colour are afforded an opportunity to share their own stories, 'remarks about our experiences as people will not be seriously considered in academic circles'. Aware of this fact, Black students have looked to leverage other outlets to express themselves. One such outlet in recent times has been the internet. As this chapter has demonstrated, the desk is not only a metaphor for the general violations Black students can be subjected to when operating in elite higher education institutions, they are also themselves material sites of violation and subsequent dehumanisation. Lined with personal effects and thus apparent sources of

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[33] The necessity of providing opportunities for people of colour to tell their own stories is actually amplified by Joyce Carol Oates's novel *The Sacrifice*, which retells the controversial story regarding Tawana Brawley and (what a grand jury deemed to be) her false allegations about being raped by a group of white men in 1987. As Roxane Gay (2015) writes in a review for *The New York Times*: 'There is little…empathy in "The Sacrifice'. Too often, difference is treated as caricature, as the speculations of someone who understands the Black or working-class experience only through what might be gleaned from an encyclopaedia'. Considering the critique of such behaviour in *Black Girl, White Girl*, it is striking how this description of Oates's writing mirrors that produced by Genna. Ultimately, white writers cannot and should not be relied upon to accurately capture the richness and complexity of Black and other people of colour's lived experiences.

information, which can be used to reaffirm preconceived and stifling narratives regarding blackness, these desks are particularly intensive sites of racial oppression. There is perhaps more promise in the desk-top. It is to this architectural object that the thesis now turns, with a close reading of Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie's *Americanah*. By reflecting on the way Ifemelu utilises the internet to combat the ostracising effects of university life, the chapter will discuss ways in which the desk-top can assist the construction of liberating counter-stories. It will also comment on some of the ways the desk-top can actually perpetuate and even intensify the oppressive mechanisms of the elite higher education institution.

<u>Desk-Tops</u>

There is a clear connection between the university or college desk and the desk-top computer. Mark Wigley (2010, p.52) notes how:

> Desktop computing simultaneously places the computer on the desk and the image of the desk inside the computer. The visual logic of the horizontal desktop is mirrored in the vertical screen, with the body of the user literally inserted into the space in between the two images and the mouse acting as a hinge.

Although placing a computer on the desk does not fundamentally alter the higher educational space (metaphorically represented by the desk) it does not constitute a superficial adornment of that space either. For the desk-top provides a portal into an alternate (or virtual) space, where new modes of expression and new ways of being are promised and, to some extent, permitted as well. As Wigley (2010, p.50) puts it: 'It sustains a new body able to move in new ways, in new spaces, starting with the sense that one is moving through a seemingly virtual space of the computer'. In fact, the desk-top does not only sustain a new body, it becomes an extension of it: 'The unassuming yet ever present mouse is a remarkable prosthesis', argues Wigley (2010, p.50), 'radically extending the capacity of the body. Its relentless smoothness in shape and frictionless movements across the table fuse the gap between humans and machine. The wire reaching out between the fingers become a crucial part of our biology'. As technology develops and our technological proficiency grows with it, the fusion of the body and computer, or human and machine, only becomes more apparent.

Wigley's mouse may be relentlessly smooth in shape and frictionless in movement, but it is still a distinct object that clearly mediates between us and the computer screen. Increasingly, however, no such mediator is necessary. With newer models, we are able to control and manipulate the desktop screen directly, either by sliding our fingers over a connected keypad or pressing against the screen itself. These actions are becoming so instinctual that many of us cannot help but conceive of the computer as an extension of our new improved bodies. I, for example, am typing these words without looking at the keyboard, which means that they appear to materialise in front of me as soon as I think of them; reinforcing a sense of synthesis between the desk-top screen, my body and my mind. Wigley (2010, p.51) asserts that this connection becomes most apparent with the mobile devices we carry in our pockets, as they are almost always physically attached to us in some way. Indeed, as many critics of developing technology and social media have contended, phones and other

mobile devices are picked up and scrolled through so frequently now that they have more or less become appendages to the human body.

In one such critique of the internet and social media, Zadie Smith (2018, p.52 [original italics]) argues that the warning (issued by Jaron Lanier) 'you have to be somebody before you can share yourself' online has been perverted by Mark Zuckerberg's Facebook, where 'sharing your choices with everybody (and doing what they do) *is* being somebody'. Stepping slightly sideways from this point, perhaps part of the prodigious appeal of new technology is that it presents people with the possibility of becoming a no-body. For not everyone can actually be or become somebody in the offline world where certain physical forms are, as the concept of antiblackness illustrates, denied an ontological existence (Ray et al. 2018). The desk-top is appealing because it allows users to disappear their physical form and (in theory) all the debilitating social processes and oppressive hierarchies that come with it. This is something that early advocates of the internet were keen to impress. As Alexandra Campbell (2008, p.413 [original italics]) summarises: 'The physical boundaries of space and body, effectively valorised to secure borders between racial and ethnic and national groupings offline, are represented' by internet advocates 'as a "cybernetic utopia" in which *where* you are, *who* you are, and *what* you are is of little consequence'. Such 'utopian accounts' suggest that '"race", nationality, gender and sexuality are practically irrelevant in cyberspace as disembodied internet users are imagined as overcoming the limits of offline corporeality' (Campbell 2008, p.413). This meant that 'in the early days' of its existence, the internet became a space where 'everything - even transcending racism - was possible' (Nakamura 2002, p.xi).

Whilst not rendering the social categories of race, nationality, gender, sexuality, class and dis/ability totally irrelevant online, Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie's *Americanah* does present cyberspace in an idealistic manner. The novel's main character, Ifemelu, manages to subvert the social and economic restrictions American socialisation imposes on her by simply running a successful blog. This blog gives Ifemelu a comfortable middle-class lifestyle (without explicit patriarchal support) and, by securing a fellowship to attend Princeton, grants her the cultural and social capital that comes with studying at an Ivy League university (Iromuanya 2017). Although Ifemelu does make reference to online dissenters when discussing her blog posts, their comments do not seem to relate to her race or gender and, in any case, she does not spend any time reflecting on the ways in which they negatively affect her mental state. Taken together, these two points indicate that *Americanah* presents an idealistic picture of blogging and cyberspace for Black people generally and Black women specifically. As this chapter will

later discuss, various commentators have cited major benefits to using the internet, such as community building, positive identity assertion and the creation of counter-narratives (Kwakye and Ogunbiyi 2019; Stanton et al. 2017; Steele 2016). However, several critics also note that, to quote Deborah Gabriel (2016, p.1623), 'online spaces do not necessarily change how an individual views their identity, nor the significance of power relations attached to racial hierarchies, since race, class and gender remain the most dominant dimensions of identity online, despite the promise of fluidity in cyberspace'. More explicitly, Jesse Daniels (2012, p.696) argues that 'race and racism persist online in ways that are both new and unique to the internet alongside vestiges of centuries-old forms that reverberate both offline and on'.

In the higher educational context, it is important to engage with the ways that Black people have positively harnessed the internet, or utilised the desk-top computer, in order to withstand the isolating and oppressive environment they are enveloped by in elite, predominately white institutions. As was shown in the analysis of *Black Girl, White Girl*, the material site of the higher education institution coerces Black students into falling in line with the social order operating there. This is a racist process that, in constantly reinforcing an outsider status through incessant surveillance and stereotyping, can cause Black students' mental and physical health to seriously deteriorate. In Oates's novel, the young Black woman who is subjected to this process is unable to effectively register resistance because all expressive outlets are either denied or distorted by her white roommate's co-option of the desk space. An examination of the ways in which Black people utilise the internet in this chapter not only emphasises the agency Black people possess and actively wield in predominately white universities and colleges (which is made unclear if not denied entirely in *Black Girl, White Girl*) but also demonstrates how the desk-top can be an important site of resistance; providing the kind of expressive outlet Minette seems to lack whilst attending Schuyler College. After first examining how Black women's bodies are configured, characterised and constrained by the system of white dominance operating in the material world of Adichie's *Americanah* (a process that is shown to be centrally enforced by elite higher education) this chapter will show how Adichie's novel positions the desk-top as an architectural object with the potential to combat the oppressive dynamics played out on the university or college desk it rests on.

An analysis of the internet and higher education cannot stop there, however. It is important to also remain attentive to the ways in which whiteness manifests online. This is something that Adichie's *Americanah* simply does not do, as it focuses solely on the positive

aspects of the desk-top. Nevertheless, it should be addressed because, as Thomas Nakayama (2017, pp.69-70) highlights: 'The digital environment opens up new ways of thinking about the ways that whiteness attempts to re-secure its position of power'. Nakayama's point is reiterated by Anastasia Kanjere (2018, p.11) when she argues that 'online, as offline, a variety of discourses are recruited in the reproduction of whiteness and as a means to delegitimise criticism of the racial status quo'. The urgent need to attend to these issues outlined by Nakayama and Kanjere is impressed further by Nakamura's (2008, p.98) observation that 'while studies of race in cyberspace are still relatively rare, studies of whiteness in cyberspace are vanishingly so'. As such, focusing specifically on the context of higher education, this chapter will end by examining some of the ways that the internet is exploited by white institutions and individuals alike in order to perpetuate, if not intensify, the oppression of Black people both inside and outside of the academy. It will thus complicate the positioning of the desk-top as a liberational object that can operate outside of the conventional power systems reflected and perpetuated by the higher educational desk.

The Body and Blogs in *Americanah*

> Princeton, in the summer, smelled of nothing, and although Ifemelu liked the tranquil greenness of the many trees, the clean streets and stately homes, the delicately overpriced shops, and the quiet, abiding air of earned grace, it was this, the lack of smell, that most appealed to her, perhaps because the other American cities she knew well had smelled so distinctly (Adichie 2014, p.3).

Americanah opens with Ifemelu's impression of Princeton University. The positive association she makes between the Ivy League institution and its lack of smell (as seen above) may initially seem like a strange and superfluous detail but, after further examination, emerges to be a significant commentary on the racial and gender dynamics operating at the academic institution. As a sensory experience, smell draws our attention (however indirectly or subconsciously) to the body, or, more specifically, to the open orifices of the body. These orifices, through which we release and exchange numerous substances, remind us, in turn, of both the body's baseness and its penetrability. The absence of smell disavowals such a state of being, as it allows us (albeit on a temporary and partial basis) to experience ourselves as lofty, invulnerable minds. The fact that this disavowal takes on a decidedly racial and gendered dimension in Ifemelu's assessment of Princeton is unsurprising considering that the politics of smell have long been enmeshed with the politics of race and gender in Western society. Despite the fact there is 'no genetic basis for smell', Mark Smith (2012, p.381) notes how 'beginning in the late-nineteenth century' it 'was used to not simply demarcate groups but, in

addition, to supposedly detect "race" and ethnicity'. This was evidenced in the landmark case of *Plessy v Ferguson* (1896) where the "separate but equal" ruling was made to ultimately legitimise the implementation of Jim Crow in South U.S (Smith 2012).

The reason that smell was able to play a part in establishing a degrading and dehumanising system of antiblack oppression is because, in the words of Asia Friedman (2016, p.86), 'smell not only helps to indicate membership in categories such as gender and class (or race), it plays a role in the moral construction of the individual group'. Whitely discourse in the nineteenth century ensured that Black people became associated with negative smells that carried moralistic connotations such as putridity, miasma and disease; all of which implied the need for quarantine and containment. As *Plessy* and the Jim Crow system demonstrate, these racial alignments were used to justify the spatial separation of Black and white people in America. This is because of what William Tullett (2016, p.317) calls the 'long enduring understanding of skin as a porous membrane between body and environment'. In the West, it was felt that Black bodies (deemed to project a potent smell that exposed an underlying immorality) would effectively contaminate white people both literally and figuratively if they were permitted to share the same space. This fear of contamination is reflected in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) as Quentin expresses complete horror at the prospect of Black students crossing over into the predominately white space of Harvard University and undermining the system of white dominance it serves. As was discussed in the analysis of Faulkner's novel, policies were established by elite institutions to have Black people systematically removed from predominately white areas in order to offset such anxieties about racial integration (Loss 2012).

The association of Black people with smell and the negative, moralistic connotations that come with it can also be seen as part of a systematic strategy to categorise whiteness as a sign of 'cleanliness, purity, the absence of a stain or mark' (Berthold 2010, p.11). Characterising whiteness as 'absence' is an integral aspect of whiteliness, which has always attempted to make the physical body disappear so that white people can move above and beyond material restrictions imposed by race and other social markers. As Richard Dyer (1997, pp.14-5) asserts: 'Black people can be reduced [in white culture] to their bodies and thus to race but white people are something else that is realised in and yet is not reducible to the corporeal, or racial'. In regard to the historical context of smell, it is telling that at the same time white people were projecting negative associations of smell onto Black people, 'English and American writers were also neatly effacing their own role in distinguishing racial

odour', with a 'similar erasure of the European nose (being) demonstrated by the use of dogs to detect racial odour' (Tullett 2016, p.312). For this allowed white people to further disassociate themselves from the body and transcend its perceived limitations.

The promise of disassociating from and transcending the limitations of the body is exactly why Ifemelu finds the lack of smell around the Princeton campus so appealing. It is a desire that is typically denied to those who are racialised as Black, as well as those who are gendered as woman. Nirmal Puwar (2004, p.16) highlights in her book *Space Invaders*:

> One of the major fantasies of the male body is that the finest minds are able to overcome the limits of the body, which is after all framed as an obstacle to pure rational thought. There is a masculinist denial of the male body while women are over-determined by the materiality of their bodies…logic and rationality are symbolically male and women are outside them. Women are their bodies, but men are not, and women are therefore destined to inferiority in all spheres requiring rationality.

As with whiteness then, maleness is characterised by an 'overcom(ing) of the limits of the body' which allows men to experience themselves as 'pure rational thought'; an experience that is denied to all women in general but Black women in particular. Indeed, it is important to note Sander Gilman's (1984, p.231) comment that: 'The association of the Black (sic), especially the Black female, with the syphilophobia of the late nineteenth century was…made manifest. Black females do not merely represent the sexualised female, they also represent the female as a source of corruption and disease'. This reinforces Ifemelu's reason for revelling in Princeton's lack of smell. As a Black woman, she occupies a social position which is systematically reduced to the body and its worst connotations. The lack of smell in what she calls the 'hallowed American club' points to the possibility of transcending such a position, with her status as a fellowship student permitting Ifemelu (in her own view) to exist as a pure, rational mind; a privilege normally reserved for white men (Adichie 2014, p.3). It is these white men the narrator is referring to when she reveals how Ifemelu 'liked, most of all, that in this place of affluent ease, she could pretend to be someone else, someone especially admitted into a hallowed American club, someone adorned with certainty' (Adichie 2014, p.3). The dangerous power dynamics that are put in place when select Black people are 'especially' admitted into elite higher education institutions and expected to adopt a different persona, or 'pretend to be someone else', will be discussed in the following chapter. For now, it is enough to say that the superficiality implied by 'pretend' and 'adorned' indicate that Ifemelu's position within Princeton is unstable and always vulnerable to change. The Black woman may be in the university but, to paraphrase Du Bois, she is not fundamentally of it.

The fact that Ifemelu operates as an 'outsider-within' the elite university is made clear when she is forced to leave Princeton for the notably run down and demographically Black area of Trenton in order to braid her hair (Collins 2000, p110). Critics have identified this hair salon, *Aisha and Fatima African Hair Braiding*, as a particularly important symbolic site in Adichie's novel, noting how it is used to capture and amplify the ways in which various intersecting systems of power, such as race, nationality, class, gender and dis/ability, operate in American society (Cruz-Gutiérrez 2019; Iromuanya 2017). Ifemelu's move from an elite university in Princeton to hair salon in Trenton impresses how she is constituted by external forces as a contaminated (and thus contaminating) Black female body, regardless of her own efforts to repudiate such a configuration of identity and social position. This process of enforced socialisation is indicated immediately with a description of the salon itself: 'Inside, the room was thick with disregard, the paint peeling, the wall plastered with large posters of braided hairstyles and small posters that said QUICK TAX REFUND' (Adichie 2014, p.9). As Ifemelu enters the salon, she is instantly confronted with the overwhelming materiality of the space as paint, posters and print seem to pull away from the building's foundations and impose themselves on the incoming customer. This affront on Ifemelu's personal space compels her to become hyper-aware of the borders of her body and thus, by extension, its openness and vulnerability. These feelings are intensified when the foundations of the salon emerge to be disgusting as well as dilapidated.

The sense of disgust Ifemelu experiences in the salon is relayed with the report that she 'carefully avoided looking at the corners of the room because she knew that clumps of mouldy newspapers would be stuffed beneath pipes and grime and things long rotten'(Adichie 2014, p.12). This revelation is significant considering Sang Hea Kil's (2013, p.186) claim that 'disgust objects tend to be repulsing because of the link to an animal origin, the idea of taking that object into the body as food, and the irrational belief that people take on the properties of the disgust object through contact or ingestion'. In Ifemelu's view, the salon is a site of disgust because it seems capable of contaminating her with its reprehensible properties. This extends to the African women who work there, with Aisha being described as having a 'skin condition, pinkish-cream whorls of discolouration on her arms and neck that looked worryingly infectious' (Adichie 2014, p.10). By averting her eyes from the collection of mouldy newspapers, grime and other rotten things, as well as attempting to disengage from conversations with Aisha, who she 'did not like' and pretends not to hear, Ifemelu actively attempts to combat the contamination of her open and vulnerable body (Adichie 2014, p.15).

In the context of the salon space and the novel more broadly, this does not express a desire to disavow a link to animal origin but rather to disavow her designated status as a Black immigrant woman which, in America, has been framed by racist discourse as one of the greatest sources of disgust imaginable (Hancock 2004).

In a sense, Ifemelu's actions mirror efforts made by the African salon workers themselves. As Mindi McMann (2018, p.210) highlights, 'Halima insists on distinguishing between herself and the young African-American mother', who comes to the salon but is quietly criticised for exhibiting a sexual promiscuity apparently unknown to African women ('"never in Afrique"'), in order to escape a positionality that is recognised by the immigrant as one of the lowest (in terms of social and economic power) in America: Black woman (Adichie 2014, p.103). This points to one of the many intersections Adichie interrogates in the salon space as the African workers attempt to emphasise their nationality in order to avoid being aligned with African-Americans and thus racialised as Black. This strategy, which rests on recognising and responding to the antiblackness which pervades American society, has been identified in sociological studies of immigrant communities that have entered America relatively recently (Johnson 2016). Mary Waters (1994, p.16), for instance, reports in her analysis of second-generation immigrants from Haiti and the West Indies that 'the second generation reserves their ethnic status for use as an identity device to stress their distance from poor Blacks (sic) and to stress their cultural value which are consistent with American middle-class values'. Waters (1994, p.18) goes on to make the important point that 'whites (sic) tend to make racial judgements about identity when it comes to Blacks (sic).' As such, immigrant communities 'are aware that, unless they are active in conveying their (ethnic) identities, they are seen as Black Americans…that often in encounters with whites (sic) the status of their Black race is all that matters' (Waters 1994, p.18). What this indicates is that white people and institutions largely spearhead and shape the stratifying process of racialisation in America which, despite the efforts of immigrant communities from around the world, shows little concern for the nuances presented by national or cultural affiliation.

The role that white people play in perpetuating a sweeping system of white dominance is reinforced by Ifemelu in one of her later blog posts, where she argues:

> When you make the choice to come to America, you become Black. Stop arguing, saying - I'm Jamaican or I'm Ghanaian. America doesn't care. So what if you weren't "Black" in your country. You're in America now. We all have our moments of initiation

into the Society of Former Negroes. Mine was in a class in undergrad when I was asked to give the Black perspective, only I had no idea what that was (Adichie 2014, p.220).

It is unsurprising that Ifemelu first experiences being racialised as Black amongst a group of white students at a predominately white university. In her essay, 'How It Feels To Be A Coloured Me', Zora Neale Hurston (1928, pp.2-3) famously declared that 'I do not always feel coloured. Even now I achieve the unconscious Zora of Eatonville before the Heigra. I feel most coloured when I am thrown against a sharp white background'. Hurston's important insight indicates that an individual's sense of being Black is not inherent but emerges when faced with an external and oppressive white environment. The notion of being 'thrown' into this state of racial awareness alludes to the violence (or violation) that accompanies such externally enforced socialisation. We see an example of white people's violation of Black people in Ifemelu's account above. Though initially ambivalent, if not unaware, of being separate from the rest of the class, Ifemelu is left under no allusion about the alienation that comes with an outsider status when the seminar leader asks her to provide 'the Black perspective' on whatever topic is being discussed.

This is a violating act because after isolating Ifemelu from the rest of the class and rendering her hyper-visible as an alien entity, it strips her of any individual identity and fixes her as a faceless being and body, which is weighed down by the expectation of pertaining to a narrow and essentialised view of blackness. As a consequence, Ifemelu is unable to operate in the realm of pure idea exchange like the rest of her white peers. By inviting Ifemelu to offer up 'the Black perspective', the seminar leader suggests that the insights she provides are necessarily informed by her particular, racially inflected experience. They do not carry the same authority attributed to the apparently objective and neutral knowledge produced by Ifemelu's white counterparts. In fact, Ifemelu's insights are only valued to the extent that they reveal an aspect of Black identity or culture (Gusa 2010). The obvious irony of this entire enterprise is that the person asking the question has a much firmer idea of what 'the Black perspective' is supposed to entail than the person pressed to answer it. Like Genna in *Black Girl, White Girl*, they have a preconceived idea of what constitutes blackness (implied by the homogenising notion of a 'Black perspective') that they attempt to project onto the complex and multifaceted individual who has been unwillingly racialised as Black by American society. Indeed, it bears repeating again that whilst the process of racialisation has historically imposed material constraints on Black people and thus, to some degree, established an aggregate experience and positionality– such as particular vulnerability to state violation and social,

economic and political disempowerment – the intersectionality of social identities, coupled with the individuality of each person means that there cannot be a homogenous Black perspective or experience. However, due to the structural design and systemic operation of these institutions, Black students are more likely than other social demographics to be subjected to isolation, alienation and violation within higher education institutions; as is enforced by the various testimonies and narratives discussed in this thesis, including Ifemelu's seminar experience in *Americanah*.

Although it would obviously be impossible for Ifemelu to become more informed about what constitutes 'the Black perspective', given the heterogeneity of this social group, she certainly possesses a much greater understanding of how the American racial system works by the time she journeys to Trenton to get her hair braided. This explains why, like the salon workers around her, she is so keen to disavow her status as a Black immigrant woman. Despite these efforts, Ifemelu's various attempts to offset such socialisation in the salon space is ultimately shown to fail. When she first arrives in Trenton, for instance, we are told that the 'sticky heat sat on her skin' and then later, when inside the salon ('seething with heat' because of a broken fan) that she 'brushed away some sticky hair on her neck' (Adichie 2014, p.8 & p.103). This highlights how the surrounding environment (dirty, decrepit and disgusting) violates Ifemelu's body and, so doing, assimilates her into, or makes her an extension of, the space reserved for Black women. Made to sweat and therefore smell, Ifemelu is reduced to the base functionalities of the body and thus forced to adopt the social position and associated characteristics that are already projected onto her. This point is amplified when the heat stops Ifemelu from reading: 'She closed the novel; it was too hot to concentrate. She ate some melted chocolate instead' (Adichie 2014, p.12).[35] Whilst the university is positioned as a site for the inquiring, rational mind, with its 'campus grave with knowledge', the salon, in complete contrast, is positioned as a site for the vulgar, unthinking body (Adichie 2014, p.3). It certainly prohibits the procuring of knowledge in ways valued by academic institutions. Not only are we told that Ifemelu is compelled to put her book down, we are also informed that newspapers have been stuffed in the salon's pipes in order to soak up the grime beginning to spread there. In the salon, potential sources of knowledge are thus reduced to raw materials

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[35] The reference to melted chocolate, a delicacy deeply connected to the slave trade in Brazil, confirms that conditions within the salon have confined Ifemelu to a globalised system of racial oppression. This system reduces and restricts those racialised as Black to the brute functions of the body in order to reinforce white dominance; as seen with the 'full chattel slaves workings in Brazil's cacao industry' who were 'principally Africans imported as a labour commodity' (Walker 2007, p.80).

that intermingle with and ultimately become an extension of the waste accumulating in its corners.

The dilapidated and disgusting corner of the salon, which comes to define that space and Trenton more broadly, serves as a fitting metaphor for the Black immigrant woman's position and status in American society as a whole. A corner is quite literally an intersection of two different, material planes that converge to establish the concrete borders, or outer limits of space. To be placed in a corner therefore means to be situated in the far most margins of a space. Occupying this position is typically seen to be oppressive and alienating; it is a position that people are reluctantly backed into. Ifemelu only travels to the salon in Trenton and is therefore only reduced to the lowly state described above because there are no places in Princeton where she can get her hair braided. This indicates that despite her literal presence at the Ivy League university, Ifemelu is not considered to be part of the institution or its surrounding area, which is the domain of white middle-class men. Marked as a potential contaminant, Ifemelu is backed into the socio-economically deprived area of Trenton, situated at the margins of American society, and effectively quarantined and kept away from more privileged and empowering spaces and institutions.[36] The fact that it is the broken fan and grimy, decrepit corner of Trenton' salon that triggers Ifemelu's transformation from (temporarily and partially) disembodied student to socially debased Black body, demonstrates how she is subject to a *system* of white dominance. For it is the socio-economic conditions of the space that fulfil and confirm the racist narratives which led her there in the first place.

The role racist narratives, or literary discourse, plays in the system of white dominance displayed in *Americanah* becomes more explicit when a white woman, Kelsey, enters inside. By this time in the novel, Ifemelu has managed to create some distance between herself and the surrounding environment. Not only has she replaced the melted chocolate with a granola bar (a "healthy" snack with middle-class connotations that puts Ifemelu at a remove from the poor, 'fat' Black people at Trenton station, as well as the legacy of enslaved Africans who harvested cacao in Brazil), she has also returned to Jean Toomer's canonical novel *Cane*; previously put away because of the heat (Adichie 2014, p.5). The reference to Toomer's

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[36] This is a reflection of how urban space has been managed since Black people migrated on mass from the South to Northeast U.S in the 20th Century. According to David Goldberg (2002, p.168), cities have become 'blocks for Blacks (sic), their containing isolation, not only residentially but educationally and economically also'. Such 'newly emergent forms of racial confinement' are 'social spaces, state enabled and sustained, mandated and managed, surrounded symbolically and materially by racially conceived and created sanitising boundaries' (Goldberg 2002, p.168).

classic text is not at all incidental to the racial dynamics being explored by Adichie in the salon space. Ismail Muhammed (2019) reveals that 'as he pursued a career as a writer (Toomer) began to articulate an idiosyncratic and highly individualistic notion of race wherein he was "American, neither Black nor white, rejecting these divisions, accepting people as people"'. However, according to the critic, 'whatever Toomer intended to achieve with *Cane*, the result was his conscription into the role of "Negro writer"', as 'executives at the venerable modernist publishing house Boni and Liveright, as well as literary critics firmly anchored Toomer and his writing to the New Negro movement' (Muhammed 2019). This suggests that by having Ifemelu read *Cane* in the salon, Adichie not only registers Ifemelu's desire to disavowal her racial designation but also her inability to do so because of the paradoxical role literary discourse plays in both maintaining and resisting a racist system.

The limitations of Ifemelu's racially transgressive performance, as she grips her granola bar and book, is put into sharp relief by Kelsey who uses literary discourse to dominate the salon space in much the same way as Genna dominates Schuyler College in *Black Girl, White Girl*. Entering a space situated in the predominately Black area of Trenton and built for braiding African people's hair is a clear example of ontological expansiveness, as the white woman not only unreservedly enters a space not intended for her, but does so in order to gain an insider's knowledge of Black people and culture: "'Oh my god. So that's how it's done. I used to think African-American women with braided hair had such full hair!'" (Adichie 2014, p.190). Like Genna, Kelsey may be 'aggressively friendly' as she goes about dominating the space, but this is not enough to hide the preconceived and disdainful view of Africa she holds onto: "'You couldn't even have this business in your country, right? Isn't it wonderful that you get to come to the US and now your kids can have a better life'" (Adichie 2014, p.189). Speaking in a 'knowing tone', Kelsey not only exposes a fixed understanding of what the African experience entails but one that positions African people, culture and countries as one big, backwards monolith (Adichie 2014, p.190). Interestingly, Kelsey's behaviour is reminiscent of the white woman Adichie shared a room with when studying at an American university; which is an experience the author recalls in her well-known Ted Talk, 'The Danger of a Single Story'. In this talk, Adichie (2009) notes how her roommate held 'a default position towards me' which 'as an African was a kind of patronising, well-meaning pity'. Summarising the situation up, Adichie (2009) goes on to state that 'my roommate had a single story of Africa, a single story of catastrophe'.

Kelsey's own 'single story of Africa' is shown to be buttressed by literary discourse. Talking about her upcoming trip to the continent, she notes (despite being given no invitation to elaborate): "'I've been reading books to get ready. Everybody recommended *Things Fall Apart* which I read in high school. It's very good but sort of quaint, right? I mean like it didn't help me understand modern Africa'" (Adichie 2014, p.189). This is in contrast to *Bend in a River* which, for her, "'is the most honest book I've read about Africa'" (Adichie 2014, p.189). By highlighting how these regressive ideas are cemented through reading the novels of different authors of colour, Kelsey reinforces the point made in *Black Girl, White Girl* that, irrespective of authorial intention, books are utilised by white people (ostensibly committed to supporting Black people) in order to further their oppression. Unlike Schuyler College, the salon in *Americanah* is a predominately Black space made separate from the academic institution. However, Kelsey's discussion of the two literary texts exemplifies how a system of white dominance, expressed here through an oppressive epistemological whiteness, pervades all aspects of society; even the corners it has rendered dirty and disgusting. Not only this, it shows how such a status is, in part, effected by the way white people use novels and other institutionalised narratives to further justify and legitimate racist preconceptions of Black people and culture, as well as the racist government practises and policies which follow. Like Minette then, the African immigrants in the salon space are shown to be trapped within the confines of a system that uses literary discourse to help coerce, contain and subjugate Black people. This is a reminder that interrogating fictional representations of race and general reading practice (as per this thesis) is a necessary endeavour when attempting to challenge systemic inequities within and outside of elite higher education.

We witness one crucial difference in the way that Minette and Ifemelu respond to the instrumentalization of literature by white liberals. As was discussed in the previous chapter, Minette is not given a narrative voice and proves unable to effectively express herself in a way that counters Genna's oppressive behaviour. Here, though, when Kelsey asserts her position on the respective authenticity of the two books in question, Ifemelu's first thought is how 'she could have blogged about Kelsey, too, this girl who somehow believed that she was miraculously neutral in how she read books, while other people read emotionally' (Adichie 2014, p.190). This highlights that, unlike Minette, Ifemelu has control of a space where she can counter the oppressive system of white dominance she is confronted with. Her blog, and more broadly the internet, facilitates a counter-narrative that, unlike the higher education institution or indeed the salon, allows the Black woman to autonomously assert her individual

sense of identity, whilst shedding light on the racist system that prohibits her from doing so in the material world. It is to this function of Ifemelu's blog and the internet more generally that the chapter now turns. Combining a close reading of *Americanah* with the personal testimony of various Black commentators, the next segment will explore some positive aspects of the internet (community cohesion, identity affirmation and alternative knowledge production) which have the potential to counter systems of oppression in the academic space.

The Internet, Resistance and Higher Education

Critics have argued that the internet constitutes an emancipatory space in *Americanah*, one which undermines and even eradicates the social hierarchies made evident in the salon and other material sites of Adichie's novel (McCoy 2013; Phiri 2017). Cristina Cruz-Gutiérrez (2019, p,70) claims that 'despite the fact the salon epitomises a safe place of empowerment and uninhibited communication, Ifemelu feels neither completely comfortable or empowered there', which is a feeling that 'can be contrasted with her comfortable experience of joining an online natural hair community and, later on, in setting up her own blog'. Whilst my earlier analysis indicates that the salon does not 'epitomise a safe place of empowerment', as Cruz-Gutiérrez puts it, this dispute only emphasises the critic's point that Ifemelu displays a contrasting comfortability and sense of self-empowerment when it comes to the internet. This positive relationship first emerges when, after expressing insecurities about her hair to a friend, Ifemelu is encouraged to visit a website called HAPPILYKINKYNAPPY.COM. Here, Black women with 'coily, kinky, nappy, woolly' hair are given a platform to support each other and share experiences and frustrations that come with retaining their natural hair in a society that demeans and discourages it (Adichie 2014, p.212). The impact this website has on Ifemelu is made most evident when, after deciding not to purchase a bundle of 'silky straight weaves', the narrator notes how she:

> Left the store, eager to get back and log on and post on the boards about it. She wrote: *Jamilah's words made me remember that there is nothing more beautiful than what God gave me.* Other wrote responses, posting thumbs-up signs, telling her how much they liked the photo she had put up. She had never talked about God so much. Posting on the website was like giving testimony in church; the echoing roar of approval revived (Adichie 2014, p.213 [original italics]).

As the above quote shows, the care and advice from fellow users of HAPPILYKINKY affirms Ifemelu's identity and ensures 'she fell in love with her hair' (Adichie 2014, p.213). Inspired by her experience of this site, Ifemelu proceeds to set up her very own blog which features

personal observations about the American racial system. Here, she replicates the key features of HAPPILYKINKY, with Cruz-Gutiérrez (2019, p.75) noting how Ifemelu 'builds her very own safe space, aiming to voice racial issues and help others who manifest similar despair and anxieties'. In doing so, she reinforces the three positive, potentially liberating components of the internet first established by the HAPPILYKINKY website: the harnessing of community, the affirmation of identity and the facilitation of alternative paradigms of knowledge.

It is important to recognise and explore these three benefits of internet usage when considering the ways in which whiteliness can be countered in elite universities and colleges. As it has been said, the desk-top (and through it, the internet) offers isolated Black students a rare opportunity to escape the confines of their oppressive material environments and connect with others in different spaces and places; educational or otherwise. FemTechNet Collective (2018, p.25), a group of feminist scholars 'committed to critical studies of science and technology' have highlighted how they 'use technologies in pragmatic and proactive ways to enable (their) precarious feminist work, to transcend the limits of embodiment'. For them, technology 'link the spaces we…inhabit' meaning 'we are always here and somewhere else, co-present among many networked publics' (FemTechNet Collective 2018, pp.26-7). Linking disconnected spaces in this way has been said to help cultivate stronger community bonds amongst Black students and help offset the negative experience of university life. In her segment of *Taking Up Space*, Ọrẹ Ogunbiyi (2019, p.159) argues that online spaces are:

> A sanctuary in which minorities can engage in discourse without being silenced, places in which we are allowed to prioritise our own life experiences and histories of oppression, amid a society that often glosses over them. We can exhale and find some comfort in the knowledge that other people share these experiences; we are not alone.

Again, whilst Ogunbiyi is writing within the UK context, her view regarding online spaces speaks to a feeling of connectedness that is shared and championed by FemTechNet. As said previously, this reinforces a commonality of experience between Black people in the UK and US, which is perhaps more pronounced online where national borders are almost instantly traversed and transcended through websites and social media accounts. Tarra Yosso et al. (2009, p.676) argue that 'as a result of chronic racial microaggression, many students of colour perceive their campus environment (to be) an extremely stressful, exhausting place that diminishes their sense of control, comfort and confidence while eliciting feelings of loss, ambiguity, strain, frustration and injustice'. It is a significant revelation then that for Ogunbiyi

Black students feel able to collectively 'exhale' when online. For this suggests that by facilitating discussion amongst a self-identifying community of people, the internet allows otherwise isolated Black students to release stress and strain built up over daily encounters with racial microaggressions in the material sites of the university.

Not only do online communities and networks allow Black students to counter the intense isolation that can be experienced at predominately white institutions, it also (as we see with Ifemelu in *Americanah*) allows them to positively assert aspects of their identity which are denied or negatively stereotyped *by* those institutions. Research suggests that this is especially the case for Black women. According to Stanton et al. (2017, p.465) 'social media sites like Twitter and Tumblr are especially appealing to Black women because they foster positive identity development, collective community and strengthen social networks among Black women'. Similarly, Tracy Curtis argues that 'the fact that Black Americans use social media at a rate that is higher than the rest of the population opens up avenues for Black girls and women to define themselves before others arrive and try to do it for them'(in Cruz-Gutiérrez 2019, p.75).[37] What this suggests is that by going online and engaging with people in a similar position to them, Black students (and Black women students in particular) can create and/or access counter- and alternate-narratives which reject institutional and individual attempts to negatively frame and control their identity, as exemplified in both *Black Girl, White Girl* and *Americanah*.

It is significant that the internet is able to facilitate such counter- and alternate-narratives for Black students. The system of white dominance operating in elite higher education ensures that the perspectives, experiences and knowledge provided by Black people are typically marginalised whilst those offered by white people (and white men in particular) are centred in the curriculum by default (Bernal 2002). This dispels the notion that simply increasing the number of Black students at predominately white universities and colleges will put an end to the racism manifesting there. Even when Black students do attend these institutions in larger numbers, they are still forced to listen to, absorb and (if they want to succeed) reproduce (at times racist) knowledge created by white people.[38] The internet

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[37] Stanton et al. (2017, p.467) cite the example of 'hashtags such as #BlackGirlMagic, #BlackGirlsRock and #CarefreeBlackGirl' which appear 'on various social media platforms'.

[38] This point has recently been corroborated by a project called *The Open Syllabus Project*, which has created a database listing the texts most used on university modules. According to the database, canons 'remain overwhelmingly dominated by white, male authors – often, particularly in the case of the humanities, from the distant past' (McKie 2019).

punctures this self-perpetuating system of white dominance by providing Black people with an opportunity to engage with alternative knowledge, ideas, concepts and paradigms. As Ogunbiyi notes: 'Facebook groups and Twitter networks have been a central hub for both socialising *and* organising. They have been important sites for education and progressive conversations away from those complicit in oppression' (Kwakye and Ogunbiyi, p.158 [original italics]). Less constrained by conventions of the university, such conversations often emanate from different cultural sources and are produced by people who would not usually have a large enough platform to be heard.

In light of what has been outlined above, it is unsurprising to learn that there is 'a considerable level of optimism surrounding the internet as the creation of a democratic public space in general and a space in which race identity and racism are transcended in particular' (Kanjere 2018, p.10). Neither racial identity or racism can truly be transcended when online, but the internet *has* proven to be more democratic than other offline spaces like the college or university. Style is an important factor here. For one, blogs and social media encourage informal writing which is much more accessible than many of the theorists and scholars that students read, engage with and digest during official course programmes. This is something that is commented upon in *Americanah,* with Ifemelu noting how Blaine, an African-American scholar, 'hummed with references unfamiliar to her' ensuring that 'he would seem far away as though he belonged to them' (Adichie 2014, p.314). Whilst humming may occasionally sound sweet and soothing, it is an extremely difficult (if not impossible) form of expression to decipher and can, in time, become a source of great frustration. As Ifemelu indicates, those students who are unfamiliar with this hum of academic references and terminology can be left feeling inferior to and isolated from others in the academic institution.

This is partly why there has been such a push to decolonise the university. Efforts to expand and interrogate the curriculum are often met with overblown accusations (usually from white men) that texts long-established in the university canon (usually produced by white men) are being completely overthrown; along with the values and standards they implicitly project (Gopal 2017). As Meera Sabaratnam (2017) writes on the SOAS blog, decolonisation 'does not entail compromising academic standards, abandoning academic freedom or avoiding controversial topics, as much of the coverage would have you believe'. Instead, it is an attempt to cut through the hum of noise (augmented by critiques of decolonisation) which permeates

discourse emanating from the institution. The more accessible style of writing facilitated and encouraged by the internet forms part of this decolonising project, which Ifemelu actively participates in by adopting a 'plainer font' and more 'forthright tone' in her blog (McMann 2018, p.209). Significantly, when she realises that 'her posts sounded too academic, too much like him (Blaine)', Ifemelu makes a conscious effort to throw off such elitism and return to her more informal, accessible and personal style as a way to maintain the distinct, more democratic potentiality of the blog she originally harnessed (Adichie 2014, p.313).

@natalieisonline impresses the importance of Ifemelu's decision in the following Twitter thread:

Figure 4 (@Natalieisonline 2018)

Here, @natalieisonline argues that writing 'candidly' and 'without a paywall' is a way of honouring, giving back to and thus strengthening the online community she herself has benefitted from both intellectually and emotionally. She also contends that it is a way of combatting a capitalist system that projects more cultural currency onto a book than a Twitter thread. Whilst the lack of weight given to Black women's work online is a problem (and one that I will return to) @natalieisonline suggests that by using what Keguro Macharia (2018, p.177) calls the 'ephemeral' Twitter format, she can at least circumvent the insidious and exploitative actions of academics who, in a bid to be seen as anti-racist, place themselves in

close proximity to popular books produced by Black women and use them to perform progressiveness at dinner parties.[40] Incidentally, by explicitly critiquing this capitalist and racist system on an online format, @natalieisonline highlights that Twitter (and other websites) are valid and valuable sources of knowledge in their own right. This elevation of Twitter to the status of important academic resource is one that Keguro Macharia supports and has expounded upon in a recent essay. Grounding Twitter in the black diasporic tradition of 'speculative theory', Macharia (2018, p.177) reveals how she 'treat(s) the tweets (she) engage(s) not simply as raw data that need theoretical scaffolding and textual elaboration, but as forms of theory (that) articulate worldviews grounded in specific geo-histories and imagine possible worlds in doing so'. For Macharia (2018, p.177), 'typically, tweets are dismissed as untheoretical because of the short character limits (140 or 280)', but 'this claim makes little sense from my Kenya context and, more broadly, within the history of thinking'. This is because 'African communal wisdom was often distilled from experience and reflection into proverbs (*methali* in Kiswahili) that were considered archives of wisdom and guides for the present' (Macharia 2018, p.177). What the comments from both @natalieisonline and Macharia communicate is that the democratic style and format of the internet does not simply mean increased accessibility. It also means that different intellectual approaches, or different ways of thinking, both inside and outside of the (white) Western tradition, can be made possible.

In an essay entitled, 'Writing in the Fire Now: Beth Dialogues with Wambui and Osop', Beth Kamunge (2018, p.190) notes how 'publishing standards tend to construct detached, "objective", "rational", inaccessible writing as good writing, with anything that deviates from this norm being likely to get rejected.' She goes on to ask: 'Is there room for "messy" writing that calls for speculation? That poses more questions than it does answers? That embodies grief and lament – a dirge of sort?' (Kamunge 2018, p.190). By centring the essay around a series of email exchanges between herself, Osop and Wambui, Kamunge not only provides an example of what this sort of speculative writing can look like and how it can lead to different intellectual outlooks and insights, she also highlights how the alternate approach can be

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[40] In the UK context, such behaviour is implicitly encouraged by The Research Excellence Framework (REF). In order to comply with this Framework and demonstrate Impact, my own university encourages academics to use Twitter and social media. Although its official website advises users to 'build your audience tactically' and 'get involved with as many conversations as possible' there are no guidelines for deciding when it is appropriate to engage with different users or reflecting on the power and privileges each academic possesses (The University of Sheffield ©2019b). This means white academics are now being incentivised to exercise ontological expansiveness in the virtual world without restraint.

facilitated by the internet. After Osop Abdi Ali, a humanitarian worker in Nairobi, shares the fact that 'sometimes I feel like I am screaming into a void and nobody is paying attention' in an email, Kamunge invites him (again, over email) to contribute to an essay she is currently working on (Kamunge 2018, p.195). With concerns about not sounding clever enough eventually alleviated by Kamunge, Ali agrees, and the essay in question ends with his moving email to an aunty about the difficulties and fears that come with being a Muslim Kenyan-Somali in Kenya. No conclusion is drawn and no analysis is even attempted by Kamunge who has the essay end with Ali's email. This leaves the reader to dwell on the pain that Ali articulates, as well as the love and concern he clearly feels for his aunt.

Although it is not commented on, I believe Kamunge's intention here is to challenge the long-established notion in academia that essay writing is simply supposed to be about conducting analysis and reaching conclusions. Essay writing, Kamunge seems to be saying, is also equally about helping both writer and reader alike through a process of healing and self-discovery, which allows them to confront the pain and fear that comes with living in such tumultuous and uncertain times. The long-standing emphasis on conclusions encourages academics and other writers to circumvent the complexity of contemporary society and the real, emotional responses it elicits, so that they can find a neat and satisfactory solution or end point to whatever problem is being discussed. If there is anything to take away from Ali's email, it is the irresolvable messiness of the emotions, relationships and power dynamics that encompass the lives of oppressed people, which perhaps (Kamunge suggests) only speculative writing can properly capture and convey. Such speculative writing would not ordinarily be permitted in an academic institution if presented as academic research instead of a creative writing piece. This is due to particular conventions and constraints imposed by essay guidelines, assessment criteria and REF recommendations. As Kamunge points out, academics display a deeply ingrained preference for so-called detached, objective and rational forms of discourse when it comes to research. Unsurprisingly, these characteristics have all been racialised as white, which reinforces white people's authority over knowledge production and "Truth" (Ahmed 2004). Although there does seem to be a growing acceptance of more personal, affective styles of writing recently, students are not taught (or trained) to communicate this way when in higher education and will thus likely see it as an unscholarly mode of expression. Those who do decide to write in this way are very aware that it could be a point of contention, with established and thus empowered academics often deeming emotional discourse to be subjective or not intellectually rigorous enough.

It should go without saying but writing objectively and with a detached point of view is impossible. Posturing with third person prose does not change the fact that all work is informed by a person's social position and individual set of experiences. Beyond this though, such writing is not even particularly desirable. As Catherine Steele (2016, p.2) contends and Kamunge's essay exemplifies, 'in prioritising the rational, literacy has moved the dominant US culture away from an appreciation of emotionality and community'. These are (and should be considered) two vitally important components of communication and self-expression, particularly for oppressed people who are isolated and alienated in Western society. Steele (2016, p.2) champions the internet because she argues 'patterns of interaction online further a shift back to the oral', a traditional mode of expression in Black culture that encourages a back and forth between participants and thus establishes and maintains an appreciation of both emotionality and community. Ifemelu pertains to this traditional mode of expression in her blog by posting in first-person. This embrace of the emotional and personal register is framed as liberational move in *Americanah* as it marks the only moment when Ifemelu is able to wrestle control of her voice and identity from the third-person omniscient narrator, who otherwise determines external perceptions of the Black woman. Such a feat proves impossible in *Black Girl, White Girl*, as Genna remains in full control over the reader's perception of her Black roommate. With the emphasis it places on individual subjectivity, self-expression and connectivity, cyberspace is perhaps the ideal outlet for students like Minette who are alienated within the physical confines of elite universities and colleges.

There is an impulse, in light of the important positives outlined above, to frame the internet as an uncomplicated liberational tool for Black people; both in and outside of academia. This is exactly what Adichie does in *Americanah*, with issues that Black women tend to face in cyberspace being majorly underplayed in the novel, if they can be said to exist at all. Considering the extent to which Adichie explores the problems of being socialised as a Black woman in America elsewhere in her text, this change in approach seems to suggest that Ifemelu's blog exists separately from, or is able to withstand, the harsh realities of the offline world. This is quite a striking notion as the blog is 'blunt, and the content is uncomfortable as it calls out many of the myths of racial progress and equality that buttresses ideas of America as progressive reality' (McMann 2018, p.209). Given such style and content, we might expect some sort of racial backlash resulting in higher levels of anxiety or stress, as Black women

have publicly reported.[41] However, Adichie does not highlight this issue or indeed any other problem with race and gender in her portrayal of online formats. Instead, she frames the internet as an overwhelmingly positive site of identity (re)formation and agency for Black women, with Ifemelu shown to shed all the oppressive burdens that come with being seen and treated as a Black female body in the material sites of the salon and university. In *Americanah* then, we see Ifemelu reaping all the benefits Black women have reported in their use of the internet, without suffering any of the negative consequences that have been said to come with it as well.

The positives of internet usage for Black students should not be dismissed or trivialised. However, the dangers that lurk in the virtual space should not be ignored either. Scholars are increasingly pointing to ways in which the system of white dominance in the offline world has managed to manifest and even evolve in the online world. Nakamura and Chow-White (2002, p.1) warn us, for instance, that 'no matter how "digital" we become, the continuing problem of social inequality along racial lines persist.' Jesse Daniels (2012) even argues that the internet and the computer generally is inherently a white space designed by and for the purposes of white people. One need not look much beyond the white arrow that opens up and hovers over the luminous white word document or internet page to see the logic of this argument. It is for this reason that we must seriously engage with the ways in which the internet supports whiteliness. As the next section will highlight, the internet not only has the potential to perpetuate the oppression of Black students, but to actually intensify it as well; facilitating an increase in social and economic exclusion, student surveillance and the level of racist abuse enacted by anonymous and thus emboldened white users.

The Internet, Whiteness and Higher Education

Having emphasised cyberspace's capacity to bring together a community of people, it seems crucial to first interrogate the issues of access and ability that comes with internet usage. For neither access to (nor ability to use) a desk-top is a given. They are both in fact social privileges that are primarily denied to those in lower-socio economic environments. Platforms such as Twitter and WordPress might well be free, but access to the technology and time needed to use them is not. Although Ifemelu has the time, education and tools to combat Kelsey's racist discourse through her blog, the same cannot necessarily be said for those working in the

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[41] Reni-Eddo Lodge discusses such backlash to her own blog posts on race in an interview with *Stylist*. Here she reveals negative responses left her 'at a stage of emotional exhaustion and hopelessness' (Foster 2017).

salon. Even other Black students who attend a higher education institution may well have to support themselves through various job roles which limits their ability to utilise the internet's counter-hegemonic potential. In other words, once other intersecting systems of power are taken into account, idealistic portrayals of the relationship between cyberspace and race are immediately tempered and undermined.

Significantly, dis/abled people are overrepresented in the lower classes, which is something that can in itself be tied to the increasing reliance on technology in work and society generally. Such a statement contradicts claims made by some scholars that technology is the key to securing a society that is more inclusive of dis/abled people in the postmodern period, where work 'is more geographically dispersed, computer dependent and service based' (Gleeson 1999, p.113). However, as Gleeson (1999, p.113) highlights, such 'work has…largely remained spatially concentrated in industrial and commercial settings, including the factories, shopping centres and offices that continue to be inaccessible for many disabled people'. Furthermore, as Gleeson (1999, p.114) goes on to argue, 'new work technologies often disadvantage disabled people by requiring higher levels of education, technical skills, self-confidence and, in many cases, physical dexterity'. This connection between socio-economic status, dis/ability and education level is essential. Jay Dolmage (2017) notes how 'for most of the 20th century, people with disabilities were institutionalised in asylums, "schools" for the "feeble-minded" and other exclusionary institutions, locations that became the dark shadows of the college or university'. The history of exclusion noted here has led Dolmage (2017) to state, bluntly, that 'disability has always been constructed as the inverse or opposite of higher education'. This inverse relationship is extremely significant because dis/abled people's inability to enter higher levels of education and therefore acquire the technical skills increasingly being demanded in contemporary society, compounds the fact that they are much less likely to transcend their low socio-economic status and make use of potentially subversive technology.

This brief discussion of class, dis/ability and technology is not tangential to the broader racial concerns of the chapter or thesis. Race is intrinsically tied to these three themes, both individually and collectively. According to the FemTechNet Collective (2018, p.33) 'people of colour have the lowest rates of access to the internet and personal computers in the United States'. Such a statistic is quite clearly a consequence of the well-established intersection of race and class in America, but it is also a consequence of how dis/ability is socially constructed in the States as well. For 'African-American students continue to be three times as likely to be labelled mentally retarded, two times as likely to be labelled learning disabled, compared

to white peers' (Annamma et al. 2016, p.10).' The disproportionate categorisation of Black people as dis/abled has long been used as a way to ensure and justify their subjugation and is part of the reason why Black people are underrepresented at higher levels of education. According to Annamma et al. (2016, p.11), 'over-representation of students of colour is much less likely in dis/ability categories that are sensory or physical in nature such as blindness, deafness, or physical impairments'. They argue that 'this fact alone is evidence that race and perceived ability (or lack thereof) are still connected within educational structures and practises today. Albeit in much more subtle ways' (Annamma et al. 2016, p.11). Although students of colour are less likely to be over-represented in these categories, it is still important to consider the relationship between technology, higher education and students who are physically or sensorially dis/abled.

Returning to the discussion of desks and desktops at the beginning of the chapter, it is clear that my conception of desk-tops and the (potentially subversive) disembodied experience they engender is couched in ableist thinking. There are many physical and mental realities that might prohibit the synergetic relationship between people and desk-tops I envisaged earlier; if adequate adjustments are not made to the technology. According to Asuncion, the (common) failure to make these adjustments in higher education means 'many students with disabilities (are unable to) take full advantage and to participate in the same learning opportunities as their non-disabled peers. It also puts them on unequal footing when they graduate into a labour market hungry for new hires who are comfortable using technology' (Konur 2007, p.207-8). Clearly then, the way in which race, class and dis/ability intersect means that the desk-top becomes an exclusionary device before it has even been switched on; tempering some assessments of the internet's potential to stand outside of and liberate Black people from an oppressive system of white dominance.

The limitations of the internet in this regard become even clearer when we note how it actually facilitates and intensifies current offline practices of racial surveillance carried out by white students and academics. This is an issue that the FemTechNet Collective (2018, p.34) briefly make reference to when they assert that 'the internet is highlighting race – but this also means that radicalised groups are more vulnerable to surveillance'. It is certainly true that Black people who confront and challenge the socially constructed system of race and racism on the internet are more susceptible, or vulnerable, to being surveyed by white people and white institutions than they were before. One need only log online and scroll, anonymously and inconspicuously, through Twitter or Facebook to oversee and become privy

to a whole host of thoughts, practices and experiences held by Black people generally and, because of their higher internet usage, Black women specifically. In the educational context, this allows white students and academics to more efficiently and effectively exercise ontological expansiveness. Co-opting ideas and knowledge produced by Black people in order to reinforce the logic of whiteliness, they are able to further entrench systematic inequities underpinning universities and colleges.

I have felt it important to name and directly quote (or screenshot) the online sources I have used in this chapter, so as to both acknowledge the Black and other women of colour who produced them and emphasise the value and validity of the format through which they were shared. As previously noted, @natalieisonline argues that she shares content online in order to both honour those who have come before her and to counter the capitalist impulse to only value knowledge that has been commodified and can thus be leveraged like a prop to signify the progressiveness of white people. However, people with a serious online presence do now possess the kind of cultural capital academics are liable to exploit at the dinner table in order to seem more informed or "on side" than they actually are. This is something that Ifemelu comes to realise in *Americanah*, when she notes that the people attending her workshops or talks 'had not read her blog but they had heard that she was a "leading blogger" about race' (Adichie 2014, p.305). Ifemelu remains unfazed by the observation that she was not there 'to inspire any real change but to leave people feeling good', deciding to simply tell such people what they want to hear whilst reserving her real opinions for the blog (Adichie 2014, p.305). Nevertheless, the danger is clear. White academics can tokenistically reference or gesture towards Black thinkers whilst only superficially engaging with their ideas, allowing opportunists to enter subversive or safe spaces as progressive "allies" without having to do any of the (stringent and never ending) work this should normally entail. Moreover, with less accountability regarding referencing in the ephemeral online world, white academics can co-opt the work of Black women and pass it off as their own. They can use social media to more effectively erase Black women's role as producers of knowledge, whilst also decontextualizing and sanitising this knowledge in order to serve the agenda of the higher education institution.

I argued in Chapter Two that whilst Genna is keen to be thought of as a sister, she is unwilling to seriously self-reflect and take responsibility for her (central) role in Minette's decline. I also argued that Genna's obsession with Minette was rooted in a desire to reduce her roommate to a preconceived idea of blackness. For this would ensure the young Black women complied with the rules and regulations, or social order, of the white institution. The

internet is underpinned by the exact same racial dynamic. Whilst Ifemelu is deemed to have found a "safe space" with her blog in *Americanah*, it must be noted that all blogs, social media accounts and other websites are enveloped by an interactive network which principally propagates white discourse. This is exemplified by the existence of a "Black Twitter", which implies that Twitter, as with the material sites of higher education, is fundamentally conceived as a white space. Certainly, whilst the internet has so far been discussed as a platform for Black people to share counter- and alternate-narratives, it is also (and perhaps it is principally) a platform for white people to share and gain more momentum for reprehensible and racist ideas as well.[42]

This has a clear impact on the material world and enhances the mental strain and pressure of being a Black person caught within a system of white dominance. According to Stanton et al. (2017, p.473) 'engaging in hashtag activism and reading progressive, Black-oriented blogs that expose readers to race and gender oppression that they may not have been previously conscious of, may heighten mental distress and diminish well-being'. More obviously, racist ideas espoused by white people online also detrimentally affect the mental health and well-being of Black people who are exposed to it. This is not to mention the direct racial abuse routinely targeted at Black internet users, which is 'prevalent on social media platforms, assisted by the ease of anonymity' (Petray and Collin 2017, p.1). Indeed, the cover of anonymity, deriving from the disembodied experience celebrated earlier, can actually be said to intensify the racial oppression suffered by Black people generally and Black women specifically. For it emboldens white people to project the sort of overt racist abuse our colour-evasive society makes difficult in the material world.[43] This perpetual harassment of

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[42] John Wihbey (2014) argues that in the context of news and information, 'evidence we have so far does not suggest that the offline and online worlds are radically distinctive in terms of human behaviour, or provide an altogether different set of dynamics and pathways.' For him, 'the bulk of civically important information still rests in the hands of a set of gatekeepers that has expanded in size, but nevertheless represents nothing like a radically democratic utopia of news and information' (Wihbey 2014). The status quo element of the internet is brought into sharp relief by the recent demise of *MediaDiversified* in the UK. Despite providing a valuable platform for budding writers of colour to network, share their experiences, and publicise serious political and social critiques, economic instability meant it could not afford to go on. The disproportionate impact financial concerns and commitments have on independent, alternate media outlets serves a sucker-punch to the idea that the internet is removed from real life power dynamics. The fact governments can also shut off access to the internet should they feel too threatened by dissenting voices, (as we have seen in Sudan and Kashmir recently) should quell all talk of an online utopia.

[43] Significantly, the 'largest ever study into online abuse against women' found that '84%' of Black women were 'more likely than white women to be mentioned in abusive or problematic tweets' (Amnesty International UK 2018).

Black internet users by anonymous white profiles, either through racist discourse or direct racial abuse, is (in part at least) underpinned by a desire to silence and subjugate those who are seen to be transcending the boundaries of blackness projected onto them by a system of white dominance.[44]

Benefits of internet usage are thus arguably outweighed by the toll social media and other online platforms takes on Black people's mental health. This is not to say that the internet is an entirely negative and oppressive domain, where attempting to autonomously assert identity and establish counter- and alternate-narratives is a pointless or unworthwhile endeavour. But it is to make clear that, unlike Adichie in *Americanah*, we must not minimise the issues of race and racism in the virtual world. By highlighting how Adichie minimises the internet's racial problems in her novel, I do not mean to suggest that the author is unaware of the fact Black people, even when entering the virtual world, are enveloped by the oppressive system of white dominance that underpins American society. As noted earlier, Adichie is as famous for her talk on 'The Danger of a Single Story' as she is for any of her books. It has been suggested by some critics that the utopian elements of *Americanah* can be considered a conscious attempt to avoid telling the same "single story" (white) Western readers typically extract from African novels (Hallemeier 2015). By focusing on Ifemelu's success in *Americanah*, which the narrator establishes in the opening pages of the novel by noting how Ifemelu's 'blog was doing well, with thousands of unique visitors each month, and she was earning good speaking fees, and she had a fellowship at Princeton, and a relationship with Blaine', the author may be looking to subvert expectations or preconceptions of the "African experience" in America (Adichie 2014, p.6). This is reflected in Adichie's play with genre as well. Nora Berning (2015, p.4) argues that *Americanah* 'undermines the generic conventions of the typical immigrant novel that leaves no room for an alternative to self-alienation'. By focusing attention on how Ifemelu is able to positively assert her identity and even indulge her alterity, as Berning puts it, Adichie establishes a second story for Black immigrant women in America. For Berning (2015, p.5) this 'adds to the novel's transgressive potential'. This consideration of genre

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[44] A series of articles have recently been written on the white supremacist website 8chan, after its central involvement in various shootings in 2019. In the words of April Glaser (2019), 'an anonymous, meme-filled internet backwater, 8chan has long been a place for white supremacist to indoctrinate others – mostly young white men – into bigoted ideologies'. Although 8chan has since been removed, David Heath and Kevin Crowe (2019) highlight 'the presence of racist ideology on popular social media sites has helped fuel the rise of white nationalism, experts say – far more so than on the niche sites, which tend to cater to those already deep in the movement'. With social media sites reluctant to intervene, the proliferation of systematic white dominance through the radicalisation of white people on online outlets is unlikely to stop anytime soon.

suggest that it is not conducive to Adichie's broader agenda for the author to amplify or interrogate the issues of internet usage for Black people in America, as it would enforce the self-alienation narrative in 'immigrant novels' and thus consolidate the prevailing single story rather than asserting an alternative. This does not mean that she is unaware of the racial pitfalls that plague the internet. For Black people (or those who are racialised as Black) the oppressive elements of the internet are a (daily) lived experience which have, in any case, been commented on and written about in different contexts.

My analysis of *Americanah* is therefore meant as less of a critique than an important intervention in the perverse reading practice exhibited by white people like Genna in *Black Girl, White Girl* and Kelsey in *Americanah*. One of the purposes of pointing to the relationship between whiteness and the internet in this chapter is to stop such opportunistic or exploitative white readers from repurposing or distorting Adichie's message about the benefits of using the internet for those racialised as Black in America. It is an attempt to draw attention to the ways in which universities and colleges, as well as the white individuals within them, are able to propagate whiteliness in the virtual world in order to intensify its impact in the material world. The fact a system of white dominance still ultimately penetrates the boundaries of the desk-top reminds us that we need to remain attentive to unexpected expressions of whiteliness in elite universities and colleges, and reassess the prospects of resisting or substantially changing them whilst remaining in formal higher educational spaces. This is the objective of the final two chapters in this thesis, the first of which examines the relationship between doors, whiteness and the elite higher education institution in Zadie Smith's *On Beauty*.

Home

Although I have stressed how idealistic Adichie's portrayal of the internet is in *Americanah*, the author does register some dissatisfaction with cyberspace in her novel. Adichie may not explore the relationship between the internet and systematic white dominance, but she does (very subtly) make note of its limitations. Despite everything Ifemelu appears to get from her blog, both spiritually and materially, her online activity ultimately impresses a sense of isolation from her home in Nigeria:

> She looked at photographs of these men and women (featured on 'Nigerian websites, Nigerian profiles on Facebook, Nigerian blogs') and felt the dull ache of loss, as though they had prised open her hand and taken something of hers. They were living her life,

Nigeria became where she was supposed to be, the only place she could sink her roots in without the constant urge to tug them out and shake off the soil (Adichie 2014, p.6).

The community Ifemelu is able to curate online is unable to fully fill the void opened up by leaving Nigeria. Computer wires which transport Ifemelu to the virtual world and artificially connect her with people from home cannot effectively root her in place. As such, satisfaction only arrives with Ifemelu's physical return to Lagos. It is noted near the end of the novel, after Ifemelu returns to Nigeria, that 'she was at peace: to be home, to be writing her blog, to have discovered Lagos again. She had, finally, spun herself fully into being' (Adichie 2014, p.475). I speculated at the beginning of this chapter that perhaps one of the benefits of the internet is that it allows marginalised people, typically constrained to a negatively characterised body, to become no-bodies instead. Ifemelu's experience of the internet while in America show this to be true. However, her reflections on the decision to come home indicate that becoming a no-body is not enough. Rather, Ifemelu wants to become a full-being. Ifemelu's ability to move from one state to another appears to rest on her (at least immediate) escape from race; buttressed by her middle-class status and possession of an international passport. In a brief conversation with an ex-boyfriend, Ifemelu confesses "'I feel like I got off the plane in Lagos and stopped being Black'" (Adichie 2014, p.476). The material limitations imposed by American society in its racialisation of Ifemelu's body compelled her to seek physical transcendence through the virtual world, but this proves to be no substitute for the reclaiming and reaffirmation of the body in Nigeria; communicated and compounded by the potential reunion with childhood sweetheart, Obinze.

The fact Ifemelu stands at the cusp of an enduring reunion with Obinze at the end of *Americanah* ensures the novel finishes on a hopeful note. This is made clear when, after Obinze has professed his love on Ifemelu's front doorstep, Ifemelu responds with what are the novel's final words: "'Ceiling…Come in.'" (Adichie 2014, p.477). There are no guarantees here, but the possibilities that come with the invitation to cross over the door's threshold are palpable. This leaves us to ponder the fate of those Black students who still remain within the elite, predominately white universities and colleges of America. Where does this chapter's analysis leave those who are largely unable to return to a homeland and escape the realities of race and racism in higher education? Whilst the chapter has explored the benefits that come with utilising the desk-top and, by extension, the internet, it has shown that the virtual world does not offer a wholesale escape from the system of white dominance operating at university. Given that the racial dynamic does not significantly change when Black students move from

the desk to the desk-top, or the material to the virtual world, it seems important to take a step back and review the conditions that come with Black students' entry into elite institutions and reassess the feasibility of changing them. In order to do this, the next chapter will examine the material and metaphorical function of the door in Zadie Smith's *On Beauty*. By analysing several threshold moments in the text, it will show how the post-Civil Rights gesture of inviting previously marginalised Black students in elite institutions is inherently self-serving and only reinforces the status quo of the university. The hope that is generated by stepping over the door's threshold, a lasting note on which *Americanah* ends, is short lived in *On Beauty*. Here, a young Black man's entry into the university is shown to both reinforce a system of white dominance and nullify acts of resistance that were once dynamic and subversive outside the academic space.

"When one doesn't know about the other one's culture,
Ignorance swoops down like a vulture."
Boogie Down Productions (1989), 'You Must Learn'

"School is like a 12-step brainwash camp,
They make you think if you drop out you
ain't got a chance, to advance in life
They try to make you pull your pants up."
Dead Prez (2000), 'They Schools'

"Why are they scared of me?
Don't be scared of me,
Don't be afraid of me, why they threatened by me?"
Freddy Mummix (2014), 'First Day of College'

Doors

Zadie Smith's *On Beauty* seems to provide a perfect example of how the desk-top (and through it, cyberspace) can successfully include marginalised Black people within elite higher education institutions. Having briefly attended Claire Malcolm's poetry class, after impressing the teacher with his rap performance at an open-mic night, one of the novel's key characters, Carl, a working-class Hip Hop artist from Roxbury, is hired as an archivist for the University library. In this role, the part-time rapper is responsible for researching and purchasing new records, as well as writing biographies for important Hip Hop artists and, later, short essays on the music genre's major themes. In zealously conducting online rap research and digitally archiving various rap records, Carl not only demonstrates a new enthusiasm for education and a sense of personal development, he also brings new knowledge to the University from a previously overlooked cultural source. He therefore leads and directly benefits from a process of online documentation that people within and outside of the academy have identified as an important intellectual endeavour (Earhart and Jewell 2011; Fouché 2011; Fuentes 2016; Marcus and Carlson 2018). Reflecting on their own digital archiving project, for instance, Magdalena Zaboroswka (2018, p.507) notes that 'the need to preserve both the intangible and tangible traces of Black lives by any means available' is 'especially vital' because 'documentation, interpretation, and preservation efforts have been hampered by the history of systematic erasure of Black lives'. Similarly, Irma McClaurin asserts during an episode of the online podcast, *Citing Black Women*, that archiving:

> is a way for us to take control of who gets to construct the narrative because, if the material culture is not there, if the papers are not there, there are no photographs, then people can pick and choose from what they find here and there, or anywhere, and they construct the narrative for us (Cite Black Women 2019).

In other words, archiving Black people's lives is one way of destabilising and thus countering the racist narratives that are perpetuated by authoritative sites and sources of knowledge when they institutionalise inaccurate, constricting and debilitating perceptions of Black identity and culture. Historically, McClaurin says, this has happened because 'the impetus for what gets preserved and what doesn't is really left to people who don't look like us', which is highlighted by the dominating and decisive narratives of both Shreve in *Absalom, Absalom!* and Genna in *Black Girl, White Girl* (Cite Black Women 2019). It thus seems essential that archival efforts should be led by Black people, like Carl, and informed by a plethora of previously ignored or marginalised cultural practices, like Hip Hop.

Such efforts to address the whiteliness of the archiving process speak to the core principles of decolonisation (Arday and Mirza 2018; Noxolo 2017). According to Josie Gill (2018, p.284), 'the decolonisation movement as a whole questions the integrity of the academy and challenges academics as producers and reproducers of knowledge to consider how that knowledge – and the methodologies adopted for acquiring it – might be exclusionary, exclusive, and indifferent to inequality and justice'. As Gill makes clear, decolonisation is not just about addressing content, of providing new or additional narratives in order to expand a core knowledge base, it is also about interrogating the pedagogical approach that is used to obtain and share knowledge. Cecily Marcus and Sarah Carlson (2018, p.7) argue that, in the context of archiving, 'it is one thing to recover history. It is another to call into question the very forms that archival collections take, both physically and digitally, that serve to obfuscate rather than call attention to the inevitable losses, failures, and absences that characterise any archival collections'. Without destabilising the form archival collections take, the knowledge they produce (whether it focuses on Black lives or not) will still uphold a system of white dominance. For example, in an account of her life as a Black archivist, Ashley Farmer (2018) discusses the feelings of exclusion she experiences when attempting to archive Black history within the university space. As well as commenting on the 'lack of diverse holdings and resources' and the issue of their 'interior design', she reveals how 'many of us (Black students) can recount an archivist's sense of surprise upon seeing us conduct research confidently, clearly familiar with the procedures and regulations'. Here we have a Black student researching and documenting the lives of Black people. However, the unavailability of certain resources, the alienating and inaccessible appearance of the resources that are available, and the microaggressive assaults which create a sense of out-of-placeness, all have an impact on what knowledge she is able to produce and how it will be received.

The internet has been framed by academics as a progressive and potentially liberating means of recording Black history, as it helps decolonise the archiving process discussed above. Earhart and Andrew Jewell (2011, p.2) argue that 'utilising digitation and computational power makes possible new ways of seeing, collecting, editing, visualising and analysing works of literature…the digital medium, if utilised properly, can make insights more powerful, evidence more transparent, and communication more effective'. The Hiphop Archive and Research Institute (HARI) at Harvard University is an example of how the desk-top (and cyberspace) can be used in the way Earhart and Jewell describe. According to one of the subsections on its website, "Classic Crates", the ethos of the HARI is 'to collect, preserve and make accessible the rich heritage of Hip Hop as an American art form' (Hiphop Archive & Research Institute 2016). The website features thought-provoking blog posts and substantial biographical and lyrical breakdowns of selected artists, whilst the "Classic Crates" subsection features records (selected by internationally renowned DJ and producer 9th Wonder) which are thoroughly analysed and researched, with samples and a vast array of surrounding documents (both aural and written) provided for additional context. The HARI's digital archive can thus be seen as a part of a comprehensive effort to 'deploy' what Regina Duthely (2017, pp.210-1) calls 'Hip Hop counter-storytelling', which 'allows underrepresented students the autonomy to tell their own stories just as Hip Hop artists resisted oppression through their art'. This, in turn, connects to the practice of 'digital wreck' that Duthely explores in her essay on 'Black Feminist Hip-Hop Rhetorics and the Digital Public Sphere'. According to Duthely (2017, p.203), Black women are able to use the digital public sphere in order to provide 'counter-stories of Black womanhood' and, as a consequence, build communities, democratise knowledge and develop alternative paradigms in ways that combat the status quo enforced by conventional archival content and pedagogy.

Considering the apparent value of digitally archiving Black lives generally and Hip Hop culture specifically, it is curious that Smith ultimately deems the documentation of Hip Hop as a problematic if not outright pernicious academic exercise. Whilst she expresses concern about the potential disconnect between academic Hip Hop archivists and a wider community of Black people, Smith's issue seems to be more fundamentally about the oppressive power dynamics that inherently underpin the Black student's entry into the university. In order to interrogate this issue and how it manifests in *On Beauty*, the current chapter will frame its close reading of the novel around the literary symbol of the door. As the second section of this chapter will show, doors have historically served an important ideological and material

function that writers have utilised in order to amplify the ways in which Black people are systematically excluded from the privileges and protections of American society. Similarly, Smith uses doors, or more specifically thresholds, to illustrate how predominately white academic institutions and the white individuals who represent them, as gatekeepers, only permit Black people to enter inside the elite space on the condition that they acknowledge and accept their own cultural inferiority. Using Claire Malcolm as a prime example, Smith highlights how some white academics approach and assist prospective Black students in order to impress their cultural superiority and intellectual authority whilst simultaneously posturing as committed advocates of racial inclusivity.[46]

A telling moment in the novel is when Carl's explanation of Hip Hop's "crossroads" trope, which he relays to a half-listening Zora Belsey, is interrupted by a noise outside:

 "So you get the crossroads painted there, right? And the snakes and this guy – who obviously I now know is Robert Johnson – I lived my whole life next door to this mural, never knew who the brother was…*anyway*: that's Johnson in the picture, sitting at the crossroads waiting to sell his soul to the devil. And that's why (*man*, there's a lot of noise out there). *That's* why there's a *real* chair hanging from the archway in the alley. My whole life I been wondering why someone hung a chair in that alley. It's supposed to be Johnson's chair, right?…Near the chair, and that's the first *principle of rap music.* You gotta pay your dues, man. So it's like…I'm tracing that idea through – man, those brothers make a lot of noise! I can't hear myself thinking here!" (Smith 2006, p.378 [original italics]).

Moving over to the window and opening the blind, Zora identifies the noise effecting Carl's ability to "think" as "'some kind of Haitian protest'" (Smith 2006, p.376). Their mutual response to this discovery is to shut the noise out by closing the window, so that Carl can continue explaining his work. With the window serving as an elevated threshold that separates outside from inside, social world from academic world, such a decision introduces a damning dichotomy between intellectual endeavour and political activism.[47] A dichotomy that is further reinforced by the fact Carl is only able to close the window half-way and needs Zora to complete the job for him. As a full-time student, who is the daughter of a leading lecturer at the University, Zora is entirely immersed in the academic world and so shutting out the reality

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[46] Sara Ahmed (2012) discusses white people's strategy of overtly committing to inclusion and diversity initiatives, in order to obscure their own role in perpetuating racial oppression, throughout her seminal text *On Being Included*.

[47] This also serves to subtly undermine the association between Black liberation and material/metaphorical ascent which, as noted earlier, has been expressed by Black writers like W.E.B. Du Bois and Nella Larsen.

of political and social struggle is shown to be a simple and well-practised enterprise: 'There's a knack to it', she states, demonstrating the technique to Carl who, as a new addition to the University, is not fully acclimatised to the culture that has been established there (Smith 2006, p.378). Not that it will take him long, judging by his response to the fresh silence that sets in: '"*That's* better," said Carl. "Little peace for a brother when he's working"' (Smith 2006, p.379 [original italics]).

The relationship between Haitian people and Wellington University, as well as the intersecting systems of power which determine their distinct social position in America, will be discussed later in the chapter. However, it is worth noting here that the closure of the library window reinforces the division Adichie (2014) establishes between African-American people and immigrant groups racialised as Black in *Americanah*. As highlighted in Chapter Three, the African immigrants working in Trenton's hair salon attempt to disassociate themselves from African-American people so as to disavow the lowly social status that comes with being considered Black in America. In an analysis of Adichie's text, Shane McCoy (2013, p.282) argues that the author ultimately emphasises this division in order to counteract 'the assumption of solidarity by Western readers' which 'often emerges from historical tropes that have been employed in postcolonial literature, in general, and African literature in particular'. By highlighting a division between African-American students and Haitian protestors, Smith seems less concerned with rejecting reader expectations of diasporic solidarity than with critiquing the lack of solidarity extended by Black academics to more vulnerable and precariously positioned members of the diaspora outside of the university space. Smith's concern is that intellectual practices, or pedagogical approaches, advocated by universities, compel Black academics to turn their back on a wider community of Black people and the more pressing problems they face. The additional challenges endured by Black people outside of academia, such as the Haitian contingent in *On Beauty*, are the result of a particular intersection of power systems, such as class, ethnicity and citizenship status. This reinforces that there can be no homogenous Black experience, even if certain commonalities hold, as I have maintained through the thesis and will address further when discussing the significance of Smith's Haitian characters later on in the chapter. [48]

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[48] I say 'a' and not 'the' Black community to avoid suggesting Black people can be reduced to a monolithic group, whilst also acknowledging the commonalities of social position and experience that some Black people share.

The abandonment of Black people outside of the university is a concern that has troubled African-American and other Black academics for decades. In *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, Carter G. Woodson (2010, p.33) states that 'one of the most striking evidences of the failure of higher education among Negroes is their estrangement from the masses'. In *Black Feminist Thought* (1990), nearly sixty years later, Patricia Hill Collins (2000, p.35) argues that for African-American women intellectuals 'knowledge for knowledge's sake is not enough – Black feminist thought must be tied to Black women's lived experiences and aim to better those experiences in some fashion'. More recently, in his discussion of Britain's first Black Studies programme at Birmingham University, Kehinde Andrews (2018, p.135) asserts that 'keeping its activist and community-centred core is vital to maintain the critical nature of the discipline'. As was noted in the previous chapter, the online space (though not as democratic as some commentators suggest) has been able to strengthen a connection between Black scholars and a wider diasporic Black community, by providing access to knowledge and research for those outside the institutional walls. Putting this point in the context of Black Feminist thought and Hip Hop culture, Duthely (2017, p.204) comments that 'the distinctions between the university and public, education and activism, public and private are all blurred in the digital moment', something that is reinforced by the digital archive for the HARI at Harvard.

Smith seems less than convinced. In fact, by having Carl close the library window so that he may return to his analysis of Hip Hop, the "crossroads" trope and their connection to the Robert Johnson mural in Roxbury, the author subtly suggests that he has sold his (and Hip Hop's) soul to the Devil, like the infamous Blues player before him (Lewis 2011). A damned transaction that is compounded by the fact Carl, unlike Johnson, does not even go on to improve his musicianship. Indeed, Carl gives up rap altogether and takes to writing about the art form instead. Framing this decision as a deal with the Devil may partially speak to an ideological preference for the oral over the written form (at least in the context of Hip Hop) which has historically been championed by Black artists (particularly during the Black Arts Movement) as a more accurate, dynamic, impactful, and subversive mode of expression for Black people to use. This is an ideology that rapper and educator KRS One (2009, p.58) certainly pertains to, writing in *The Gospel of Hip Hop* that: 'Like Hip Hop itself, the Gospel of Hip Hop is to be lived; not just read. It is to be done; not just watched. It is to be expressed; not just studied and taught to others'. This comment from KRS suggests that Smith's invocation of the Devil is less about a literal preference for the aural and more about a

fundamental disdain for stasis, which is a state of being that characterises Wellington University.

As Kanika Batra (2010, p.1083) points out, the Black Studies Department in *On Beauty* is depicted as being both superfluous and of a 'status quo nature'. According to Kehinde Andrews, this is indicative of many Black Studies programmes in America. Once 'poised to truly transform the academy', through 'community support and mobilisation', Black Studies has now, Andrews (2018, pp.136-7) argues, 'succumbed to the perils of institutionalisation'. In the contemporary context, he contends, there is a lack of genuine commitment to pushing alternate paradigms through the work, perspectives and knowledge of those operating outside the university and upsetting the power dynamics that ultimately constrain them in American society. Incorporating marginalised people, like Carl, into the university (as seen with the post-Civil Rights shift in official university policy towards "Inclusion" and "Diversity") is not a liberational move if it simply entails assimilating them into a conservative culture. If anything, it actually prohibits progress by perverting and nullifying once transformative practices. As Andrews (2018, p.136) puts it, 'the problem with institutionalising any movement is that you necessarily learn the institutional personality'. Hip Hop's dynamism and the subversive potential of digital archiving is made redundant if it is subsumed into the status quo and, as Andrews and Smith impress, cut off from the community as a result. Smith's reluctance to celebrate digital archiving therefore speaks to her cynicism regarding the motivations of Black Study departments and universities generally.

The motivations of academics at Wellington University are conveyed and condemned in *On Beauty* when the disparity between why Carl *thinks* he has been made a Hip Hop archivist and the actual contemptible reality is revealed. Carl believes he 'was hired because he knew about *this* subject, *this* thing called Hip Hop, and knew much more about it than the average joe' (Smith 2006, p.372 [original italics]). However, the reader is aware he was actually hired because the issue of where to put him (after no longer being allowed to attend Claire's poetry class) was giving the Assistant Director of the Black Studies Department 'a headache' (Smith 2006, p.372). This headache was initially brought on because Claire, who first invited Carl into the University, felt too overwhelmed by her own work to fight for him to stay in her class. Such flimsy and insincere support for marginalised Black students is what Smith sets out to scrutinise in *On Beauty*. If not a commitment to the ideals of racial inclusivity, or wider community well-being and liberation, then what else motivates white institutions when they attempt to incorporate Black people into higher education? In order to get to

the bottom of the author's inquiry it is necessary to take a step back from the immediate context, from the working-class Black student sat down at his desk-top, and take a look instead at the interactions that put him there in the first place. In other words, to step back from the desk-top and look instead to the door.

Racial History of the Door

The historical significance of the door is made clear by those critics who have reflected on its material and symbolic function. Irus Braverman (2018, p.670), for one, claims that 'the importance of the door for human civilisation cannot be overstated. Across various times and cultures, the door has been a central technology for facilitating the distinction between inside and outside, individuals and society, private and public, and profane and sacred'. In making these fundamental distinctions, doors can be considered key 'operators of symbolic, epistemic, and social processes that…articulate space in such a way that it becomes a carrier of cultural codes' (Siegert and Peters 2012, p.9). Not simply a physical action then, 'to step through a door means to subject oneself to the law of a symbolic order, a law that is established by means of the distinction of inside and outside, whether the law of the *polis* (the people) or the paternal law of the household' (Seigert and Peters 2012, p.10 [original italics]). With such significance being placed on the action of passing from outside to inside, the 'crucial' idea of the door becomes, according to Peter Kohane and Michael Hill, the 'threshold' (Kohane and Hill 2006, p.142). Looking back through history, Kohane and Hill (2006, p.142) argue that 'as threshold, the doorway dramatized a coming-to-order, a celebration of passage from one state to another: from nature to society, from without to within a city, or from the street or square to the building'. Whilst subjecting oneself to either the law of the people or the paternal law of the household may not seem cause for much celebration, as it coerces the individual into following externally enforced rules and regulations, the alternative reality reveals why this is in fact the case. For those who are prevented from passing over the symbolic door's threshold are subsequently turned out, defenceless, into a hostile social wilderness. The law of symbolic order can thus be seen as a site of refuge, inasmuch as it grants (to varying degrees) the privileges and protections of identity, status and civil rights, which are otherwise denied to those who dwell on the outer side of the door.

Crucially, this is not an arbitrary or abstract system of inclusion and exclusion. As Cheryl Harris (1995, p.280) highlights, 'the law (both literal and symbolic) draws boundaries and enforces or reorders existing regimes of power. The inequalities that are produced and

reproduced are not givens or inevitabilities; rather, they are conscious selections regarding the structure of social relations'. It is important to keep this point in mind, that inequalities produced by the law are the result of 'conscious selections', for it reminds us that systems of power and oppression were put in place by individuals, through the institutions and networks that they created. This clearly extends to the system of race, with Harris (1995, p.281) noting that 'the law constructed "whiteness" as an objective fact, although in reality it is an ideological proposition imposed through subordination'. Such an ideological proposition, which Harris (1995, p.279) conceives as 'property', has been rendered inaccessible to various groups throughout American history. However, the initial process of constructing whiteness through the exclusion and 'subordination' of other people began (with great urgency) during the era of American slavery. As Harris (1995, p.279) observes:

> Because whites could not be enslaved or held as slaves, the racial line between white and Black was extremely critical; it became a line of protection and demarcation from the potential threat of commodification, and it determined the allocation of the benefits and burdens of this form of property. White identity and whiteness were sources of privilege and protection; their absence meant being the object of property.

Considering Harris's statement in relation to theory on the door, crossing over the threshold (or moving from outside to inside, from lawlessness to the law's symbolic order, from social vulnerability to social privilege and protection) can be said to constitute the moment when an individual entered the realm and obtained the property of whiteness. This was an empowering realm and invaluable piece of property. However, it would only remain so if others (soon to become Others) were dismissed into the social wilderness and left to become disenfranchised and dehumanised objects of oppression.

Interestingly, Faulkner captures and crystallises this dynamic between doors and whiteness in one of the most significant scenes in *Absalom!*, where Thomas Sutpen's motivation for building Sutpen's Hundred and establishing the life and legacy of a wealthy Southerner is relayed to the reader. In this scene (the details of which are speculated on by the narrator Shreve), a young Thomas Sutpen travels to the Big House in order to deliver a message from his father, but is turned away at the door after a slave determines that his lowly status means he is not fit for entry:

> And now he stood before the white door with a monkey n*** barring it and looking down at him in his patched made-over jeans clothes and no shoes…he even remembered what the n*** said, how it was the n*** told, even before he had time to

say what he came for, never to come to the front door again but to go around to the back (Faulkner 1995, p.232).

According to Shreve, the interaction above marks the moment Sutpen becomes aware of the racially hierarchised society he has been living in but has so far has been ignorant of. It is with this realisation, we are told, that Sutpen immediately departs for the West Indies and begins his new life as a wealthy plantation owner. For what becomes clear to Thomas Supten, as he leaves the Big House in a state of total shame, is that in order 'to combat them, you have to have what they have that made them do what the man did. You have to have land and n*** and a fine house' (Faulkner 1995, p.238).

As Heberden Ryan (1992, p.296) notes: 'The narration in *Absalom!* is full of closed doors'. What the closure of this particularly important door seems to impress upon young Thomas Sutpen is the fact that without land, without slaves, without a house or, in other words, without considerable property, one does not have a secure status in society. More specifically, one does not have the secure status of being white without considerable property to dramatize such status. For Sutpen, the grand threshold (whether it be the entrance to a plantation or a big house) serves as a symbolic portal to all the material privileges of whiteness, as the literal whiteness of the ostentatious door he is dismissed from clearly emphasises. By owning such a threshold, Sutpen believes he can protect himself from being rendered a piece of property, like 'cattle…a creature heavy and without grace', which is how he thinks the owner of the 'big house' sees him (Faulkner 1995, p.235). Once he owns a similar threshold, Sutpen reasons, he can clearly demarcate his white status by excluding others (like his new slaves) and reducing them to property instead. According to Harris (1995, p.283), this strategy was typical of the time as 'the possessors of whiteness were granted the legal right to exclude others from the privileges inhering in whiteness; whiteness became an exclusive club whose membership was closely and grudgingly guarded'. It is exactly Sutpen's strategy of transforming himself into a wealthy white Southerner, through ownership of a grand door, that leads Seigert and Peters (2012, p.10) to characterise the threshold as an 'extremely dangerous place'. Neither outside nor inside, the threshold is a dynamic liminal space that, depending on the intentions and inclinations of those occupying it, has the potential to reinforce or subvert the law's symbolic order. It is for this reason that white people and institutions anxiously guard the threshold of whiteness with the utmost vigilance.

The close, grudging guarding of whiteness at the American threshold, as well as the anxieties which induce it, was made most explicit with the advent of Jim Crow. Whilst the

discussion of doors has been mainly metaphorical up until now, Darell Wayne Fields (2000, p.34) highlights that the system of legal segregation ensured metaphorical "'doors" of history, theory and practise' (which helped create the confining and oppressive reality of race in America) were supported by two much more conspicuous doors. As he puts it:

> These doors are real. You can feel their weight, open them, close them, and hear the cracking of their hinges. The pair of doors is quite similar in construction, and if it were not for the "obvious distinctions", any reasonable person would state that they are twins. The distinctions, however, are sinister but clear, separate but equal, "black only" and "white only" (Fields 2000, p.35).

The implementation of these two doors created the same racist dynamic observed in *Absalom!* but without any of the direct confrontation between people placed on either side of the threshold. It thus diminished the threat of subversion that previously came with close proximity. After Jim Crow, there was no need for the individual white person to stand at the threshold and decide whether to turn out whoever was at their doorstep, so as to preserve the law of the symbolic order, for this law had been visibly scratched into the door frame itself. Those who were deemed unsuitable for entry into the white realm could make no mistake about this fact. The message relayed by the doors was comprehensible to everyone who saw it.

Figure 5 (Will, Khansa and Samy 2013)

As Fields (2000, p.34) points out: 'The doors (of history, theory and practise) are adaptive distortions, and their single purpose is to condone and manage the "reality" nurtured by the regime'. The installation of the two physical doors that intensified South U.S's racist regime came about as the region adapted to life after slavery which, Abdur-Rahman (2011,

p.183) argues, led to a 'growing anxiety within the white community around the fixity of racial categories'. Although white people and institutions were resolved to defending the threshold of whiteness from those who were no longer contained by the system of slavery, the practice of racial passing presented a serious problem. In the late-nineteenth to early-twentieth century, race was largely considered a biological (and thus natural) phenomenon, which meant that racial categories were often informed by phenotypical properties. As such, those who would ordinarily be considered Black (because of their genealogical history) but pertained to physical characteristics associated with whiteness (such as a lighter skin tone) were effectively able to steal past the threshold and enjoy privileges and protections not at all intended for them. The ability of Black people to "pass" as white threatened the logic and system of white dominance because it upset ideas of racial purity and distinct, naturally occurring racial characteristics (Golub 2005). It thus became important to reaffirm and tighten racial categories (as seen with the introduction of the "one-drop rule") and stop them from being breached further in the future (Harris 1995). Jim Crow was designed for such a purpose (Abdur-Rahman 2011).[51]

As was mentioned in the introduction, the onset of Jim Crow inhibited Black people's pursuit of higher education in South U.S and condemned them to a permanent second-class status that was briefly contested during the period of Reconstruction (Alexander 2012). However, by the 'early decades of the 20th Century biologism was losing coherence' and, with a sense of moral hypocrisy growing after WWII, amidst increasing pressure from the NAACP, the Supreme Court deemed the "separate but equal" ruling in *Plessy vs Ferguson* (1896) to be unconstitutional (Omi and Winant 1994, p.15). This ostensibly led to a reversal of the historic relationship between the door, the law and race. We see this most clearly in the educational context when Mississippi Governor, Ross Barnett, was forced by both the Supreme Court and the President himself to literally move away from the University of Mississippi's threshold and allow James Meredith to become the first Black student to enter through it in 1962. With the Civil Rights Movement ensuring various other legal measures were taken to grant new

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[51] In fact, Golub (2005, pp.564-5) argues that the infamous case, *Plessy vs Ferguson* (1896), where the U.S. Supreme Court established the legality of segregation through the "separate but equal" ruling, was 'a case fundamentally about racial passing' as Plessy's ability to pass for white 'reveal(ed) the Court's deep anxiety regarding mixed-race individuals and the spectre of interracial sexuality that ambiguously raced bodies necessarily signify'. 'Within the Court's racial narrative', Golub (2005, p.565) continues, 'passing simultaneously constitutes a violation of white supremacist norms of sexual behaviour and a challenge to the assumption of natural racial difference upon which the institutions of segregation depended'.

rights and opportunities to Black people, the symbolic order of the law observed during slavery and Jim Crow was seemingly undone. The "post-racial" era had emerged. Or, as some detractors of policies like affirmative action would go on to claim, an era of pro-Black and anti-white policies developed as the government stepped up and utilised its considerable might to wrench open and widen the frame of institutional thresholds so that more Black people could move on through.

This view of race relations is initially corroborated by *Black Girl, White Girl*. Like *Absalom!*, Oates's novel is full of closed doors but, in complete contrast to Faulkner's text, they are repeatedly shut in the face of an ostensibly earnest and accommodating young white woman. At various stages in the novel, Genna informs her reader that 'the door to (Minette's) bedroom was closed…the door to her closet was closed'; that Minette chose 'to eat in her bedroom with the door closed' and that 'if she shut the door (Genna) was given to understand that (Minette) didn't want (Genna) to intrude upon her privacy event to call out good night' (Oates 2007, pp.102 & 48 & 52). As I argued in Chapter Two, Genna attempts to perversely invert the historically oppressive relationship between white and Black women by presenting Minette as a missionary and herself as some Western heathen. Here, she portrays Minette as the hostile custodian of an educational threshold (which leads to the young Black woman's desk) and herself as a dutiful, even subservient, outsider who accepts her lowly status and powerless position. This dynamic shifts, however, when Genna later reports that the word 'NIG' was scrawled on their shared dormitory door and recalls Minette's reaction to it: 'Minette murmured "Ohhh!" as if she'd been kicked in the stomach, turned away and ran clumsily back into her bedroom' (Oates 2007, p.205). The writing of the word 'NIG' on a contemporary college door in Northeast U.S creates a parallel with the doors used in South U.S during Jim Crow. It thus suggests Minette is similarly consigned to the status of a second-class citizen; degraded and dehumanised within the institution and society generally. Even though Minette might not find herself physically separated from white people in the post-Civil Rights era, the marking on the door reminds her that she is not (and nor has she ever been) considered an equal by the law of America's symbolic order.[52]

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[52] It is intriguing that only half of the abhorrent racial slur is written on the door. One, quite practical, interpretation is that whoever wrote the slur lost their nerve halfway through. Another interpretation is that the history of racial degradation is so deeply entrenched in the American psyche that the architect felt assured everyone would understand their meaning. Yet another (more interesting but also more complicated) reading is that 'NIG' is meant to refer back to the first novel published by an African-American woman: Harriet E. Wilson's *Our Nig*. Significantly, this novel details how the author was a 'victim of racism and abuse at the hands of a white woman', putting a unique 'emphasis on the suffering of a nominally "free Black" in the North', at a

Figure 6 (Phelan ©2012)

The paradoxical racial dynamic evident in *Black Girl, White Girl,* where a young Black woman is seemingly extended every accommodation by her white roommate whilst being harassed and hounded by that self-same person (characteristic of post-Civil Rights racism in general) is symbolically reflected by the contemporary design of doors; particularly the increasingly popular transparent door. As Braverman (2018, p.684) summarises: 'On the one hand, such doors separate inside from outside in terms of bodily entry, thereby functioning like closed doors; on the other hand, they function like open doors in that they enable parties to see both in and out'. Putting this in the racial context of the chapter, transparent doors can be said to reflect how those who have been historically positioned outside the law of symbolic order, i.e. Black people, are now encouraged in the post-Civil Rights era to not only look past the threshold and into the realm of whiteness, but to actually enter inside it as well. However, these doors disguise that fact the law of symbolic order is still decidedly off limits to the people Patricia Hill Collins (2000, p.110) calls 'outsiders-within'. Black people may now be entering elite higher education institutions but, as it has been shown over the last

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time when 'most African-American novels focused on abuses suffered in the South by slaves' (Railton ©2012). As stated in Chapter One, there is a continual suggestion in *Black Girl, White Girl* that Minette is actually responsible for the racist acts she is seemingly subjected to whilst at Schuyler College. By referencing a novel that talks about the abuses a young Black woman receives at the hands of a Northern white woman, Minette could well be drawing a parallel with her own position; linking her status in the predominately white institution to that of Black people in the South during slavery and Jim Crow. The issue here, of course, is that such a reading would support the idea that the racism Minette suffers is not actually real, undermining the very point being made. Again, this is perhaps another example of the many contradictions and inconsistencies that permeate Genna's narrative.

three chapters, they are still subjected to denigrating, dehumanising and debilitating micro- and macro-aggressions that clearly demarcate their second-class status in American society.

Hospitality, Hip Hop and Higher Education

In her own examination of post-Civil rights racism in higher education, Zadie Smith uses the symbolic function of the door and its threshold to focus in on and amplify the hierarchical power dynamic that fundamentally characterises the relationship between white academic institutions and Black students. In doing so, she reveals that the ostensibly benevolent and inclusive post-Civil Rights gesture of inviting previously marginalised Black students into elite sites of education is inherently self-serving. It is unconcerned with engaging, let alone alleviating, the racially oppressive and exclusionary ideologies that have historically permeated American colleges and universities. In *On Beauty*, the gesture of inviting a Black individual to cross over the threshold is rendered no different, in terms of its internal power dynamic, to the gesture that turns them away. This equivocation is easier to understand after attending to theory on the concept of "hospitality" which, as the work of scholars like Sara Ahmed (2012), Jacques Derrida (2000) and Judith Still (2010) exemplify, is centrally concerned with interrogating the relationship that is instigated when one person (guest) is invited to cross a boundary or threshold by another (host). Smith's interest in the concept of "hospitality" and how it relates to the issue of racism in higher education is first intimated in *On Beauty* when Howard Belsey, a white lecturer at Wellington University, confronts and dismisses Carl from his doorstep after the young Black man turns up to attend the Belsey anniversary party: "'Look" said Howard rudely. "I don't mean to be rude, but Levi shouldn't really have been inviting his…friends – this is really quite a small affair – '" (Smith 2006, p.105). Significantly, Howard is said to keep 'hold of the half-opened door' as he says this (Smith 2006, p.105). With an array of academics from Wellington situated behind him, within the house, the suggestion is that the white lecturer's behaviour reflects the way higher education institutions (and the individuals within them) have historically guarded the university threshold from prospective Black students.

Conventionally, Howard's dismissal of Carl from his doorstep would not be deemed an act of hospitality. However, according to the theorists cited above, genuine hospitality, or 'absolute hospitality', is actually impossible. For 'absolute hospitality', in the words of Derrida (2000, p.25 [original italics]):

Requires that I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner (provided with a family name, with the social status of being a foreigner, etc…) but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that *I give place* to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names.

This is considered impossible because of the uneven power dynamic that necessarily constitutes the host-guest relationship. The subject who has the power to extend hospitality in the first place, who is situated in that privileged social position, 'want(s)', Derrida (2000, pp.53-5) argues, 'to be master at home…to be able to receive whomever I like there. Anyone who encroaches on my "at home", on my ipseity, on my power of hospitality, on my sovereignty as host, I started to regard as an undesirable foreigner, and virtually as an enemy'. As such, any invitation to cross the threshold into 'my home' is contingent upon the guest honouring the hierarchy that is created from the point of entry. This is called the '*condition* of entry' (Ahmed 2012, p.43 [original italics]). As soon as the guest threatens the power of the host, their invitation will be rescinded, and they will no longer be welcome to stay. Rather than just a simple act of kindness then, hospitality can be a means by which to establish and maintain power over somebody else.

This oppressive relationship, inherent to the concept of "hospitality", is initiated by Claire when she first invites Carl to attend her poetry class at Wellington. After the rapper has completed his performance and is enjoying the subsequent applause from the appreciate audience, it is noted that:

He was about to pass on to the next black slap, the next head rub, when tiny Claire moved into his path. Her class, wary of potential shame here, cringed behind her.

"Hi!" she said.

Carl looked down and found the obstruction.

"Yea, thank you, man – thanks" he said, presuming her message was the same as everybody else's. He tried to get by her, but she caught him by the elbow.

"Are you interested in refining what you have?"

Carl stopped and stared at her. "Excuse me?"

Claire repeated the question. Carl frowned. "How d'you mean *refining*?"

"Look, when you get back from the bathroom," said Claire, "come and talk to me and my kids. We're a class, a poetry class, in Wellington. We'd like to talk to you. We have an idea for you" (Smith 2006, p.233 [original italics]).

In this moment, Claire reconfigures the threshold scene between Carl and Howard by actively placing herself between the young Black man and the academic institution (represented here by the class who 'cringed behind her') and effectively inviting him inside. Initially, Claire might be seen to serve as Howard's counterpoint; a liberal white academic who goes out of her way to usher Black people into the University. However, the similarity between the ethereal threshold that Claire establishes here, and the transparent doors discussed earlier, reminds us that the invitation to look and even enter through a privileged and protected space does not necessarily reflect a commitment to social justice. The fact Carl is said to be 'caught' by Claire figures his eventual entry into Wellington University as a loss of liberty that ultimately serves his captor. Conceiving Carl's elbow as a joint, or a hinge, would suggest that the young Black man actually represents a doorway for Claire; one that can lead her into a more promising and privileged position. A closer inspection of the above exchange between Claire and Carl indicates that the academic's invitation is predicated on the prospective Black student acknowledging both her authority and superiority as an academic who practices poetry.

Considering the historic connection between racial subjugation, segregation and washing facilities in America, there is something perverse about Claire alluding to Carl's trip to the bathroom. By instructing Carl to come and speak to her when he's finished using those facilities, Claire seems to be subtly reminding him of the racial hierarchy that historically stands between them. In doing so, she amplifies Carl's place in American society and her benevolence in extending an opportunity to attend her poetry class at Wellington University. It is equally suspicious that, rather than congratulating Carl on his performance (as he understandably expects), or expressing admiration for his skill, she starts the conversation by asking: "'Are you interested in refining what you have?'" As Carl's cynical response implies, the use of the word 'refine' here is jarring. For it not only suggests the need to cut Carl's content and polish his person, it also unquestioningly assumes that this act can be achieved through a university poetry class. In other words, Claire's offer is laced with the racist and classist assumption that the white middle-class academic can and should use poetry to elevate (what she deems to be) Carl's unsophisticated art form. The more subtle, yet equally racist and classist suggestion is that, in doing so, Claire will be able to elevate the young, working-class Black man to a new level of cultural sophistication as well.

The negative assumptions and judgements that are implicit in Claire's invitation to Carl reflect the way rap music and Hip Hop culture is generally viewed by mainstream (white) society. According to the editors of #HipHopEd: 'This contemporary view of Hip Hop (pejorative) is a new iteration of the culture of poverty – which argues that social groups that have been marginalised from capitalist society will inevitably develop practices that help them deal with their oppression'(Emdin and Adjapong 2018, p.85). Hip Hop is seen to suit the purposes of those forced to live in poverty, as it offers a much-needed outlet to express and manage the pain and problems that come with such difficult circumstances. However, it is also believed to be bound by this state of poverty as well. It cannot, in the view of its detractors, become truly aspirational or sophisticated because these qualities are reserved for art produced by people positioned outside the "primitive" poverty-stricken environment. In other words, the "culture of poverty" 'positions Hip Hop as always about surviving and never about thriving' (Emdin and Adjapong 2018, p.85). This association between affluence and artistic merit (which, in the context of Hip Hop, is implicitly racialised) is expressed by several academics in *On Beauty*, with the most obvious example being Monty Kipps (a successful Black academic) who, as Kathleen Wall (2008, p.764) highlights, 'believes that art "naturally" belongs to those who have been awarded the privilege of money and taste'.

The first time that Hip Hop is specifically brought into the equation, however, is when Carl introduces himself as a spoken word artist to the Belsey family. After discovering that Carl has not heard of her teacher, Claire Malcom, Zora Belsey (Howard's daughter and student at Wellington) explains disdainfully: "'She's like a *poet* poet'" (Smith 2006, p.77 [original italics]). Zora's stress on the first 'poet' serves to distinguish those who are conventionally considered poets from the spoken word artists and rappers who try to claim a similar status. More than this though, it marks an attempt to undermine and ridicule what is perceived to be an unjustifiable leap for the supposedly inferior art form; an art form that, for Zora, is a cheaper and baser version of what her teacher engages in. By clearing asserting Claire's status as a '*poet* poet', and not a spoken word artist, Zora establishes Claire's superiority over Carl (something he fails to acknowledge by not knowing who she is) and delegitimises the young Black man's art form. The matter-of-fact way in which Zora does this implies that the art form traditionally associated with Black culture ("'like oral poetry…in the African-American tradition'") is indisputably inferior to what she considers "pure poetry" (Smith 2006, p.77). Although poetry should not be strictly bound to one race, the fact Zora identifies spoken word as a Black, or 'African-American', art from when distinguishing it from

"pure poetry" suggests that she associates the superior art form with whiteness. Her judgement of Hip Hop is therefore racist and, as it will soon emerge, classist as well.

Zora is certainly correct to identify Hip Hop as part of a long and extensive tradition of Black artistic practice. Created by Black and Latino youth during the 1970s in New York, the Hip Hop movement 'in many ways follow(ed) in the footsteps of the militants of the Black Power Movement and Black Arts Movement' (Rabaka 2013, p.12). Indeed, 'one of the springboards for MCing', according to Bettina Love (2018, p.41) 'was the critical conscious poetry of the Last Poets, namely Sonia Sanchez and Gil-Scott Heron'. Some scholars and artists argue that Hip Hop's roots go even further back than this; with some of its fundamental features being identified in jazz, "the dozens" (a game of wit played during slavery) and the ancient storytelling practices of griots in West Africa (Tedx 2013; Rabaka 2013). Hip Hop can thus be considered a Black art form in the sense that it continues the rich legacy of Black people using art to express their particular experiences of the world. As previously mentioned, Hip Hop is also a classed art form. Rabaka (2013, p.292) argues that 'flying in the face of the traditional African-American leadership model that mostly looks to moderate, middle-aged, middle-class, and church going African-American models to lead, the Hip Hop Movement's leaders historically have been and, for the most part, remain Black ghetto youth'. Unfortunately, despite shedding light on marginalised experiences, sharing alternative knowledge paradigms, subverting the status quo and/or simply encouraging people to have a good time, this Black working-class art form has been decontextualized, exoticised and debased in order to sell fantasies of the so-called Black underclass to white people; the biggest consumers of Hip Hop music (Basu and Lemelle 2006).

The mainstream depiction of Hip Hop is another example of discourse being used to perpetuate negative and debilitating racial stereotypes across the globe. As Tricia Rose (2008, p.89) highlights: 'The ideals of Black men as gangstas, thugs and pimps, and of Black women as hoes and tricks (personas that populate white fantasies of the Black working-class) feed long-standing myths about Black people, and this normalised racist (and classist) history is largely what makes such images popular'. Significantly, Dipannita Basu (2006, p.27) extends this point by arguing that 'such visual and aural representations of Hip Hop play a prominent role in shaping the public's imagination and perception of Black youth'. This point is crucial. Whilst associating socially constructed and unstable concepts like race and class with particular art forms seems like shaky grounds to stand on, there is no mistaking the fact mainstream society has created and operates under a fixed perception of who and what certain art forms

represent. As such, its denigration of Hip Hop culture can be considered the denigration of Black, working-class people as well. Helpfully, Akala (2012) captures this connection between Hip Hop, race and class in 'Get Educated':

> Gordon Bennet! I'm flabbergasted. Smart bastard. Why don't he play his role and just act r***. 'Cause when you're born single parent poor, that's your place. Don't read too many books, sag your jeans, screw your face. Chat shit, act thick, practise your backflips. Put your motherfucking arse out for the cameras, providing entertainment for your cultural betters.

Here, Akala clearly shows that the notion of a Black person being smart is shocking to his white middle class speaker (who the rapper identifies and parodies through the words 'Gordon Bennet' and 'flabbergasted') not only because they are Black but also because they are poor. This perception is assisted if not underpinned in Akala's track by mainstream depictions of Hip Hop culture, where rappers entertainingly 'chat shit, act thick, practise…backflips' and get their 'motherfucking arse out for the cameras', in order to create a superficial, violent and hypersexual (per)version of Hip Hop. These performances are welcomed and encouraged by the white middle-class person Akala is parodying because it allows this person to conclude that white middle-class culture is vastly superior in comparison. This logic system is reinforced by Zora when she communicates a hierarchical relationship between the Black working-class art form of Hip Hop and (what she frames as) the white middle-class art form of poetry.

Incidentally, Zora's role in perpetuating such a value system shows how Black people can internalise and impose racially oppressive and classist ideas themselves. It also impresses upon the reader the division that exists between Black middle-class and Black working-class people living in America. Nicole King (2002, p.216) argues that 'within "Black US" culture, class has operated as a signifier, like gender and sexuality, that complicates the racialised experience, despite the ways in which blackness is constructed and sometimes remembered monolithically'. King (2002, p.214) also notes that 'Black US literature has consistently rendered the antagonisms caused by intra-racial class difference in its themes and story-lines offering, within different periods, different assessments of the dilemma'. Zadie Smith's Black British novel does something similar in this regard. More so than Adichie's *Americanah*, which primarily focuses on intra-racial ethnic difference (or the disparate experiences of African-Americans and African immigrants), *On Beauty* explores the intra-racial class differences that emerge within the higher education context. She shows how Black middle-class people, like Zora and Monty Kipps, have a propensity to perpetuate academic discourse that enforces

current class hierarchies. As King (2002, p.216) points out, this has historically led to the accusation that the Black middle-class and Black elite have 'broken ranks with what some romantically count upon to be a united "Black front"'. 'Such a class position', King (2002, p.216) says, 'is often considered antithetical to an "authentic" Black identity'. By prescribing to the logic of the university, Smith is not suggesting that Zora displays an inauthentic blackness.[53] Rather, she is suggesting that Zora's class position ensures she is necessarily more invested in the prevailing power structures. This once again amplifies how an intersectional analysis is vital when examining the relationship between Black students and higher education. Taking class into account in the analysis of *On Beauty* ensures the experiences of Zora and Carl can be distinguished from one another and demonstrates that whilst universities are underpinned by a system of white dominance, not all Black students experience it in exactly the same way.

The impact Zora's words ultimately have on Carl is clear to see when, after being dismissed from Howard's doorstep with the excuse that the party is only a 'small affair', he sarcastically retorts: "'Right, for *poet* poets'" (Smith 2006, p.105 [original italics]). By repeating Zora's refrain exactly, Carl reveals how close her comments have cut him and how they now inform his perception of higher education. For Carl, the fact he is not allowed to cross over Howard's threshold is because he does not measure up to the cultural standards of the academics inside. This notion takes such a hold of him that he actually stops himself from entering the University space without any external intervention. For instance, later in the novel, Zora observes that on approaching the Wellington gates 'he seemed to want her to slow down to put off the moment when she passed through the gates and out of his world' (Smith 2006, p.135). This observation suggests that, unlike Zora, Carl considers himself bound to the space outside the University. His feelings of cultural inferiority are thus shown to be as much of a physical barrier to the educational institution as Howard standing at the door.

Returning to Claire, her use of the word 'refine' means that she augments such feelings of inferiority, even as she extends an invitation to step inside the University's threshold. She thus establishes (or really maintains) a hierarchical relationship between the two. Following

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[53] Like the authors King (2002, p.225) analyses in her essay, "'You Think Like You White'", Smith is aware of the 'dangers inherent in ideologies of blackness that discern racial "authenticity" or "inauthenticity" based upon a subject's perceived, desired, or actual class position'. This is made clear through Smith's depiction of Levi, Zora's younger brother, who romanticises Black working class immigrants because of what he deems to be an inherent "authenticity": 'Felix was blacker than any Black man Levi ever met in his life. His skin was like slate. Levi had this idea…Felix was like the *essence* of his blackness in some way. You looked at Felix and thought: *This* is what it's all about, being *this* different' (Smith 2006, p.242 [original italics]).

Sara Ahmed, this is representative of how white academic institutions operate in relation to students of colour generally. For Ahmed (2012, p.43), 'whiteness is produced as host, as that which is already in place or at home. To be welcomed is to be positioned as one who is not at home'. This constitutes the person of colour (here a Black person) as a guest who must honour the power dynamic that exists between them and their white host; lest their invitation be taken away. According to Ahmed (2012, p.43), 'people of colour' are required to do this by 'integrating into a common organisational culture, or by "being" diverse, and allowing institutions to celebrate their diversity'. In other words, people of colour are included within higher education institutions, are invited to cross over the threshold, on the condition that they acknowledge and maintain the status quo. What is more, they must do so whilst allowing the institution to celebrate their presence as proof of a commitment to social justice.

Dangerous Minds

The two conditions of entry that Ahmed describes above can be identified in Carl's invitation to participate in Claire's poetry class. As well as acknowledging Claire's cultural superiority, Carl is expected to allow the middle-class white woman to present herself as a progressive academic who is committed to enhancing the position and prospects of her Black students. We are given a glimpse of how these two conditions are met during the first of Claire's lessons that Carl attends. After immediately showing him how rap can be broken down into 'iambs, spondees, trochees, anapaests', Claire reassures Carl that '"you're almost thinking in sonnets already"' and then 'sweetly' implores him to '"write me a sonnet"' (Smith 2006, pp.259-60). Whilst her tone sounds supportive, it is actually both patronising and pedantic; as if Claire thinks she is speaking to a child or more primitive being. Worse, it marks an attempt to coax Carl into abandoning the rap form for the more "estimable" sonnet form; a process that Claire frames as intellectual growth and enlightenment. Although Carl grows in confidence with this teaching style and eventually produces a sonnet for the class (which receives exaggerated praise), such a development does not reflect racial progression within academia but rather confirms that the two conditions of entry into the university space have been fulfilled. This is because, by producing a sonnet, Carl allows Claire to present herself as the working-class Black student's "white saviour".

The "white saviour complex" is a racist trope that promotes the idea that white people are benevolent and sacrificial individuals who are compelled by a sense of duty to civilise, or set straight, backward, unruly and dependent people of colour who are passive victims of their

own base culture, environment, or even biology. Whilst allowing the supposed saviour to revel in their own moral goodness, this kind of complex reaffirms the idea that people of colour are inferior to white people and that their lower station in society is due to some cultural or biological deficit as opposed to racially oppressive social structures. The trope is found in several award-winning, "feel-good" films revolving around race, such as *12 Years a Slave* (2013), *The Blind Side* (2009) and, more recently, *Green Book* (2018). However, a more pertinent example would be the film *Dangerous Minds* (1995), where a white middle-class woman (Michelle Pfeiffer) enters into a rough, inner city school and through a "compelling" concoction of unwavering determination, unconventional pedagogical practice and sincere concern for student welfare, manages to "beat the odds" and inspire a basically bright but unmotivated and undeveloped class of Black and Latino students to take an interest in their education. This romanticised yet racist view of the role white teachers can play in the lives of students of colour informs Claire's perception of Carl and explains her eagerness to invite him into her poetry class. Carl presents Claire with the opportunity to perform Pfeiffer's role and fulfil the fantasy (projected by the film) of elevating the young, working-class Black man to a new level of cultural sophistication.[54] Claire's concern (even anxiety) about being seen to perform such a role is made apparent throughout the novel but particularly in the exchange (or rather, performance) which transpires after Carl has read out his sonnet to the class:

> "If other people wanted you *not* to be in this class. Would you fight to be in it? Or would you let *me* fight for you to be in it? Or your fellow poets here?"
>
> Carl glowered. "I don't like to be where I'm not welcome."
>
> Claire shook her head and waved her hands to disperse that thought. "I'm not making myself clear…
>
> …*anybody who needs this class*" she said fervently, and looked from Chantelle, to a young woman called Bronwyn who worked at the Wellington Savings Bank, and then to a mathematician boy called Wong from BU, "is *staying* in this class" (Smith 2006, p.261 [original italics]).

Here, the hyperbolic tone conveyed by Claire's earnest stresses, pointed questions, overstated language ('fight', 'fellow poets') and physical gesturing ('shook her head', 'waved

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[54] This "white saviour narrative" replicate Missionary efforts to "educate" Native people when first settling in America. As Sacvan Bercovitch reports (1975 p.141 [original italics]): 'The Puritans, despite their missionary pretences, regarded the country as *theirs* and its natives as an obstacle to *their* destiny as Americans. They could remove that obstacle either by conversion (followed by "confinement"), or else by extermination; and since the former course proved insecure, they had recourse to the latter'.

her hands'), combine to capture and convey the melodrama of film and suggests that Claire is playing out the white saviour role she has internalised.[55] As the scene above shows, Claire positions herself as a superior yet sacrificial figure who is willing to 'fight' for her cluster of marginalised students who, unrefined as they are, she pledges to lift up with her much 'need(ed)' knowledge and guidance. Claire thus aligns herself with the host of 'middle class, suburban, usually white teacher(s)' that are show by a sub-genre of Hollywood films to 'confront poor urban students of colour' who constitute a 'challenge, a social problem which needs to be addressed, a threat to the middle class and/or to themselves, as well as a hip group whose danger is alluring' (Bell 1998, p.23).

Significantly, this combination of threat and allure that characterises Black and other students of colour in white saviour narratives reflects how people perceive and respond to Carl in *On Beauty*. For instance, when Howard first sees Carl on his doorstep, he describes him as 'tall, pleased with himself, pretty, *too* pretty, like a conman, sleeveless, tattooed, languid, muscled, a basketball under his arm, Black' and then, on the basis of this observation, is said to keep 'hold of the half-opened door'; clearly betraying his sense of suspicion and fear (Smith 2006, p.105 [original italics]). It is also noted during the doorstep exchange that Howard 'watched (Carl) put both hands either side of his ball, so that the slender, powerful contours of his arms were outlined in the security light' and then, that the professor 'jerked back as the boy bounced his ball once, hard on the doorstep' (Smith 2006, p.105). The fact that Howard jerks back and betrays his fear of Carl when the young Black man bounces his basketball, subtly reinforces the idea that the perception of Black people (here, that they are threatening) is connected to the cultural signifiers associated with Hip Hop culture. Indeed, it is on the basis of these signifiers ('sleeveless', 'tattooed', 'basketball under his arm') that Carl is 'marked out', in the words of Nirmal Puwar (2004, p.8), as a 'trespasser…circumscribed as being "out of place"'.

The security light reiterates Howard's perception of Carl as a potential trespasser, but it also signals his paradoxical sense of attraction to him. For there is something quite homoerotic about the way the light is said to outline the 'slender, powerful contours of (the young Black man's) arms'. Not to mention the sexual double entendres that feature in Howard's response to the sight and movements of Carl's body, such as 'jerked', 'ball', 'hard'.

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[55] Melodramatic moments involving inspiring educators abound in Hollywood film (and usually involve Robin Williams): 'O Captain, my Captain!' in *Dead Poets Society*, 'It's not your fault' in *Good Will Hunting* and 'Our Deepest Fear' in *Coach Carter* are just some examples that immediately come to mind.

This apparent paradox is explained by bell hooks (1992, p.34) when she states that 'it is the young Black male that is seen as epitomising the promise of wildness, of unlimited physical prowess and unbridled eroticism. It was this Black body that was most "desired" for its labour in slavery, and it is the body that is most represented in contemporary popular culture as the body to be watched, intimated, desired, possessed'. Howard's feelings of sexual desire towards Carl can be viewed as a desire to indulge in the 'wildness' and 'unlimited physical prowess' that has historically been denied by the characterisation of whiteness, but is promised by Hip Hop (a prominent part of popular culture) to reside in the young Black male body before him. Despite his desires, Howard's description of Carl as 'pretty, *too* pretty like a conman' points to his fear that Carl's attractiveness is a trick that will ensure he loses his property; specifically, the property of whiteness, which is fundamentally associated with the mind and not the body. Howard thus dismisses the young Black man from the academic space entirely.

Howard's desire for Carl may well be trumped by fear, but the opposite is true of Claire and the rest of her class. This is highlighted by their mutual reaction to Carl's performance at the Bus Stop, where it is noted that 'he was pacing the stage in the same relaxed, homely manner which he'd accompanied Zora to the gates of Wellington college, and he smiled prettily as he spoke, the complex rhymes tripping off his luminous teeth as if he were crooning in a barbershop troupe' (Smith 2006, p.231). Whilst reference to Carl's teeth suggests a slight sense of threat, the overriding impression is one of attraction to the young Black man, who is said to 'smile prettily' and rap sentimentally in the style of an old-fashioned crooner. Combined with the fact Carl moves about in a 'relaxed, homely manner', the comparison with crooning indicates that he is a particularly inoffensive performer and not at all like the conman Howard considers him to be. The point will be discussed further in the following chapter, but it is worth noting here that drawing attention to Carl's 'luminous teeth' subtly aligns him with minstrelsy.[56] As I highlighted in Chapter One, by parodying racial stereotypes that permeated everyday social discourse, minstrelsy allowed anxious white people to play with racial boundaries in a relatively safe environment and ultimately enforce the racial illogic that sustained systematic white dominance. With his performance being

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[56] The symbolic significance of Carl's teeth becomes more apparent when considering Smith's debut novel *White Teeth* (Smith 2000). With this novel exploring themes of colonialism, empire and racism, it seems clear that Smith finds the imagery of white, or luminous, teeth to be a compelling way in which to point to oppressive racial dynamics.

focalised through and between Zora's perspective and the rest of Claire's poetry class, the suggestion is that Carl constitutes an attractive prospect for academics because he allows them to indulge their desires and play with the racial boundaries of Wellington University without disturbing the power dynamics of the institution.

This notion is reinforced by the collective reaction to the Haitian performance on the same night. In complete contrast to Carl, the large group of Haitian men are said to have 'jumped, whooped and leaned in the crowd', reciting what Claire considers '"crude"' lyrics in Creole before reverting to an English chorus of '"AH-RIST-TEED. CORRUPTION AND GREED, AND SO WE SHALL SEE, WE STILL AIN'T FREE"' (Smith 2006, p.228). Brimming with frenetic, unpredictable energy, seemingly devoid of stylistic sophistication and infused instead with a clear, uncomplicated political message that urges action instead of providing entertainment, the Haitian performance marks much more of a threat to the academic status quo than Carl's does. It is a performance that compels the audience to move, to confront and to make changes in the real world and not to sit back, contemplate and abstractly analyse form and stylistic choices from the segregated space of the university classroom. The performance thus encapsulates the ethos of KRS One (explained earlier) and the Black Arts Movement more generally.[58] As her lessons with Carl ultimately prove, Claire is not at all interested in an approach to art that attempts to transform the status quo. So much so that she actually joins the rest of her class in leaving halfway through the Haitian performance. This refusal to engage with the Haitian men's message makes a mockery of her later comment to Zora that: '"When I think of Carl, I'm thinking of someone who doesn't have a voice and who needs someone like you, who has a very powerful voice, to speak for him"' (Smith 2006, p.263). Putting aside the patronising presumption of speaking for somebody else (rather than attempting to amplify their voice) Carl clearly does not have trouble being heard. When Claire first meets him, Carl is receiving rapturous applause for winning the competition at the Bus Stop. The Haitians are the ones who quite literally need Claire to translate their message so that the students can hear about the exploitation and corruption of Haiti. However, despite

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[58] This ethos is summarised by Haki Madhubuti (a prominent member of the Black Arts Movement) when he states: 'A Black poem is written not to be read and put aside, but so it actually becomes a part of the giver and receiver. It must perform some function: move the emotions, become a part of the dance, or simply make one act. Whereas the work itself is perishable, the style and spirt of creation is maintained and is used and reused to produce new works' (Smethurst 2005, p.91).

her rhetoric, the poetry teacher is not motivated by a sincere desire to enhance the position of marginalised people, which would threaten her own position and privileges in academia, but rather to satisfy her own self-serving needs.

The contrast in Claire's response to the two performances undermines a monolithic conception of blackness and once against demonstrates how the intersection of different power systems creates distinct social positionalities and relationships within the higher education institution. As Violet Johnson (2016, p.41) highlights, 'blackness is inextricably embedded in Haitianness…the successful Haitian Revolution, fundamentally a Black versus white struggle in which Blacks (sic) won, forever stamped blackness on Haiti and Haitians'. This is reflected in *On Beauty* when it is said how Felix, one of the performers at the Bus Stop, was 'blacker than any Black man Levi ever met in his life' (Smith 2006, p.242). Significantly, shade is one way in which people racialised as Black are stratified in American society, with the logic and system of antiblackness ensuring that those with darker skin are subjected to greater levels of ostracization and oppression than those with lighter skin. It could certainly be argued that Claire rejects the Haitians on the basis of antiblackness alone. However, Johnson's analysis of the horrific abuse levelled at Abner Louima, a Haitian person who was beaten and sodomised by police whilst living in New York, suggests that their ethnic background could also be a driving factor.

After the successive dictatorships of Papa and Baby Doc Duvalier sparked a rise in the immigration of Haitian people during the 1980s and 1990s, Johnson (2016, p.40) reports that 'the US government developed what many charged was a racially biased refugee and immigration policy towards Haitians'. Furthermore, in a significant convergence with Adichie's *Americanah*, 'Haitian migrants were accused of carrying the tuberculosis virus' (Johnson 2016, p.40). In other words, Haitians were deemed to project the contaminating disease Ifemelu identifies in the African immigrants working at Trenton's hair salon. The suggestion in Adichie's text is that this is about blackness, which all the immigrants reject and attempt to evade by amplifying their ethnic identity. However, the particular history of Haitian people in America indicates it is equally a result of their ethnic identity; an identity that is intrinsically attached to but nevertheless distinct from their racial designation. In the words of Johnson (2016, p.42) 'the perceived Haitian American threat (felt by both white and African-Americans alike) can thus be understood within the confluence of immigration and blackness'. Both these factors, in addition to the different political messages being communicated, underpin Claire's

contrasting treatment of Carl and the Haitian performers; which more firmly fixes their respective relationships with Wellington University in place.

When theorising about the guest-host relationship within the concept of "hospitality", Derrida (2000, p.25) makes the distinction between the 'Foreigner' and the 'Absolute Other'; with the two positionalities said to be situated on either side of a spectrum of un/familiarity and safety/threat. Putting the above analysis in these terms, the darker shade, ethnic background, immigrant status, and first language of the Haitian performers means they are closer to the Absolute Other than Carl and thus constitute a greater threat to those academics standing at the threshold of the University. There is not enough space to pursue the matter in detail here, but this does raise the question of how international students are treated in the university space in comparison to "native" students of colour. According to Clare Madge et al. (2014, p.687), movement from one country to another (which is intrinsic to the status of "international student") is 'unsettling' for the higher education institution and thus results in their marginalisation from the academic space. Due to:

> The West's desperate desire to assert its difference from the rest of the world, (international students become) metaphor(s) of absence (lacking the knowledge, failing in the classroom, emblematic of the problem of immigration, depicted as marginal victims) against which the "development" and intellectual advances of western education and knowledge can be pictured (Madge et al. 2014, p.684).

Less observable in *Americanah*, we clearly see this Eurocentric project reflected in the collective rejection of the Haitian's frenetic performance by the staff and students of Wellington University.[59] This is not only the rejection of a people, but also of an important political approach to pedagogy. As Clare Madge et al. (2014, p.689) put it, a pedagogy based on mobility would mean 'creating a shared dialogic place in which different mobile knowledge agents, institutions and infrastructures of education play a role'. This ties in with Nicole King's discussion of creolisation in her analysis of *On Beauty*. According to King (2009, p.264): 'To creolise is to make something new from disparate sources, such as a language or culture; it signifies an action that is both ongoing and, some argue, a process of re-making and becoming'. 'It is also', King (2009, p.264) says, 'a system of thought and action that challenges colonial systems of categorisation and their emphasis on order, absoluteness, singular national

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[59] In *Americanah*, Ifemelu's "international" status is perceived (by African-American academics at least) to actually give her more license to speak on matters of race, if also less desire to do so: 'She's African. She's writing from the outside. She doesn't really feel all the stuff she's writing about. It's all quaint and curious to her. So she can write and get all these accolades and get invited to give talks. If she were African-American, she'd just be labelled angry and shunned' (Adichie 2014, p.336).

narratives and fixed identity'. The Haitian performance - its style, movement, language (and the history and politics they reflect) - points to the possibility of fusing disparate sources in order to destabilise, or decolonise, current oppressive knowledge systems operating in higher education. Incorporating such 'mobile intellectuals' and their pedagogical approach into the academic space would thus fail Claire's first condition of entry, which is to reinforce the superiority of the white institution (Madge et al. 2014, 686). She has no interest in doing this and so denies the Haitain performers access into Wellington University.

Claire's insincerity about shifting the status quo is finally confirmed when faced with the difficulties that come with attempting to officially incorporate Carl into her poetry class:

> "She's (Zora's) got this enormous petition going that the student are signing – she wants me to overturn the rules of this university overnight – but I can't *create* a place for this kid at Wellington! I really enjoy having him in my class, but if Kipps gets the board to rule against discretionaries, what can I do? My hands are tied. And I just feel like I never stop working at the moment – I've got unmarked papers coming out of my ears, I owe my publishers three different books now – I'm conducting my marriage through email, I just-"(Smith 2006, p.370 [original italics]).

Claire's self-pitying tone, just one hundred pages after her "rousing" speech about 'fight(ing)' for Carl's place at the University is quite reprehensible and constitutes a damning indictment of the careless and capricious manner in which some white liberals, both inside and outside of the academic space, advance and withdraw their support for Black people in the struggle against systematic racism. She might be happy to reel off a lot of rhetoric that frames her as a benevolent white saviour, but as soon as it comes to actually stepping up and making real material sacrifices behind the scenes, where no one is watching, Claire simply slinks away. Incidentally, Claire is never said to speak to Carl again after this exchange with Professor Erskine, further showing how easily the teacher dismisses him and his "cause" from her life. The end of Claire's interest in Carl reinforces how self-serving her initial invite into the University was. Rather than a gesture of genuine commitment to Carl, it marked an attempt to maintain a sense of cultural and racial superiority whilst posturing as a sacrificial white saviour. Ultimately then, by inviting Carl to enter the academic space, Claire erects a glass door that, whilst obscuring the constraining conditions of power from the working-class Black student, refracts and amplifies the workings of whiteliness.

A Rude Awakening

It is clear that Carl's presence in the Wellington library, where he enthusiastically endeavours to archive aspects of Hip Hop music and culture, is not a reflection of institutional or even individual interest in making the University a more inclusive space. It can hardly be considered a marker of racial progress that a young, working-class Black man is consigned to the corner of an elite institution because its individual members do not know what else to do with him. Carl's experience at Wellington indicates Zadie Smith's sense that elite universities are not concerned about Black academics' desire to merge their own cultural knowledge with academic resources, or to engage in a process of creolisation, in order to support a wider community of Black people and subvert the status quo. As Claire's initial offer and subsequent treatment of Carl indicates, academia is primarily concerned about appearing progressive whilst maintaining an uneven power dynamic between white and Black people. Even Zora, as she stands clutching her petition to keep Carl in Claire's poetry class, cannot be considered a positive force in the novel as she clearly acts out of sexual desire; as opposed to any commitment to the ideals of anti-racism or even belief in Carl's personal ability. This fact eventually dawns on Carl when Zora makes her feelings for him clear at a party the two of them are attending:

> "*That's what it was all about*", said Carl and he whistled satirically, but the hurt was clear to read in his face, and this hurt grew deeper as he stumbled over further realisations, one after the other. "Man, oh *man*. Is *that* why you helped me? I guess I can't write at all – is that it? You were just making me look an idiot in that class. Sonnets! You been making a fool of me since the beginning, is that *it*? You pick me off the streets and when I don't do what you want, you turn on me? Damn! I thought we was *friends*, man" (Smith 2006, p.414 [original italics]).

The pain and embarrassment that Carl expresses here is particularly pointed because he had started to consider himself an accepted and even valued member of Wellington University. This is despite the numerous occasions where the institution's feelings of apathy and even disdain for him were made clear. For instance, Professor Erskine fails to recognise Carl, who he appointed as Hip Hop archivist, when approached about making several changes to the library system. Even more damningly, it is noted how both Carl and the older Black librarian, Elisha, were 'always steeled for the contempt of the students and faculty' when conducting their daily business'; with 'steeled' not only connoting the hardening, or stiffening, that comes from being uncomfortable in a hostile environment, but the strain of always having to put on psychological armour to cope with the oppressive reality of the university space (Smith 2006,

p.372). The fact it takes Carl until the party to understand his role at Wellington, which is to service the needs of the academics around him, illustrates the level of naivety he was previously operating under.

Such naivety brings us full circle to the moment when Carl is analysing the crossroads trope and its relationship to Hip Hop in the University library. Although Carl acknowledges the connection between the crossroads trope and Robert Johnson, he misses the less obvious but perhaps more significant one with the Yoruban figure, Esu. According to Gates (1988, pp. 6 & 9 & 42), Esu, 'guardian of the crossroads', is an 'indigenous Black metaphor for the literary critic', as he endlessly displaces meaning, deferring it by the play of signification. Esu is the element of displacement as well as its sign. He is a "deceiving shadow" true to the trickster'. By missing this link, Carl demonstrates an inability to see beyond the order of things and play in a subversive manner. He does not possess the characteristics associated with Esu and thus, falling short, experiences the fate of Robert Johnson. Smith uses the character of Carl to convey and condemn the ways in which universities take advantage of previously marginalised Black students but, in doing so, can only produce a cynical account of life in higher education for Black working-class people. Arguably, this is also due to the generic framework that Smith utilises. In her own analysis of the novel, Regina Martin (2019, p.582) identifies *On Beauty* as feminist realism, which she notes is a genre that 'concedes to work within the conditions it is given even as it exposes the historicity and social constructedness of those conditions'. 'This concession', she goes on to say, 'may be the fatalistic flaw of realism' (Martin 2019, p.582). The limitations of *On Beauty*'s vision is therefore perhaps a combination of Carl's flaws as an internal character, and the flaws of the novel's generic framework itself.

This is not to say that realism does not have its virtues. As Martin (2019, p.583) makes clear, 'the realist mode, with its ability to totalise and mediate between the diverse planes of social existence…provides Smith with a form for exploring the ways in which a postpositivist female subjectivity informed by intersectionality is constituted by and through this tension'. This speaks to the approach of my own thesis. Realist novels such as *On Beauty* help to identify, expose and think through the role architecture currently plays in reinforcing a system of white dominance in higher educational spaces, and the different impact this has on complex individuals who are the product of a range of intersecting identities and social positions. It is essential to reckon with this reality before moving on to imagine radical alternatives.

It is in turning to Paul Beatty's *The White Boy Shuffle* that we can begin to envisage more radical modes of resistance and transformation in regard to whiteliness in higher education. For, as I will later argue, this novel exhibits a 'comic rage' more amenable to radical change than realism or even more straightforward satire. Indeed, in *The White Boy* Shuffle, Beatty explores how a Black working-class student can embody Esu and undermine the university's attempt to turn him into their plaything. It should be noted that Gunnar Kaufman's experience at Boston University does ultimately underscore the danger of bringing Black working-class people and culture into contact with elite institutions, with Gunnar's once transgressive performance art being co-opted and contained. However, his subsequent return home offers the potential for a new, more autonomous relationship with higher education, one that distinctly derives from Hip Hop, or, more specifically, Hip Hop's circles, snares and cyphers.

Circles, Snares and Cyphers

It strikes me that all the objects so far examined in this thesis (the window, the desk, the desk-top and the door) are rectangular in shape. Not to mention my primary source material (the novels) and indeed the very document I am currently writing on. This seems significant and something of an issue in a thesis that claims to challenge systems and structures of convention; formal and otherwise. For in repeating the rectangular I have perhaps inadvertently perpetuated another part of the regulating process in American society, rooted in geometry. Such speculation is not as overstated as it might initially appear. When the famous New York grid system was first being designed, commissioners commented (in 1811) that 'one of the first objects which claimed attention was the form and manner in which the business should be conducted…whether they should confine themselves to rectilinear and rectangular streets, or whether they should adopt some of those supposed improvements by circles, ovals, and stars'; shapes that 'certainly embellish a plan, whatever may be their effect as to convenience and utility' (Museum of the City of New York ©2019). Suffice it to say, the commissioners prioritised 'convenience and utility' and settled on the rectangle. With its straight lines and tight edges, the rectangle could be used to create a compact system that made moving around the city as time efficient as possible. In other words, by adopting the rectangle, commissioners ensured New York would be structured, quite literally, to serve the interests of capitalism, which, as Peter Freund (2010, p.112) notes, is designed 'to increase the intensity and scale of accumulation…lead(ing) to the acceleration of time in everyday life'. The official website for New York's grid system highlights that 'not just vehicular traffic, but pedestrians, too, are obliged to follow the grid' (Museum of the City of New York ©2019). The city's rectangular foundations thus compel the people who reside there to repeat and further entrench patterns that form a capitalist mode of being. In doing so, they demonstrate how shape, or geometry, can be directly tied to ideology.

In Chapter Two, I noted that a rectangular system of regulation is particularly discernible in lower levels of American education. The row of desks spread uniformly across the classroom not only atomise and alienate the student, they also allow the figure of authority and discipline in the room (the teacher) to move easily around them and maintain intense levels of surveillance and control. Such a spatially and geometrically informed power dynamic becomes even more apparent within America's inner-city public schools, which are more

intensive sites of the carceral network. This is highlighted by Paul Beatty's *The White Boy Shuffle* when Gunnar Kaufman arrives at Manischewitz Junior high school for the first time:

> I opened the steel front door and stepped into the deserted vestibule, looking for some middle school guidance. There was none to be found. No signs directed me towards fall registration. I walked through the metal detector and went looking for the Dean's office to pick up my schedule (Beatty 1996, p.64).

Here, the specific detail of the door being made of 'steel' is important because it conveys a thickness and heaviness that amplifies the materiality of the rectangular object and, consequently, draws attention to the fact Gunnar's body is momentarily held and contained within a tight and restricting threshold. This is a process of physical and psychological detainment and discipline that is immediately repeated by the metal detector, as it reinstates a particularly rigid and self-conscious pattern of movement. As Gunnar correctly identifies, the reason Manischewitz students are detained and disciplined in this way is so that they can become like the hard, lifeless metals which comprise the educational space and ultimately service America's capitalist system as 'minimum-wage foot soldiers' (Beatty 1996, p.33). This is a social role that is inherently racialised. According to Noah De Lissovoy (2012a, p.750): 'Schools increasingly exclude and marginalise students of colour in preparation not for regular work but rather for an existence on the periphery of the economy or within the walls of the prison system'. The fact Gunnar is forced to walk through a metal detector in order to make his way into the educational institution reinforces how young, working-class Black students are primed for these two positions simultaneously. Not only is Gunnar conditioned to become a minimum-wage foot soldier, he is also rendered a potential criminal in the process. Guarded by a 'steel' front door and 'chain link fence', Manischewitz high school essentially takes the form of a prison as it prefigures the fate of its Black and Latino inmates.

Beatty's depiction of Manischewitz high school stands in complete contrast to Levi's experience of Wellington University in Zadie Smith's *On Beauty*. Wandering around the corridors of this institution, the young Black man notes how 'it had never struck him before how *easy* it was to walk these hallowed halls. No locks, no codes, no ID cards. Basically, if you looked even vaguely like a student, nobody stopped you at all' (Smith 2006, p.405 [original italics]). By pointing out that the standard signifiers of prison are absent in Wellington, Levi distinguishes the University from the sort of inner-city public school that Gunnar attends and, crucially, the disciplining process that takes place there. Levi suggests that the absence of locks, codes, and ID cards configures the higher education institution as a site free from

coercion or control, as it allows him to move around without any inhibition. Of course, in actuality, the criminalisation of Black people in America, particularly Black men, means that they are frequently stopped when spotted in universities and colleges for the very reason that, to the white observer, they *do not* even vaguely look like a student.[61] Furthermore, as was seen with Carl in the previous chapter, higher education's denigration of Black culture (particularly Black working-class culture) means than an external object is unnecessary to stop Black people from entering or moving freely around the elite space, as they can internalise ideas of inferiority and thus (because of prior encounters with the educational system) feel compelled to stop themselves.[62]

Levi finds it hard to account for these issues, not only because he occupies a more privileged class position than Carl, but also because his father is a leading academic at Wellington University. Levi is thus a recognisable figure in an institution that did not seem particularly strange or unassailable to him in the first place. Irrespective of Levi's impression of university life, the absence of overt signifiers of coercion and control does not necessarily mean Black students are able to feel and be free in higher education institutions. As this thesis has shown, more mundane but also more foundational objects help regulate the different Black bodies that reside there. Like New York's grid system and Gunnar's inner-city high school, the rectangular window, desk, desk-top and door ensure Black students are compelled to follow a particular pattern of movement that sustains the university's racist and, indeed, capitalist ideological underpinnings (Webb 2018). Reflecting on the repetition of the rectangular in this thesis, as I use a Word document to make note of the way novels explicate the function of doors, desks and windows, I wonder to what extent my analysis has been restricted (or regulated) by shape and thus, by extension, systems of power. The geometrical correlation between content and form may appear neat and tidy but it seems to me a warning sign that points to narrowed thinking. Remembering that the premise of decolonisation is to reflect on the methods as well as the content of research, it seems important to address the

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[61] Scott Jaschik (2019) reports that campus officers at Barnard College were recently placed on leave after prohibiting a Black student from entering the library; even after providing his ID. His article also discusses two similar cases at Yale University. The first relates to when a Black student 'was briefly detained by campus police officers who were looking for another person' and the second to when 'a white Yale University student called the campus police upon finding a Black graduate student taking a nap in the student's dormitory common room' (Jaschik 2019).

[62] It is worth remembering that Carl is said to 'steel' himself when engaging with both academics and students at Wellington University. The striking parallel with Gunnar's experience at Manischewitz, as he enters through a 'steel' front door, suggests the process of regulation and discipline working-class Black bodies overtly encounter at high school continue, covertly, in higher education.

form of my analytical approach. As such, the final chapter will turn its attention to a different shape altogether: the circle. Like laying down the blueprints for a building, I hope that by now considering the higher education institution through the circular, I can construct a more critical, more nuanced and thus more accurate picture of the oppressive system of white dominance that operates there.

When considering circular objects in the context of race and American higher education, my first thought was the noose. During the mid-2000s, there were a series of racist incidents where several white students, across different Southern universities, suspended a noose somewhere on campus. According to Temitope Oriola and Charles Adeyanju (2009, p.90), this symbol is 'not merely emblematic of the transatlantic slave trade. For Blacks (sic) it is the unpolysemic of suffering, the signature of their historical dehumanisation'. It is 'essentially', they go on to say, 'about the "place" of African-Americans in the United States' (Oriola and Adeyanju 2009, p.91). The white students who utilised the symbol were violently reminding Black people that they were considered less than human and did not belong in higher education. It would be wrong to assert that such overtly violent and racist acts do not take place in elite North U.S universities. However, on reflection, it is the snare and not the noose that seems a more appropriate symbol for the racism operating there. A snare (©2019) is literally a 'trap for catching birds or mammals' but can more generally be taken to mean 'things likely to lure or tempt someone into harm or error'. The snare consequently captures the element of seduction and deceit observable in elite universities and colleges in North U.S. Indeed, Claire effectively lays down a snare when she invites Carl into Wellington, as she entices him with the promise of perfecting his art form, whilst ultimately looking to assert her academic authority and push her progressive persona. It could also be argued that affirmative action and institutional policies of "Diversity" and "Inclusion" operate in a similar way; luring Black people into elite institutions by making them seem valued and welcome before then subjecting these self-same Black students to a debilitating culture of assimilation and racial oppression.

In order to further examine the snare's relationship with elite higher education institutions, this chapter now turns to Paul Beatty's *The White Boy Shuffle*. After Gunnar graduates from Manischewitz high school, he is eventually recruited by and attends a New England university. Like Zadie Smith, Beatty frames the invitation to attend a predominately white institution as a lure that tempts the Black working-class student into commodifying his art and abandoning his community. However, by creating a more socially conscious and self-

aware protagonist than Smith, Beatty is able to more fully explore modes of resistance in the higher educational environment; all of which relate to the circle. This emergent relationship between resistance and the circle in Beatty's novel is perhaps unsurprising given Saidiya Hartman's argument that 'the circle is a central figure when trying to describe Black radical imaginaries and anti-slave philosophy' (Bulley 2019).[63] The 'potential of relation, possibility, care, other modes of understanding' that Hartman attributes to the circle is directly tied to Hip Hop culture in Beatty's own radical imaginary. Adopting the core principles of a nineties rapper, Gunnar reconfigures the snare (which takes on new meaning in the Hip Hop context) in order to withstand the white oppression he faces in different educational spaces. Although Gunnar initially harnesses the snare in a direct and individualistic manner, he later incorporates it into the more democratic, community-orientated space of the Hip Hop cypher. As this chapter will end by showing, it is the Hip Hop cypher which holds the most promise in Beatty's novel as a liberational pedagogical tool that reconfigures Black students' relationship with elite higher education in America.

The Snare

The appropriateness of the snare as a circular object which encapsulates the relationship between Black students and elite universities is made clear in Beatty's novel when Gunnar, currently excelling at high school, is courted by one of Harvard's (unnamed) Black representatives. After being taken out for dinner, the promising young student is invited back to this particular academic's home:

> The ersatz egghead lived in Cheviot Heights, in what I swore was the same house I'd stolen the security sign from a couple of years before. Over dessert he gave me a copy of his latest book, *Antebellum Cerebellums: A History of Negro Super-Genius*, and showed me his prized collection of Peggy Lee records. After one listen to 'Surrey with the Fringe on Top' I'd pretty much decided I wasn't going to Harvard, but I didn't say anything, because the French pastry was humming (Beatty 1996, p.174).

The seemingly random, trivial and unquestionably specific details regarding Gunnar's evening are actually quite revealing, as they reflect the academic's character and expose his insidious intentions towards his young guest. It is no coincidence that "Surrey with a Fringe on Top" and some of Peggy Lee's most famous records ("Fever" and "He's a Tramp") revolve around seducers who, despite clearly being motivated by personal gain, are able to lure their victims

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[63] See also Sterling Stuckey (1988, p.11) who argues 'the use of the circle for religious purposes in slavery was so consistent and profound that one could argue that it was what gave form and meaning to Black religion and art'.

in with charm, affection and/or enticing appeals and promises. For these records show the recruiter's method of manipulating Gunnar into accepting Harvard's offer so that he can receive a lucrative bonus from the University. The musical number from *Oklahoma* is particularly reflective of the current situation Gunnar finds himself in, as it captures the moment when Curly flaunts the prospect of travelling in a fancy carriage to convince Laurey to attend the box social with him. This mirrors the Harvard academic's own flaunting of his material prosperity and lavish lifestyle (through his impressive house in Cheviot Heights and attractive, showbiz wife) as he attempts to win Gunnar over and secure his seventy-five-thousand-dollars reward.

Signs of a trap being laid by the Harvard recruiter become even clearer when considering the racial significance of these two cultural reference points. Peggy Lee, for instance, is a white singer who became world famous for performing jazz music. As such, she can be characterised as a cultural appropriator who profited from a genre that was largely (if not entirely) created by Black people. By owning her records and handing them over to Gunnar, the Harvard academic is being shown to implicitly endorse the exploitation of Black culture and, also, perform the role of a palatable Black man; one who may listen to jazz but only a more sanitised version approved by the (white) mainstream. This characterisation of the recruiter is reinforced by the fact he plays Gunnar "Surrey with a Fringe on Top", which is striking for how stereotypically white it is; especially when performed in the movie. Aside from the picturesque pastoral setting and portrayal of a pure, almost virginal, white woman (Laurey), such whiteness is conveyed by how conventionally "uncool" the whole scene is. The stilted movements and choreography, the bouncy music, the reference to farmyard animals, the theatrical style of singing; they are all embarrassing to behold. So much so that when Billy Crystal bumps into his ex-girlfriend in *When Harry Met Sally* (1989), he is shown to be emphatically singing this song in order to intensify his humiliation. Admittedly, the racial dynamics underpinning the concept of "cool" are complex and difficult to fully explicate. However, in America at least, there is an undeniable link between perceptions of "cool" and perceptions of blackness. *The Fresh-Prince of Bel-Air* (1993) builds much of its comedy on the basis of this link, with Will Smith (a rap enthusiast from an impoverished part of Philadelphia) celebrated for being Black and "cool" at the cost of his wealthy cousin, Carlton, who, as a fan of Barry Manilow instead of Barry White, for example, is mocked for being "uncool" and therefore white. This leads the rapper Akala (2012) to scoff (ironically) in his song 'Get Educated': 'who the fuck wants to be Carlton from Fresh Prince'.

To return to the moment at hand, it is not so much that the Harvard academic is being humiliated or condemned by Beatty for playing Gunnar music that is stereotypically associated with being "uncool" and white. In fact, Beatty's novel troubles rather than subscribes to rigid notions of what constitutes Black and white culture, with its very title playing with the premise that all Black men can dance. Instead, the author uses the song from *Oklahoma* (in his characteristically tongue-and-cheek way) to mock the Harvard man for performing what he thinks whiteness is in order to assimilate into and succeed at university. The suggestion is that the Black academic is trying too hard to overcompensate for and distance himself from his race in order to maintain his status in society. Such a sentiment calls to mind James Baldwin's (1985, p.xiv) provocative comment that 'part of the Black ticket is involved – fatally – with the dream of becoming white'. For Baldwin, success (or more specifically, socio-economic progress) for Black people in America is achieved on an individual basis (through ownership of a "ticket", bestowed upon a lucky few) and is predicated on that individual's desire to pander and assimilate into the empowered system of whiteness; which (to Baldwin's utter disdain) means abandoning fellow Black people and internalising the values, standards, tastes and practices of their white counterparts.

By giving Gunnar his latest book, the Harvard academic confirms his desire to distance himself from Black people and culture whilst continuing to advance his career through their exploitation. Writing on the Black super-genius implies that the academic considers himself biologically distinct from the poor Black and Latino people residing in Hillside, which he describes as a 'petri dish for vermin' (Beatty 1996, p.175). In other words, a site of errant organisms that carry the threat of contamination and thus require containment and possibly sterilisation. The academic clearly subscribes to (or at least capitalises from) racist, eugenicist thinking that has historically justified and impelled the violent, oppression of (particularly poor) Black people in America (Chitty 2009; Eberhardt 2019; Wintz 1988). The academic is not at all shy about admitting this, explaining to Gunnar that instead of 'each one, teach one', his personal motto is 'each one, leech one' (Beatty 1996, p.175). Ultimately then, Beatty uses the Harvard recruiter's seductive performance to suggest that the promise of material prosperity and class elevation, specifically attained via entry into elite higher education, comes with the condition of assimilating into white culture and not only deserting but further diminishing the prospects of Black working-class people. The idea that the recruiter's pitch is in fact a snare used to trap Gunnar becomes self-evident by the end of the evening when the Black academic retrieves some rappelling equipment. As Gunnar reports it: 'He wrapped a belt around my

waist, then thread the rope through its metal loop. Anchoring one end around the pool's stepladder, he pulled the rope tight to make sure it was secure' (Beatty 1996, p.176). Here, the symbolic becomes coupled with the literal as Gunnar is caught in a loop that tethers him to the Harvard man's house and, by extension, the shameful conditions Beatty suggests comes with a successful academic life.

The parallels with Zadie Smith's *On Beauty* are clear. Again, ascent into the middle-class of America, specifically through elite higher education, is framed as a lamentable rise which is necessarily self-serving and harmful to those who comprise the Black working-class. The fact Beatty focalises his social commentary through an established Black academic who is self-aware and open about his perverse motivations makes the author's critique particularly pointed. Unlike Zora, who has internalised regressive ideas due to her respective class and educational position, the Harvard academic actively subscribes to and promotes what Paulo Freire (1972, p.199) calls a 'bourgeois appetite for personal success'. According to the educational scholar, 'this manipulation is sometimes carried out directly by the elites and sometimes indirectly through populist leaders' (Freire 1972, p.199). The issue of leadership is one that has long troubled Black commentators, with Cornel West (2001. XVIII) arguing in his seminal text *Race Matters*, for example, that 'we have too many Black leaders who give in too quickly and sell-out too easily'. This is an issue that continues to concern Paul Beatty, two decades after the publication of his debut novel.

As much is made evident from the title of Beatty's latest, Man Booker-winning novel: *The Sellout* (Beatty 2015). Here, the author expresses much more ambivalence about what behaviour characterises the two concepts of "leadership" and "selling out" than he does in *The White Boy Shuffle*. The protagonist, Me, who becomes something of a community leader after his father dies, is initially deemed '"a fucking sell-out"' by his ex-girlfriend when he reinstates segregation within his hometown of Dickens (Beatty 2015, p.139). This is until the renewed policy leads to improved civility, better educational attainment and greater awareness of current race relations in America. In this sharp satire, the question arises whether implementing such seemingly regressive policies, which actually formalise and draw attention to the current workings of power, is a positive and necessary reckoning with history and contemporary reality, a means justified by its ends, or an ill-considered and conceptually muddled move made by a reckless leader out of his depth. Such ideas of Black leadership and selling out seem less complex in *The White Boy Shuffle*. The Black academic from Harvard has clearly turned his back on the Black working-class. In the scene analysed above, he is

attempting to lure Gunnar into the snare of elite higher education so that the young, Black, working-class man will do the same.

Significantly, Gunnar is neither passive or helpless in this moment, as he manipulates and manoeuvres the rappel's rope until, to the irritation of the Black academic, he is able to scale the wall and return to Hillside. Such a show of defiance in the face of material and ideological coercion and constraint encapsulates the essence and ethos of Hip Hop culture. The problems and pitfalls of mainstream rap music (the public face of Hip Hop and the people it is seen to represent) have been well documented, with Beatty himself demonstrating in *The White Boy Shuffle* how debilitating codes of Black masculinity are perpetuated by corporate exploitation of the genre.[65] However, whilst the inescapable connection between capitalism and Hip Hop means it provides a precarious foundation for counter-hegemonic resistance to rest on, there is still some stable space on which to build. Despite the negative press they often receive, Hip Hop artists have shown an ability to withstand and challenge systems of oppression whilst operating within them. As Murray Forman (2002, p.13) states: 'While there are many examples of conservative and even regressive positions that are articulated within Hip Hop…they tend to generate the most controversy at the expulsion of other alternative positions'. Caught within the snare of corporate exploitation, various participants in Hip Hop culture have established a 'series of counter-discourses, representing an attempt to circumvent constraining and outdated programs for social empowerment' (Forman 2002, p.13). [66] It is in this regard that Gunnar can be said to embody the essence and ethos of Hip Hop, as he revolts against assimilation and exploitation of marginalised people whilst inhabiting institutional spaces which attempt to tether him to such ideals. In a sense then, Gunnar is able to play with and partially withstand the snare's trap by utilising a snare of his own. For a snare is not only a trap for catching birds or mammals, it is also a central component of drumkits which, incidentally, have 'earned a unique level of reverence within Hip Hop' (Houghton 2017). According to Hip Hop producer Suzi Analogue (2017), one of the reasons for the

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[65] For instance, when wandering on the set of a music video for Stoic Undertakers' upcoming album, Gunnar is dismissed by the casting director: "'Too studious. Next! I told you I want menacing or despondent and you send me these bookwork junior high larvae'" (Beatty 1996, p.83).

[66] Kendrick Lamar is an obvious contemporary example. The Pulitzer winning rapper often defies convention and produces (and sells) music that boldly and brashly confronts issues such as antiblackness, police brutality and materiality, whilst also acknowledging his own complicity in reinforcing antiblack and capitalist ideologies. K-Dot's attempts to engage with issues regarding Black women have been executed much less successfully. As Sesali Bowen (2017) notes, this is a theme 'that often permeates projects dedicated to Black empowerment without an equally solid grasp on gender'.

veneration of drums in Hip Hop is because 'Afrodiasporic people understand drums as a form of communication'. When Gunnar is caught within the snare of education, he is able to use the Hip Hop snare in order to communicate and assert new paradigms for Black people to follow when operating in oppressive institutions.

An early example of Gunnar establishing new paradigms of resistance in the oppressive educational sphere is when he performs at the Shakespeare soliloquy finals whilst still at high school. From the outset, these finals are framed as a means by which to encourage Black working-class students to aspire to cultural standards and values positioned as white and middle-class; enforcing a deficit-model of education (Yosso 2005). Despite the fact Shakespeare's plays were originally watched by Lord and commoner alike, the playwright has been commandeered by educational institutions and repositioned as 'the poster child for elitism' (an ideology that is both racialised and classed) and thus used as a marker of cultural sophistication and intelligence (Tedx 2011). Gunnar confirms this particular perception of Shakespeare when he notes how 'our teacher, Ms. Cantrell, determined to show that her impoverished Negro thespians could compete with kids at well-funded oceanfront and Valley schools, entered us and notified the media that her domesticated n*** would soon be on parade' (Beatty 1996, pp.71-2). However, it soon emerges that these students are actually being set up to fail, with Gunnar reporting how the 'judges looked down at their score sheets with self-satisfied smirks' when the Hillside students 'stumbled over a line of Shakespearean blather' (Beatty 1996, p.77). The judges revel in the Black students' failure to assimilate because it bolsters negative racial stereotypes (such as lack of intelligence or cultural sophistication) and seemingly substantiates ideas about their racial inferiority. This is made most clear when Gunnar's best friend, Scoby, fluffs one of the speeches in *Othello*:

> The crowd started cheering him on as if he were one of those kids stricken with cystic fibrosis taking his first baby steps on a telethon at two o'clock in the morning. "Come on, guy, you can do it." Two white girls, one of whom had just nailed Desdemona minutes earlier, boldly strode onstage and massaged Scoby's rock-hard hypertensive shoulders and whispered honey-voiced encouragement in his ear: "You can do it, big-boy" (Beatty 1996, p.77).

What initially looks like encouragement quickly becomes a show of what Gunnar calls 'liberal pity', which is also evident in *On Beauty* when Claire's poetry class extend an exaggerated applause to Carl's sonnet performance (Beatty 1996, p.77). In this scenario, such liberal pity demeans and diminishes Scoby who is reduced to the stereotype of Black men being both hypersexual fiends and, paradoxically, infantile invalids (Yancy 2008). The effect such

stereotyping has on Scoby is made evident by the young Black man's 'hypertensive shoulders', which convey a sense of embarrassment mirrored by 'the defeated Manischewitz Drama Club' who 'sank in (their) seats and drowned under a tidal wave of shame' (Beatty 1996, p.77).

Scoby's treatment highlights how the Shakespeare Finals constitutes something of a modern-day minstrel show. As Eric Lott (1993, pp.140-1) explains, 'Black figures were to be looked at, shaped to the demands of desire; they were screens on which audience fantasy could rest, and while this purpose might have had a host of different effects, its fundamental outcome was to secure the position of white spectators as superior, controlling figures'. Interestingly, Douglas Lanier (2005, p.10) notes that 'Othello (was) a favourite object of parody'. In fact, 'it is almost as if the rise of blackface parodies of Othello appears concurrently with the rise of minstrelsy' (Lanier 2005, p.10). Quoting Joyce Green Macdonald, Lanier goes on to say that these 'nineteenth century burlesques of Othello worked to delegitimise Black performance of Shakespeare and, more generally, Black self-representation of blackness on the stage' (Lanier 2005, p.10). In this way, 'Shakespeare became a symbolically powerful means of denying African-Americans the mantle of cultural authority' (Lanier 2005, p.10). Scoby's performance is in keeping with a tradition of Shakespeare being used in minstrel shows to further silence, stereotype and subjugate Black people; a damning indictment of the way educational institutions perceive, position and treat Black students in America.

As I indicated earlier, there is a comparison to be made here between Scoby in *The White Boy Shuffle* and Carl in *On Beauty*. Not least because the treatment of Scoby during the Finals possibly points to the kind of experiences Carl was subjected to at high school and explains his sense of cultural inferiority when interacting with academics from Wellington University. More pertinent to the matter at hand, however, is the fact Beatty's framing of Scoby as a minstrel figure reconfigures Carl's performance at the Bus Stop. It is worth recalling that the narrator noted in *On Beauty* that Carl 'was pacing the stage in the same relaxed, homely manner in which he'd accompanied Zora to the gates of Wellington University, and he smiled prettily as he spoke, the complex rhymes tripping off his luminous teeth as if he were crooning in a barbershop troupe' (Smith 2006, p.232). The reference to Carl's luminous teeth signals a sense of threat (ever present in minstrel shows) and aligns the young Black man with minstrel performers who amplified the size of their mouth and teeth in order to make Black people seem more voracious, primitive, and ridiculous as well. Viewed in this context, Carl's invitation to enter Wellington University becomes even more clearly about reinforcing the cultural and racial inferiority of working-class Black people.

Like Scoby, Carl is unable to counter this racist characterisation. Even though he is an actual rapper, the young Black man does not utilise the subversive potential of Hip Hop when engaging with Wellington University. This is largely because Carl does not seem to possess the same awareness of academia's insidious agenda towards him as Gunnar does. Returning to the Shakespeare Finals, Gunnar is immediately aware of the overwhelming pressure to adopt the manner of a minstrel and conform to negative stereotypes of blackness for the watching white audience. Refusing to act in this way, Gunnar subverts audience expectations with the announcement: "'I'm junking Iago's envy laden 'What a stupid moor-ronic n*** this Othello is' speech for a less traditional bit from King Lear, act two, scene two. Note how the fusion of Goneril's vile lackey Oswald and the loyal Kent's lines give the monologue a self-hating and introspective spin'" (Beatty 1996, pp.77-8). As Gunnar identifies, the particular speech Scoby and his other classmates have been reciting is one where Iago not only claims to hate Othello but revels in his ability to manipulate the Black general. The educators at the Shakespeare Finals have therefore forced the Black students to debase themselves further by actively propagating antiblack sentiments. This is why Gunnar decides to perform 'a less traditional bit from King Lear', as he seeks to undermine the long legacy of theatre being used to perpetuate the notion that Black people are inferior to their white counterparts. In the process of doing so, he seamlessly fuses Black vernacular ('junking' and 'n***') with more conventional academic diction ('note') in an astute analysis of the scene to come. He thus compels the predominately white, middle-class audience to recalibrate their conception of Black identity and culture and, more importantly, reinstates the self-esteem of his humiliated classmates by temporarily transforming the power dynamics of the space.

Gunnar's success in shifting paradigms and resisting systematic white dominance in the educational space is suggested with his reveal that, after the performance: 'I walked off the stage into a stunned auditorium of dazed crash dummies in post-car accident silence. At the top of my voice I yelled "Is everyone all right? Anyone hurt?"' (Beatty 1996, p.78). The brazenness with which Gunnar addresses the auditorium directly reflects the tone of the performance itself:

> Gazing directly at the judges, I grabbed my dick and ripped into my makeshift monologue. "What dost thou know me for? A knave, a rascal, an eater of broken meats, a base, proud, shallow, there-suited, hundred-pound, filthy, worsted-stocking whoreson…one-trunk—inheriting slave…beggar, N***…I will beat you into clamorous whining if thou deny'st the least syllable of thy addition" (Beatty 1996, p.78).

Terrence Tucker (2006, p.3) argues that this performance is a perfect example of 'comic rage' which, according to him, epitomises Gunnar's style of resistance throughout the novel. In Tucker's (2006, p.3) own words: 'Comic rage (is) an African-American cultural expression that utilises African-American oral tradition to simultaneously convey humour and militancy. Whilst African-American humour acts as a site of resistance and transcendence against oppression and nihilistic threat, African-American militancy directs contained African-American rage at white supremacist assault'. This is to be distinguished from satire. For 'at the heart of satire is a desire for reform, specifically a return to a set of morally preset values that have been eroded by corruption, vice and folly' (Tucker 2006, p.3). Crucially, 'comic rage goes beyond this, urging a re-visioning of society at large by questioning the truth and legitimacy of the very values the satirist bemoans are being ignored' (Tucker 2006, p.3). Crucially, Tucker (2006, p.248) highlights that the 'use of rhetoric rap provides the foundations for the novel's comic rage'. For him, 'capitalising on rap's willingness to be both playful and furious, the novel's critique of contemporary race and class struggles reflects both the subject and source of Hip Hop music from the 1980s to early 1990s' (Tucker 2006, p.248). We see this in the performance above. By 'gazing directly at the judges', "cool posing" ('I grabbed my dick') and continuing to use aggressive Black vernacular ('N***'), Gunnar adopts the persona of a ninety's rapper: defiant, aggressive, nonconforming and humorous; all the while manoeuvring within the snare of an oppressive institution.

The same show of defiance, or 'comic rage', allows Gunnar to withstand the advances of the Harvard representative later in the novel. Considering the apparent efficacy of this approach to resistance, it is quite confounding when we learn that, shortly after turning down Harvard for Boston University, Gunnar opts to counter systematic white dominance in formal education by parodying minstrelsy rather than outright rejecting it. This signals a turn from comic rage to satire which, as noted above, is less radical and transformative in its methods and aims. It is important to make a distinction between these two forms of resistance and impress the point that both appear at various times in *The White Boy Shuffle*. For it indicates that rather than characterising Beatty's novel as "a satire" (something the author himself has refuted) it is more accurate to say it contains satirical moments. Refuting the simple generic classification of *The White Boy Shuffle* ensures that we do not miss the more radical elements of the novel, which (as I will argue at the end of this chapter) has a direct impact on the way we interpret its final message regarding resisting and transforming whiteliness in elite, higher education.

During his last basketball game at El Campesino Real High, an elite, predominately white public high school, Gunnar changes the names of his teammates to famous minstrels or supposed "sellouts" ('Anthony "Rastus" Price', 'Anita "Aunt Jemima" Appelby' and 'Tommy "N*** T" Mendoza') before entering the hall himself:

> I lurched from the side-line, shuffling through the gauntlet of astonished teammates as slowly as I could, my big feet flopping in front of me, my back bent into a drooping question mark. My gloved hands slid along the floor, trailing behind me like minstrel landing gear. The gymnasium erupted. People rolled in the aisles with laughter; light bulbs popped. I don't suppose they could hear me whistling 'The Ol' Gray Mare' through the powdered doughnut that was my slack-jawed mouth. I stood at centre court and gave a hearty, "Howdy, y'all" (Beatty 1996, p.181).

This is where comic rage arguably gives way to satire. Rather than presenting an alternative vision for society, as seen during the Shakespearean performance, here Gunnar merely reproduces current perceptions. And it is here that we see the limitations of satire, which have been interrogated and exposed by other Black cultural texts, such as Spike Lee's *Bamboozled* (2001) and Percival Everett's (2001) *Erasure*. In the former, a Black television producer decides to put on a modern-day minstrel show (to the delight of his white executives) in order to highlight the ridiculousness of stereotypes levelled at Black people. However, the show is a huge success and even goes on to win an Emmy. In the latter, a disgruntled Black author, who resents the monumental success of a book he believes to play to harmful Black stereotypes, decides to parody the effort by creating a similar book himself; only for it to go on and win a prestigious award that none of his other books came close to being nominated for. As critics have noted, *Erasure* 'raises searching questions about the limitations of satire, especially with reference to the reception of African-American literature in a literary marketplace that tends to misread, and consequently erase, any kind of political critique' (Farebrother 2015, p.118). Regardless of the artist's intentions, they are entirely reliant on how their work is positioned by an institution and then received by its audience. Dave Chappelle addresses this very issue during a discussion with Oprah Winfrey about his reasons for leaving the hugely successful comedy show *Chappelle's Show*: 'What I didn't consider is how many people watch this show and how, the way people use television is subjective…somebody on set that was white laughed in such a way (pause) I know the

difference between people laughing with me and people laughing at me, and it was the first time I'd ever gotten a laugh I was uncomfortable with' (Reelblack 2010).[68]

Fittingly, Chappelle ends his story by noting how 'I want to make sure that I am dancing and not shuffling' (Reelblack 2010). Although Gunnar may well be shuffling with more self-awareness than the other members of his basketball team, as he attempts to make an important point about the long legacy of Black people pandering to systematic white dominance, he nevertheless perpetuates the same negative and debilitating stereotypes and behaviours. Returning to his entrance into the basketball court, the laughter Gunnar's performance elicits suggests that all sense of irony has been lost on the watching audience. Indeed, the gymnasium is said to have 'erupted', whilst people 'rolled in the aisle with laughter'. This is not meditative, reflective laughter, where the audience consider the social statements being made; which would most likely manifest in the form of nervous chuckles. Here, we have an unabashed and unthinking laughter which, in its wild unrestraint, borders on the grotesque.[69] The fact that the light bulbs are said to have 'popped' not only emphasise the ridiculous levels of laughter, it also confirms how unsuccessful Gunnar's act of resistance has been. Parodying the minstrel figure has not illuminated, or enlightened, anybody present and so the scene is shrouded in darkness. The audience are simply laughing at Gunnar in a way that is deeply uncomfortable to observe. Considering Beatty's continual engagement with Hip Hop culture in this novel, Gunnar's move from outright defiance to parody may well be a comment on how easily the rapper persona can turn from a subversive, counter-cultural figure to a humiliating source of entertainment for white people. It seems no coincidence that *Erasure*, *Bamboozled* and, to some extent, Dave Chappelle's departure from his own show, occurred at a time when the music industry had ensured 'since the middle to late 1990s, the social, artistic, and political significance of figures like the gangsta and street hustler substantially developed into apolitical, simple minded, almost comic stereotypes' (Rose 2008, p.2). As Gunnar's performance on the basketball court illustrates, the issue with utilising the

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[68] Chappelle has unfortunately proven less uncomfortable with the laughs he has elicited with transphobic and homophobic jokes in recent Netflix specials.

[69] This should not be considered a modern iteration of the Carnivalesque. Mikhail Bakhtin (1984b, p.11) makes clear that 'carnival laughter (which emanates from grotesque realism) is the laughter of all the people. Second, it is universal in scope; it is directed at all and everyone, including the carnival's participants'. Here, despite the exaggerated bodily element that, according to Bakhtin, is intrinsic to grotesque realism, laughter is very much directed away from the white masses and toward Gunnar and the other Black participants; reinforcing rather than subverting orthodox hierarchies.

Hip Hop snare to communicate alternative paradigms is that the instrument can quite quickly be hollowed out and its message distorted.

The inclusion of Gunnar's ill-considered act of resistance in Beatty's book might also signal that the young Black man's ability to withstand whiteliness in elite educational spaces is not as secure as it initially seems. This is certainly shown to be the case during the one seminar Gunnar actually attends at Boston University. Interestingly, Gunnar reverts back to his original mode of resistance whilst in this particular educational space. At the beginning of the seminar scene, the sole Black student in the room is said to have 'drummed' his fingers on the desk whilst 'the next generation of great American poets stood up and introduced themselves with bohemian haughtiness' (Beatty 1996, p.195). By repurposing the regulating desk object and turning it into a drum, Gunnar once again assumes a position of defiance as he registers his disinterest, impatience and irritation with the speakers and establishes a distance between himself and the conventions of the classroom. This is reinforced by the way Gunnar speaks to the other students as well. Bored with what he describes as being one 'badly scarred' student's 'Mayflower pedigree' (Peyote Chandler, '"of the Greenwich, Connecticut, Chandlers"'), he proceeds to inquire: '"What the fuck happened to your mug?"'. He then goes on to refute Chadwick Osterdorf III's claim that Rimbaud was '"the only true poet ever to walk the earth"' by making the observation that '"Rimbaud wasn't no gunning revolutionary. What he really wanted to do sell was slaves, Black African n***, but he was too stupid to catch any, so he sold weapons to some king who ripped him off"' (Beatty 1996, p.195-6). As in the Shakespeare soliloquy finals, such brash yet astute comments (in regard to Rimbaud anyway) subvert the established power dynamics of the educational space. Ordinarily, the flagrant flaunting of privileged people's social and academic pedigree (not just through familial ties but also grandiose and assured statements about canonical literary figures) would likely intimidate students from different backgrounds (who may not have generational wealth or be familiar with Rimbaud) and force them into an embarrassed and self-conscious silence; stunting their ability to perform in the seminar. By refusing to respect a classroom culture that facilitates this kind of pageant of privilege, Gunnar turns things on their head and calls out and unsettles those who would normally feel most secure in the elite space.

However, the success of Gunnar's approach is extremely short lived. Following his outburst, the power dynamics of the room shift back to their original position as Gunnar is exposed to and ultimately overwhelmed by whole new levels of appropriation, exploitation

and exoticisation in the elite, higher education institution.[70] We see this most clearly when, after the class learn Gunnar's name, Peyote Chandler produces a 'coffee table book of photographs' entitled *'Ghettotopia: An Anthropological Rendering of the Ghetto through the Street Poems of an Unknown Street Poet Named Gunnar Kaufman'* (Beatty 1996, p.197). This has been identified by critics as an important moment in the novel, with Rolland Murray (2008, p.225) arguing that Gunnar 'finds himself suffering the contradictions of late capitalism that…routinely "transforms" ethnic others "into serial consumers" of simulacra of their own expressions'. It should also be added that, in the unveiling of the poetry book, Gunnar finds himself subjected to the racist proclivities of white academics who wrench Black artistic expression from its original, localised context and repurpose it to confirm preconceptions of Black people and culture.

This is a phenomenon we have seen throughout the thesis. In the analysis of *Black Girl, White Girl*, for instance, it was noted how Genna furiously fingers the pages of James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison novels in order to make Minette fit within some existing template for Black identity. Meanwhile, in *Americanah*, Kelsey casually denounces and dismisses *Things Fall Apart* for being 'quaint' because it fails to cohere to her own impression of 'modern Africa' (Adichie 2014, p.189). Turning to *On Beauty*, there is an underlying suggestion and fear that by archiving aspects of Hip Hop culture for the University library, Carl has unwittingly developed a database which can be used to concretise certain regressive notions of Black working-class people and culture. A fear that, in *The White Boy Shuffle*, is fully realised during Gunnar's seminar class when the (unsanctioned) poetry book is presented by Peyote. As its title makes clear, this book signals how white middle-class academics have seized Gunnar's poems, originally sprawled across and thus tethered to the streets of Hillside, in order to take an anthropological tour around a Black working-class area they have never encountered but have firm ideas about; all the while reducing the artist himself to a racist and classist stereotype.

Gunnar is ultimately driven out of the classroom when the shameless appropriation, exploitation and exoticisation of Black people exhibited by white academia reaches new, unendurable levels. Immediately after the poetry book reveal, a student introduces herself as Negritude (a "'reminder'" she says "'of the hagiocratic innocence possessed by Black people

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[70] We as readers are perhaps being prepared for some kind of problem to develop when the narrator details that before sharing his thoughts on Rimbaud, Chadwick is 'licking the edges of his Drum cigarette' (Beatty 1996, p.195). Recalling the word that signals Gunnar's form of resistance, this reference to the privileged white student's 'Drum' cigarette wrong-foots the reader by establishing a subtle link between the two students, just as Gunnar is trying to undermine it.

around the world'"), proclaims that braids make her feel "'really Nubian'" and then finally proceeds to ululate, unprompted, for the rest of the class (Beatty 1996, p.197.) Recalling the incident, which resulted in him bolting straight out of the door, Gunnar notes:

> I felt like I'd been outed and exposed by my worst enemies, white kids who were embarrassingly like myself but with whom somehow I had nothing in common. To prove it I walked through the centre of campus and slowly began to undress...I continued down Commonwealth Avenue, naked save for sneakers and socks. My black lower-middle-class penis fluttered suddenly to the right. When I reached the vestibule of my apartment building, the campus police closed in on me. I heard Professor Edlestein shout, "It's okay, he's a poet. Matter of fact, the best black...the best poet writing today." The cops instantly backed off. I was protected by poetic immunity. I had permission to act crazy (Beatty 1996, pp.197-8).

Despite Gunnar's desperate attempt to recapture the essence and efficacy of his initial show of resistance, the reaction from both the campus police and university professor here prove just how impotent the Black student has become in the face of an unrelentingly oppressive educational institution. Exposing his 'black-lower-middle-class penis' should be the definitive act of defiance, as it encapsulates the greatest fears and anxieties of white America. However, the co-option of his poetry, and therefore his voice and identity, means that Gunnar is no longer considered a threat to the social order. Unlike with Lauryn Hill and Minette in *Black Girl, White Girl*, whose 'psychosocial alterity' (or "craziness") leads to an intensification of disciplining procedures, Gunnar has been safely subsumed into the norm and so his powerless penis is left to 'flutter' harmlessly in the wind.

The contrast between how spectators respond to Gunnar's show of resistance in the Shakespeare soliloquy finals and then the seminar class is extremely stark. Where once white educators were stunned into silence, they now actually speak up to sanction the Black student's behaviour. Although Beatty demonstrates how a Hip Hop ethos can help to withstand the insidious snare of formal education, allowing the individual to momentarily manoeuvre within its margins, the final suggestion seems to be that such an approach to resistance is ultimately unsustainable. Sooner or later, Beatty asserts, the educational institution will seize and stifle the Black student. This is fundamentally how a snare works; it pulls tighter the more it is met with resistance. As such, acts of defiance actually serve to hasten the inevitable moment when the individual is trapped completely. It should be remembered that Genna's stalking of Minette in *Black Girl, White Girl* intensifies the more the young Black woman refuses to cohere to stereotypes of blackness; a state of affairs that continues until she is caught within the confines of a house fire and dies. In *The White Boy*

Shuffle, a similar situation develops when, just before he comes on to speak at an anti-apartheid rally, Gunnar is introduced as a "'star athlete, accomplished poet, black man extraordinaire, voice of a nation'" (Beatty 1996, p.218). The very elements of Gunnar's character that, at one point or another, were meant to signify resistance, become the very means by which the Black student is boxed in and reduced to recognisable forms of Black identity and experience. Gunnar acknowledges this fact and so proposes to the Black students watching him speak that there is only one form of protest left available to them: suicide. Rolland Murray (2008, p.228) notes in regard to this advocation of mass suicide that: 'To take away the nation's capacity to issue death is thus to reclaim the autonomy of the subject by rendering morbidity a possession that can be reclaimed'. For Gunnar, in this moment, suicide is the only available act of autonomy that cannot be commodified and contained by the higher educational institution.[71]

Gunnar's damning indictment of the university is reinforced by bell hooks (1990, p.148) who states: 'Back in those spaces where we come from, we kill ourselves in despair, drowning in nihilism, caught in poverty, in addition, in every post-modern mode of dying that can be named. Yet, we few who remain in that "other" space, we are often too isolated, too alone. We die there, too'. Although hooks's statement cannot be said to speak for every Black student who attends a predominately white institution, it is extremely telling that we see this deadening feeling of isolation reflected in the experiences of numerous Black students, scholars and characters considered and cited in this thesis. Gunnar feels it too. Readying himself to speak at the rally, he notes how: 'I looked directly into the lens…I peered into the camera, looking for my mom and Psycho Loco in Hillside, my father, but I didn't see anyone, just my wall-eyed reflection in the lens' (Beatty 1996, p.219). In Bakhtin's (1984a, p.287) *The Problem of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, he writes that 'I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another. The most important acts of constituting self-consciousness are determined by a relationship towards consciousness'. In the absence of Gunnar's family and friends, the Black student, caught within the confines of the university's snare, is constituted as something strange, alien

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[71] The complete control political institutions have over Black bodies, rendered objects in a capitalist society, is further suggested by Henry A. Giroux's work on disposability and race in the context of Hurricane Katrina. Giroux (2007, p.308) argues that 'state violence and totalitarian power, which, in the past, either were generally short-lived or existed on the fringe of politics and history, have now become the rule, as life is more ruthlessly regulated and placed in the hands of military and state power'. For him, 'the life unfit for life, unworthy of being lived, is no longer marginal to sovereign power but is now central to its form of governance' (Giroux 2007, p.308). This serves to corroborate Gunnar's framing of suicide as the only act of autonomy left available to Black people in America.

and alone, with the cold, empty lens returning nothing but his own, distorted 'wall-eyed' reflection. Whilst Gunnar does not realise it at the time, an alternative response to the one he promotes when faced with extreme isolation emerges with the rally. Placing an emphasis on the absence of Gunnar's friends and family, Beatty pushes for a return home where Black students like Scoby and Gunnar can be recognised and validated by loved ones in a communal, liberating, pedagogical space.

Cypher

As a demographic long displaced from their ancestral home and historically oppressed within and by American housing, African-American people have sought to interrogate and re-imagine the concept of "home" with particular urgency. This is clearly demonstrated in the work of Toni Morrison (1997) who, in an essay entitled 'Home', captures the heart of the inquiry when she ruminates 'how to be both free and situated; how to convert a racist house into a race-specific yet nonracist home. How to enunciate race while depriving it of its lethal cling?' The paradoxes that emerge here point to the tension that exists between the traditional, American concept of "home" and the reality of living in America for African-American people. As I showed in the previous chapter, the foundation of the American household (which offers both privilege and protection to its inhabitants) is built on racial exclusion and oppression. In accordance with Cheryl Harris and following Faulkner in *Absalom, Absalom!*, owning or even inhabiting a house in America (literally and conceptually) can be considered equivalent to owning or entering into the property of whiteness.

Morrison's mission is to cultivate the safety, comfort and connectivity of "home" without reinstating its exclusionary and oppressive elements. In an analysis of the author's novel, *Paradise*, Cynthia Dobbs (2011, pp.109-10) argues that, due to the interlinking histories of race and the American household, Morrison 'moves the idea of home from one contained within the house to an explicitly gendered, open-borders communal space – its freedom and security denied by the degree to which Black women feel simultaneously safe, free and connected'. As Dobbs implies, an important and notable facet of Morrison's re-imagining of "home" is the centrality of Black women in its creation and evaluation. As people who are made most vulnerable by systems of patriarchy and whiteness, Black women's freedom becomes the marker of a home's liberational aspect. For Morrison (1997), a truly liberated home, in which Black women can feel safe, free and connected, is where 'one can imagine safety without walls, can iterate difference that is prized and unprivileged, and conceive of a

third, if you will pardon the expression, world "already made for me, but snug and wide open, with a doorway never needing to be closed'". The transgressive features of Morrison's imagined home are clear. The doorway is not only left unguarded, it is kept wide open so that the realms of private and public blur into one another. The social hierarchy which was once connected to these two concepts consequently fades into obscurity. The renewed possibility of unconditional hospitality which emerges (now that there is no rightful owner or host of the property) creates a warmth, or 'snugness', typically associated with "home" that is to be enjoyed, equally, by all those who dwell there.

In *The White Boy Shuffle*, "home" is similarly conceived as a democratic and open space of community and love which is created by those who want to share and heal as part of a collective group. Given that Gunnar is not originally from Hillside, the suggestion is that such a concept of "home" is not necessarily tethered to one physical location, but is in fact an essence that can be cultivated in various different spaces. It is with this concept of "home" that another circular entity from Hip Hop comes to the fore: the cypher. As Ian Levy, Christopher Emdin and Edmun Adjapong (2018, p.105) explain: 'The cypher…is a modern version of African drum circles. African music as a social cultural practice was designed for collective community building and emotional release'. The Hip Hop cypher operates in the same way because the 'highly codified yet unstructured practice' facilitates an 'exchange in the form of a rap or dance' (Levy et al. 2018, p.104). According to the three Hip Hop educators:

> In any Hip Hop cypher, the following unspoken norms are always present: 1) everyone stands equidistant from one another in a circle, (2) everyone has a chance to share, (3) all voices have equal value, (4) praise is awarded to individuals when they share, and (5) equal support is provided to participants when in need. In cyphers, these norms converge to create a sense of comfort, safety and belonging for group members (Levy et al. 2018, p.106).

The harmoniousness of the Hip Hop cypher has led Levy, Emdin and Adjapong to make it the foundation of their pedagogical practice. This makes sense considering its clear connections with liberational pedagogical theory. As Courtney Rose (2018, p.31) highlights: 'Hip Hop scholars, historians and pedagogues linking the bi-directional dialogic processes of Freire's cultural circles to practices within Hip Hop culture find that it strongly mirrors practices associated with the Hip Hop cypher…in both Freire's cultural circles and Hip Hop cypher's the circle represents a disruption of hierarchical positioning.'

Figure 7 (SoulFoodCypher 2019)

We see an example of the Hip Hop cypher's potential as a liberational pedagogical practice in *The White Boy Shuffle* when, after returning home from Boston University, Gunna is informed by his friend Psycho Loco that:

> "One day we was kicking it at Reynier Park, lounging, you know how we do. I just pulled the book out and started reading it aloud. Read the shit cover to cover, twice. Who was there? Me, Hi-Life, Pookie, of course, Shamu, L'il Annie Borden, buncha heads, everybody crying. N*** was happy, but upset at the same time, you know. Then the rally. Nicholas. Nobody asked why, we just understood" (Beatty 1996, p.229).

The organic nature of the scene Psycho describes, with the unconscious act of 'just pull(ing) the book out' whilst 'kicking it at Reynier Park', is important to note as it conveys a certain ease of movement, or comfort, that contrasts considerably with the general cultural of Hillside's schools and streets; where bodies are tense, alert and always primed for some sort of violation. As is typical of the Hip Hop cypher, all thoughts of hierarchy are done away with here. Gunnar is one of their own, an equal member of the group, which is something that is recognised by Psycho's casual comment 'you know how we do' when relaying his account about the day. Importantly, Gunnar's poetry book is also not valorised for containing some Absolute Truth about "the Black experience". Instead, it is simply used to help the group make sense of, cope with and bond over their mutual experience of life in Hillside.

This profound communal experience stands quite separate from the performance put on by white liberals at Boston University's anti-apartheid rally; which takes place at the same

time as Psycho Loco's impromptu cypher. Reflecting on the event, Gunnar reports how a 'middle aged white man', 'clutching a pen and a copy of my just-published book', attempted to 'scale the platform, grabbing my ankles' whilst exclaiming: '"Mr Kaufman! Please sign my book – I understand now. I understand"' (Beatty 1996, p.217) Unlike Psycho Loco, this particular claim to 'understand' betrays a belief that there is an essential "Truth" to be had about Black people which, if discovered, will provide an absolute insight into their entire experience and thus diminish the distance between Black and white people. As I have shown in the analysis of *Black Girl, White Girl*, white liberals are desperate to close this experiential gap because they feel it will usher in a long-awaited moment of acceptance and, most importantly, absolution from a racist system. Whilst such a belief actually helps perpetuate systematic white dominance, it can lead to the elevation and adoration of prominent Black figures who become valorised as symbols or markers of the acceptance and absolution so coveted by white liberals.[72] That is why the white middle-aged man grabbing Gunnar's ankles so desires the Black speaker's signature. It would signal a literal signing off on the white liberal's character.

The contrast in the two educational experiences outlined above signals a new direction for Gunnar and his use of the Hip Hop snare. So far in the novel, Gunnar has used this mode of resistance in isolation and aimed it directly at the white academics who attempt to stifle and subjugate the young Black student. This ultimately proves unsuccessful as Gunnar is unable to withstand the overwhelming forces of white oppression at the university. However, what Psycho's story reveals is that, when at home and set alongside others as part of a cypher, Gunnar's snare can help build a regenerative communal space, or "home", where those who are vilified by society can be validated and healed by each other.[73] Inspired by this insight, Gunnar establishes the Black Bacchanalian MiseryFests at Reynier Park shortly after his return to Hillside, adopting the same principles of the Hip Hop cypher exhibited by Psycho Loco and his other friends when they read his poetry book. According to Gunnar:

> The shows lasted all night, and the neighbourhood players read poetry, held car shows, sang, danced, adlibbed harangues about everything from why there was no Latino

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[72] This is exposed in Jordan Peele's *Get Out* (2017). In an (anticipated) bid to showcase his "wokeness", a liberal white father confesses to his daughter's Black boyfriend: 'By the way, I would have voted for Obama for a third term if I could'.

[73] Significantly, in the build up to Scoby's suicide when the Black student's 'behaviour became increasingly bizarre', Gunnar reveals how 'the obvious solution was for Nicholas to go home, but there was no home for him to go to; the man in the mauve suit had returned and convinced his mother to sell the house and travel the country, skating in an old-timer roller derby league. My mom offered to put him up, but he was too proud' (Beatty 1996, p.224). Suicide becomes the outlet for Scoby only after the option of returning home is no longer viable.

baseball umpires to the practicality of sustaining human life on Mars. Sometimes troupes of children simply counted to a hundred for hours at a time (Beatty 1996, p.242).

Besides the wide array of artistic activities that are showcased and shared at the Miseryfests, Gunnar also reveals that 'stigmatised groups got a chance to defend their actions to the rest of the hood…all the Muslims who had eaten meat, panhandle welfare cheats, current drug users…hoodlums could bare their souls' (Beatty 1996, p.242). By incorporating the most vilified and marginalised in society with everyone else from Hillside, the MiseryFests endeavours to properly reflect the demographic of people that comprise the neighbourhood. It thus refuses to perpetuate the romanticised white liberal vision of a monolithic Black community or the exoticised and stirring simulation of a dangerous Black underclass projected by a profit hungry rap industry. It also ties itself to the ideals of the Hip Hop cypher (and Toni Morrison's concept of "home") by carving out a democratic space where 'difference' is 'prized and unprivileged' and everyone who belongs to Hillside are given the same opportunity to contribute to a collective educational experience (Morrison 1997). Such a dynamic stands in contradistinction to the Boston University seminar where an elitist, exclusionary culture ultimate drove Gunnar, the sole Black student, away.

The MiseryFests may well be more democratic than elite American universities, but it does not adopt the open-door policy advocated by Morrison and implied by the tenets of the Hip Hop cypher. There is one demographic that is not allowed to take part in proceedings: 'To ensure that Friday nights didn't turn into trendy happenings for white bold enough to spelunk into the depths of the ghetto, Psycho Loco stationed armed guards at the gate to keep out the blue-eyed soulsters' (Beatty 1996, p.243). This precaution serves as a crucial reminder that no matter how harmonious the Hip Hop cypher itself may be, it is always surrounded and threatened by a wider system of racialised oppression. Indeed, turning out the 'blue-eyed soulsters' seems to be less about excluding individual white people and more about guarding against systematic white dominance, which is expressed through the commodification and exploitation of Black art and cultural practice such soulsters typically enact. Even in the absence of white individuals, the ideology of white domination pervades Hillside. It should be noted that the cathartic experience shared earlier by Gunnar's friends takes place in a park filled with 'shards of broken glass and spent bullet shells' (Beatty 1996, p.54). Meanwhile, the MiseryFests are performed 'under the LAPD's simple but effective stage lighting' (Beatty 1996, p.242). The performance of an educational Hip Hop cypher at home, in

Hillside, is thus always subjected to the state sanctioned policy of 'racial confinement', established through an intrusive and violating carceral network, which 'more or less abandons the spatial internalities to their self-chosen excesses'; leading to the danger and destitution of public spaces like Reynier Park (Goldberg 2002, pp.168-9). According to Akala (2018, p.178), this 'is about social engineering and about the conditioning of expectations, about getting Black people used to the fact that they are not real and full citizens'. Leaving the cypher open and unguarded is an impossible ask for the people of Hillside given the stakes of operating in their local environment.

Nevertheless, Gunnar does present an alternative approach to resisting systematic white dominance with the MiseryFests. This is highlighted by the fact Gunnar uses both Reynier Park and the LAPD spotlight to help run his festival. For it marks a move away from his previous tactic of independently confronting oppression head on and a move toward harnessing the presence and power of oppressive white forces in order to benefit the community of Hillside, who become Gunnar's main focus. This new approach to resistance is reminiscent of the Invisible Man in Ralph Ellison's (2016) seminal novel of the same title, originally published in 1952. Similarly inspired by the rebellious music of the time (jazz), the Invisible Man uses light generated by the American state (more specifically, Monopolated Light & Power) to illuminate his home (an enclave that exists separately from mainstream society) so that he can focus on communicating with and enlightening other people through the creative act of writing. One major difference between the two novels, however, is that the Invisible Man suggests he will soon re-emerge into society. There is no such promise in *The White Boy Shuffle*, which concludes with a stand-off between the American government and people of Hillside. After the government has threatened Hillside with an atomic bomb, Gunnar 'paint(s) white concentric circles on the roofs of the neighbourhood, so that from the air Hillside looks like one big target' (Beatty 1996, p.247). These circles encapsulate the final approach to resistance articulated by the novel through the MiseryFests cypher. Though conveying an acceptance and even amplification of the uneven power dynamics that exist between the State and their Black working-class targets, the circles communicate communal defiance as the people of Hillside come together in a state of vulnerability and openness in order to share and heal as a collective.

The Underground

It may not be readily apparent but the composition of the MiseryFests and the conclusion to Beatty's novel as a whole can be taken as a commentary on the way Black students should conduct their future relationship with elite universities. The dynamics established at the festival can be seen as an ideological template immediately transferable to the higher education institution. The fact that white people are not allowed into the MiseryFests, for instance, suggests that a cypher-style of education should be established without the presence of white academics. This makes sense because the preconceptions, proclivities and power of white liberals in academia (which have been highlighted throughout the thesis) means that they are likely to disturb the balance and harmony required in a cypher. Their presence alone threatens to engender anxiety in Black and other marginalised participants as history and experience induces a justified paranoia that every word and action will be absorbed, noted down, categorised, commodified and repurposed by the shameless infiltrators of the communal space. Any performance of the cypher has to therefore take place in an alternative, separate space within the university in order to function properly. Such a setup recalls the increasingly controversial concept of the "safe space", which is advocated by many students of colour attending predominately white institutions. Discussing the historical emergence of "safe spaces" as spaces of survival consciously curated by and for people of colour , Jess Harless (2018, p.334) notes that: 'Such spaces are insulated and insular, focusing inward and investing their time and energy into securing the group *qua* the group, as it is, and strengthening its internal bonds'. As with the MiseryFests, the concept of the "safe space" is grounded in the idea that those who occupy a position of social privilege and power must be prohibited from entering the space in order to preserve its essential function as a refuge for marginalised individuals.[74] Of course, whilst excluding white people from a space is likely to make it safer for at least some Black students, it does nothing to address intra-racial systems of power which, as we have seen, cut across gender, class, ethnicity, dis/ability and citizenship status. This does not discredit the concept of the safe space, or the move to curate spaces that exclude white people, but it does impress the need to think beyond whiteness when wanting to dismantle power and secure the safety of all Black people.

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[74] The internal dynamic of the "safe space" is essentially the same as the Hip Hop cypher. According to Harless (2018, p.334): 'those engaged in the movements understood that gatherings in safe spaces were more likely to take on a certain character or ethos, one in which community members could speak and act freely and could anticipate support, encouragement, and understanding from there'.

Maintaining the parameters and thus the integrity of the safe space is easier said than done. Students cannot, after all, station armed guards at the door like Psycho Loco in *The White Boy Shuffle*. As a result, these enclaves are under constant threat from white liberals who proclaim a desire to enter inside in order to better "understand" Black people and to act out their role as reliable white allies, all the while refusing to acknowledge or accept the fact that, no matter how self-reflective they endeavour to be, white people's presence alone can prove debilitating. Another related issue is how institutions generally respond to the implementation of safe spaces, which is something even Psycho's guards would struggle to protect Black students from. As Harless (2018, p.334) reports:

> For (diversity) trainers, safe space is a fundamental tool in the facilitation of workshops and discussions about oppression, and it helps instructor's frame ground rules for participation and convey their expectations about how members should engage with each other with the material. This version of safe space constructs an integrated space; composed of a variety of participants, pregnant with the promise of challenge and exchange, and filled with the expectations about engagement among agents.

This institutionalisation of the "safe space" concept is a perversion that fundamentally opposes and undermines its original ideological underpinnings. For the inclusion of "safe space principles" within classrooms means that any preference Black or other marginalised people show for separate spaces (which was the original idea) perpetuates the notion that they are unreasonable, impossible to please and ultimately the central source of discontent and disharmony in the university. This is an attitude that puts Black and other marginalised students under increasing pressure to either forsake their safe spaces or at the very least compromise the core principles that initially comprised them.

The foundations of the original "safe space" are thus at increasing risk of caving in completely, leaving Black and other marginalised students exposed to the cold hostility of the university with nowhere else to go. Except, perhaps, underground. As Black thinkers and creatives highlight, the Underground has historically served as a physical and ideological site of Black refuge, resistance and liberational pedagogical practice. This is clearly evidenced by Hip Hop culture, with Marcyliena Morgan (2004, p.208) noting that 'the key to Hip Hop is actually what happens in what they refer to as the Underground. The Underground, just like the Underground Railroad, is the place where truth can be spoken, where skills can be learned. If you don't know, if reading is illegal, you can read in the Underground. It is that sort of space'. Fred Moten and Stefano Harney (2013, p.26) envisage something similar with their concept of the Undercommons, which is a physical site and state of mind that requires Black

academics to 'disappear into the underground, the downlow low-down maroon community of the university'. According to Moten and Harney, this becomes necessary because, despite the resources and relative safety it extends to Black students, the university is centrally concerned with perpetuating oppressive power dynamics through hegemonic discourse. This is an irredeemable situation which leads Moten and Stefano (2013, p.26) to argue that students need to 'sneak into the university and steal what they can…abuse its hospitality…spite its mission…join its refugee colony, its gypsy encampment'.[75] Ultimately, the two educational theorists insist (in terms that carry traces of Du Bois) 'to be in but not of, that is the path of the subversive intellectual in the modern university' (Moten and Harney 2013, p.26).

There is a major difference between the orthodox concept of a "safe space" and Moten and Harney's more radical concept of the Undercommons. Namely, the "safe space" is much less ordered, official and stable than how the Undercommons is conceived. In this sense, the Undercommons speaks more to Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* than Paul Beatty's *The White Boy Shuffle*. The MiseryFests, like safe spaces, group marginalised people into one open physical location and therefore leave them exposed and vulnerable to the surrounding system of white dominance. In contrast, the Invisible Man 'sabotage(s)' mainstream institutions from an unidentifiable hole in the ground (Ellison 2016, p.7). This is a state of being that Ellison (2016, p.560) refers to in *Invisible Man* as 'hibernation' but Moten and Harney (2013, p.30) positively characterise as 'hiding'. It is when they are in this state of hiding, or hibernation, that Black people can then, according to Ellison, Moten and Harney, begin to undermine American institutions. Significantly, undermining institutions in this way requires opening up the transgressive realm to white people. The Invisible Man actively speaks to the white reader from his hole: 'What else but try to tell you what was really happening when your eyes were looking through?' (Ellison 2016, p.561), Meanwhile, Moten and Harney (2013, p.38) reveal that membership into the Undercommons is 'unconditional – the doors swing open for refuge even though it may let in police agents and destruction'. This risk is necessary because establishing parameters or restrictions to the Undercommons would formalise and therefore

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[75] Although he does not explicitly engage with the idea of the Undercommons, Kehinde Andrews (2018, p.139) argues for a similar approach to Black Studies in Britain when he states: 'The reality is that the best we can probably hope for is to be ignored, left to develop alternative spaces within the academy that can produce critical knowledge and engage with communities outside. Decolonising the university may well be possible but that is not the aim of Black Studies, we aim to infiltrate it and use the resources in the service of Black communities'.

dilute, even nullify, its radical potential, reducing it to another containable and containing organisation or institutional 'policy' (Moten and Harney 2013, p.75).

Accepting the dangers Psycho Loco attempts to combat as he stands guard at the MiseryFests entrance, Moten and Harney get closer to Morrison's re-imagining of "home"; collapsing the concepts of public and private, outside and in. In doing so, they appear to lose none of the warmth, or what Morrison calls 'snug(ness)', of the imagined "home" space. Indeed, such warmth is essential for the Undercommons to work effectively and is elicited by bodies being held in close proximity (though not strictly in a physical sense). Moten and Harney (2013, p.98) call this dynamic 'hapticality' which, they say, 'is the capacity to feel through others, for others to feel through you, for you to feel them feeling you'. This championing of community, or at least connectivity, through 'hapticality', is where the concept of the Undercommons departs from *Invisible Man* and meets again with the MiseryFests. Drawing on a shared history of violation and oppression, 'forced to touch and be touched, to sense and be sensed', the community comprising the Undercommons 'feels (for) each other' and, assisted by art or 'soul music', 'build sentimentality together again' and engender what Moten and Harney (2013, pp.98-9) simply describe as 'our love'. In step with other theoretical work on liberational pedagogy, communal love thus becomes the bedrock of the Undercommons approach to resistance (Freire 1972; bell hooks 1994; Harvard Graduate School of Education 2010).

Whilst the Undercommons is a persuasive and promising concept, the analysis of *Black Girl, White Girl* and *On Beauty* shows that withstanding the university's conditions of entry is no easy feat. Black students like Minette are constantly coerced into submitting to the status quo which, as academics in Wellington's Black studies department demonstrate, can be particularly enticing to those who have traditionally been excluded from the elite space. Darren Webb confronts these issues with the Undercommons when writing on Utopianism in educational theory.[76] In his words: 'It is easy to be seduced by the language of the Undercommons. Embodying and enacting it, however, is difficult indeed. Being within and against the university, refusing the call to order through insolent obstructive unprofessionalism, is almost impossible to sustain' (Webb 2018, p.103). The sporadic,

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[76] Webb (2013) defines 'critical utopian pedagogy' as a 'pedagogy of resistance and a pedagogy of possibility. Confronting a world of inequality, deficiency and unfulfillment, utopian pedagogy rejects utopian blueprints while working with students to excavate utopian "traces" that can guide us on towards what might be and what is not yet'.

temporary, tumultuous, even imperilling elements of the Undercommons concept are essential to its transgressive potential. For Moten and Harney, it is only by constantly moving, jostling and jabbing, side-by-side, that members of the Undercommons can strike a blow whilst evading the oppressive forces which surround them. The unsustainability of this approach is clear. Not only is the work draining and likely to lead to issues with mental health but, sooner or later, assailants are going to be seized, subsumed and/or sent away. Rather than a critique of the Undercommons concept itself, this underscores the impossibility of transforming the elite higher education institution from the inside.

This impossibility leads Webb (2018, p.108) to argue that the 'emphasis on creating experimental spaces within the academy needs to shift toward operating in existing spaces of resistance outside it'. Although Webb frames his argument as a response to the inadequacies of the Undercommons and other transitory approaches to liberational pedagogy, it is actually something that Moten and Harney themselves explicitly advocate for. Indeed, Harney (2013, p.112) has explained in an interview that:

> The Undercommons is a kind of comportment or ongoing experiment with and as the general antagonism, a kind of way of being with others, it's almost impossible that it could be matched up with particular forms of institutional life. It would obviously cut through different kind of ways and in different spaces and times'.

An ideal or outlook as much (if not more) than a physical place, the Undercommons can be 'launched from any kitchen, any back porch, any basement, any hall, any park bench, any improvised party, every night' (Moten and Stefano 2013, p.74). This measures up with Webb's (2018, pp.108-9) own examples of 'international communities, housing collectives, squats, art centres, community theatres, bars, book shops, health collectives, social centres, independent media and, increasingly of course, the digital sphere'. It is here, Webb (2018, p.109) argues, that 'the utopian pedagogue has a responsibility to exploit their own privilege and to work with students, communities and movements outside and divorced from the university'. The same can be said for members of the Undercommons as well.

The call to set up separate pedagogical spaces outside of the university is becoming louder. This idea may initially seem ill-advised and even extreme, given the relative lack of resources and formal accreditation to support the work. However, academics of colour are increasingly suggesting that abandoning the university completely might be the only way to combat the oppressive forces it perpetuates. As Azeezat Johnson and Remi Salisbury (2018, p.154 [original italics]) state: 'Whilst attempts to transform higher education from within

perhaps appears as *the* option for subverting standards of knowledge production, non-participation might also prove to be a vital choice'. For 'non-participation might mean a refusal to collude in the academe's perpetuation of white supremacy' (Johnson and Salisbury 2018, p.155). It might also mean the safeguarding of the individual's mental health:

> This option of leaving the academe also speaks to recognising…the cumulative threat racial microaggressions can pose to our wellbeing. If we understand the academe as a space that creates fertile conditions for microaggressive acts (whilst simultaneously lacking the requisite conditions for critique) then it is perfectly reasonable for people of colour to leave the academe (Johnson and Salisbury 2018, p.155).

With this said, Gunnar's trajectory through education in *The White Boy Shuffle* may need to be taken a little more literally than it has been so far. Rather than simply providing ideological templates than can be transposed to the university setting, Gunnar's return home might well point to the need to break away from elite universities and establish alternative educational spaces elsewhere. The fact that Gunnar's poetry book engenders a sporadic, transitory, imperilled but transformative moment, that brings his friends together at the local park, illustrates how the concept of the Undercommons can be successfully employed outside of the university; with the educational Hip Hop cypher (instead of soul music) providing knowledge and enhancing communal wellbeing through the expression of empathy, sensitivity and love.

Beginnings

In a chapter revolving around circles, it is worth noting that critics have commented how, at the end of *The White Boy Shuffle*, we not only face the concentric circles Gunnar has painted around Hillside; we also face being returned full circle to the beginning of the book. As Sara Pfaff (2015, p.106 [original italics]) puts it:

> For all its wicked satire and kaleidoscopic cultural improvisation, Paul Beatty's meditations on the political uses of cultural production in his debut novel *The White Boy Shuffle* doesn't appear to go anywhere…This is because Beatty's narrative ends precisely where it began: portraying the novel's *poete maudit* Gunnar Kaufman as he reluctantly takes on the task of mobilising the Black community.

As noted earlier, there is a need to look beyond the satirical elements of Beatty's novel and distinguish moments of 'comic rage' from it in order to identify the text's more radical vision. This allows us to reassess the development of both Beatty's narrative and Gunnar's approach to resistance and transformation. The notion that Beatty's book does not go anywhere is incorrect, especially in the educational context. Although Gunnar does return to Hillside, he

comes back from Boston University richer for his experience; if only because he now realises how hostile and toxic predominately white institutions are and how important his network of loved ones is. This type of bildungsroman is typical of Beatty who centres his narrative in *The White Boy Shuffle*, *Tuff* and *The Sellout* around a young Black man's journey from self-interest and political apathy to community leadership.[77] For L.H. Stallings, it is the reluctance to assume such a position that allows Beatty's protagonists to present an important new model for counter-hegemonic resistance. In regard to *The White Boy Shuffle*, Stallings (2009, p.103) argues that 'Gunnar establishes himself as the anti-race man. He does not clamour for glory or voluntarily offer his services'. Moreover, as a poet and basketball player, Gunnar 'demonstrates the importance of culture and the imagination to the Black public sphere and liberation' (Stallings 2009, p.104). Indeed, Gunnar is desirous of neither fame nor financial reward so his investment in the people of Hillside comes organically through his experiences in formal education. As such, Gunnar's community benefit from his journey through higher education as much as he does. For it is only after acknowledging the impotency of his direct, combative approach to resisting white oppression that Gunnar decides to strengthen ties with the people in Hillside and create the Miseryfests. With the Black student instinctively assured of the importance of Black culture to liberation, he bases this festival on the precepts of the Hip Hop cypher.

If a message is being extended to Black academics at the end of *The White Boy Shuffle*, it may well be that they should follow Gunnar's lead and abandon elite universities in order to return home and establish separate spaces of communal enlightenment, love and healing through their knowledge and appreciation of Black culture. This is a radical rather than reformist vision that, following the framework set out by Tucker, can be said to surpass the limiting lines of satire and extend into comic rage; something that Pfaff misses in her assessment of the novels development and its ending. Humour and militancy, the key components of comic rage, certainly both encompass the novel's final image, with Gunnar setting up his target for white institutions to aim at; an absurd response that nevertheless draws attention to the defiance of the Hillside community and their refusal to cohere to and curate a space within the current structures of society as they previously did with the MiseryFests.

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[77] Martin Japtok (2005, p.25) notes that whilst the traditional bildungsroman 'emphasise(s) the protagonist and his/her development, and thus individualism, their ethnic equivalents seem to give more room to others'. As such, the journey Gunnar (and Beatty's other protagonists) take, from self-interest and political apathy to community leadership, parallels the general trajectory of African-American literary figures of the 20th century.

The fact that Beatty's novel ends just as Gunnar sets this target up suggests the author is not willing to provide us with a neat conclusion to events. We have been provided a radical vision but have no sense of whether it will be successful or sustainable. Indeed, we have no idea if the people in power will look down at the circular target in front of them and destroy the transgressors in a devastating fit of violence. Equally, we do not know if, reminded of the racial power dynamics operating in elite higher education, they will self-reflect and make some significant changes. Or if, apathetic to the response of mainstream institutions, the Hillside go on to create their own structures and networks which allow them to thrive and live their lives with full independence and autonomy. Beatty makes no promises about the efficacy of his suggested approach. Instead, he creates a tension that is indeterminate, palpable and full of potential.

"I learned a lot from them cuts in the basement
The smell of blunts laced with a little bit of spice
Wise, high n***s, giving me advice
We go out and start fights, scuff up our Nikes
Come back to talk crap and shoot a little dice
This is a slice of life and memories
Sittin' in my mind vividly, often they visit me."
Common (2019), 'Memories of Home'

"I remember sitting in my classroom
Listening to Wiley and Dizzee Rascal
Breaking all the class rules
Now we've got more trophies than
Arsenal
…
I'mma take the long way home
I'mma take the long way home
I'mma take the long way home just to
hear the beat play."
**Krept and Konan (2015), 'The Long
Way Home'**

"Half Moghul half Mowgli
Raised like a concrete jungli
And a junglist and a Londonist
But my DNA wonder where my home should be
Brown steps under the Black Panthers
Like Bagheera on Mowgli?
My only heroes were Black rappers
So to me 2pac was a true P***."
Swet Shop Boys (2016), 'Half Moghul Half Mowgli'

Coda

This thesis has provided the first, comprehensive literary study of the relationship between whiteness and architectural objects in elite higher educational spaces. Through an analysis of *Black Girl, White Girl*, *Americanah*, *On Beauty* and *The White Boy Shuffle*, it has revealed the significant metaphorical and material role that windows, desks, desk-tops and doors can play in perpetuating the racial oppression of Black students, when part of a wider network of predominately white bodies, discourse and objects in universities and colleges. In Chapter One's analysis of *Black Girl, White Girl*, I argued that windows, comprised of transparent sheets of glass, can further expose Black students to a system of white dominance and intensify their sense of alienation, whilst also obscuring the very mechanisms that determine this dynamic. Similarly, Chapter Two's discussion of Oates's novel demonstrated how the association of desks with disciplinary processes and knowledge production makes this architectural object a particularly intensive site of white ontological expansiveness; with white individuals and institutions eager to seize upon the "cultural artefacts" that line the desk space and reduce Black students to recognisable and restricting signs of blackness. Moreover, Chapter Four's examination of Zadie Smith's *On Beauty* revealed that the symbolic properties of the door (which has historically marked the entryway into the privileges and protections of whiteness) can mean that Black students are left physically suspended, even paralysed, at the borders of the higher education institution; until, at least, an invitation to enter inside is extended by a "benevolent" white liberal on the condition that their progressiveness is celebrated and racial hierarchy is maintained.

The thesis has also made clear that certain architectural objects (the desk-top) and geometric (re)formations (the cypher) can, at least in part, disrupt the function and diminish the impact of the racially oppressive network operating in elite universities and colleges. Despite stressing some important caveats, Chapter Three's analysis of *Americanah* highlighted how the desk-top provides Black students an opportunity to establish counter- and alternate- narratives to those typically disseminated in physical university spaces; facilitating the assertion of autonomy, curation of community and the democratisation of knowledge in the process. And finally, Chapter Five detailed how the Hip Hop cypher in *The White Boy Shuffle* reconfigures once alienating and exclusionary spaces and turns them into sites of community, love and mutual knowledge exchange; conceptualised by Beatty as "home". This, it was argued, presented a potentially liberating paradigm for pedagogical

practice which, if implemented, could have some significant repercussions for the future relationship between Black students and elite higher education institutions. Indeed, it offers Black students (ordinarily contained, coerced and controlled by elite universities and colleges) a template for establishing separate sites of education and ultimately leaving the higher education space altogether.

By demonstrating the efficacy of using literature and other cultural mediums to examine whiteness and architectural objects in elite higher education, this thesis has impressed the importance of adopting its methodological approach when researching higher education and systems of power in the future. As Bernardine Evaristo (2019) writes whilst reflecting on her recent Booker prize winning novel, *Girl, Woman, Other*: 'Fiction excavates and reimagines our histories; investigates, disrupts, validates and contextualises our societies and subjectivities; exercises our imaginations through flights of fancy, takes our reader on transformational adventures, and probes and presents our motivations, problems and dramas'. The investigative and imaginative power of literary fiction has been on full display in this thesis. By playing with architectural metaphors, Oates, Adichie, Smith and Beatty have drawn attention to the dynamism of objects (typically seen to be static) and their role in enforcing, or indeed undermining, social processes and systems in the higher educational context. What my analysis has demonstrated is that by teasing out, reflecting on and taking forward the social and political implications of such play, critical readers can expose, examine and disrupt the features of a racially oppressive system that are ordinarily overlooked or considered inconsequential.

This methodological approach has already proven valuable to me personally. It has helped me process and better understand my own experience of higher education by alerting me to moments of alienation and exclusion that were once felt but difficult to identify or, in fact, ignored completely. It has also provided me with a language and theoretical context to explain these moments to others. For example, as the first year of my PhD turned into its second and then third, I became increasingly aware of a sign that sat on my supervisor's window, which stated that all windows must be kept completely closed. Prior to my research, I would have dismissed such a directive as a neutral university policy, unrelated to systems of power and a harmless response to internal issues with building management. However, my thesis has brought these background objects into focus, allowing me to view them in a new light and from a much more revealing angle. As the analysis of my literary texts developed and ideas regarding architecture became concretised, I began to pay

better attention to the space around me until objects that were once peripheral moved into the centre point of my vision. As Ocean Vuong (2019) states: 'That's what writing is, after all the nonsense, getting so low the world offers a merciful new angle, a larger vision made of small things, the lint suddenly a huge sheet of exactly the size of your eyeball'. The more my supervisor and I huddled over the desk-top, burrowing deeper into ideas and concepts like the Undercommons, the more the window and its sign grew in significance.

The metaphorical and material function of the window was discussed at length in Chapter One. Here, I noted how glass seems to elide the distinction between inside and outside and dismantle the binaries which underpin current systems of power. In a post-Civil Rights society, where the logic of colour-evasiveness and neoliberalism reign supreme, this is the exact impression higher education institutions set out to project.[78] However, the use of glass disguises the development of a more insidious approach to systematic white dominance, where the select few people of colour who are allowed to access the elite university space are cut off from their community and compelled to assimilate into white middle-class culture. As the sign on my supervisor's window began to amplify for me, the policy and practice of closing off the university to external ideas, perspectives and people becomes most apparent to those who are trapped inside the institution and forced to breathe in and suffocate on the musty air of dead white men and their traditions.

During my later supervisions, the metaphorical function of the window started to have a material impact. My growing awareness of the window's deeper significance meant I started to shift with discomfort at the thought of its looming presence. The window and its sign had become an urgent reminder that even whilst my supervisor and I plotted to dismantle the mechanisms of the university, we were contained, observed and ultimately governed by them. This reinforced the hostility of the institution and the need to remain vigilant whenever operating within its walls. It impressed the importance of continuing to aggravate for change but, also, the difficulties of doing so. In other words, my awareness of the window, made possible by the research conducted in this thesis, brought the current state of the university into much sharper relief. This is just one example of how examining the relationship between architectural objects and whiteness through literature, film and other cultural mediums can elucidate the experience of Black and other students of colour

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[78] It is not lost on me that the University of Sheffield's latest landmark building is literally called The Diamond and is predominately made up of steel sheets and glass.

in the elite higher educational institution. It is a particularly illustrative example. The fact the negative affective impact on my body was clearly enforced by a combination of window, sign and predominately white educational space, emphasises how it is a network of objects, discourse, and predominately white bodies which creates meaning, (re)directs forces of power and ultimately debilitates those who have historically been excluded from and oppressed by the university.

It is no surprise that this reflection on my own university experience in Britain is refracted through an American lens. Akala (2018, p.266) highlights that 'most people in Britain, if they know anything about racial injustice at all, are likely to be far more well aware of American issues and history than those on their doorstep, and this includes Black people'. This is symptomatic of the way race is discussed and taught in Britain's educational system; from primary school to university. As Reni Eddo-Lodge (2017, p.1) explains:

> I'd only ever encountered Black history through American-centric educational displays and lesson plans in primary and secondary school. With a heavy focus on Rosa Parks, Harriet Tubman's Underground Railroad and Martin Luther King, Jr., the household names of American Civil Rights Movement felt important to me, but also a million miles away from my life as a young Black girl growing up in North London.

The emphasis that Britain places on America when a conversation about race and racism arises is something I have continued to contemplate whilst writing my thesis. The decision to focus on American as opposed to British racial politics in the higher education context, made more than three years ago, seems to stem from my experience as an undergraduate. Any modules that included Black writers were extremely rare but, when it did occur, attention was generally placed on African-American people like Ralph Ellison, John Edgar Wideman and Paul Beatty, not Sam Selvon, Andrea Levy or Caryl Phillips, and certainly not the historical, political and social context within which these Black British authors were writing. Set within a wider social context where the Windrush generation were rarely discussed, the Civil Rights Movement in Britain was underplayed and the legacy of SUS laws conveniently overlooked, it is no wonder that my desire to confront systematic racism took me to America. Although examining and attempting to challenge the oppression of Black people in the US is of course a worthy cause, it is an ominous notion that those of us living in Britain are being encouraged to ignore the history and current reality of racism on our own doorstep.

Broadly speaking, there are striking similarities between the state of higher education in Britain and in America. Kalwant Bhopal (2018, p.87) notes how 'recent UK data suggests that the numbers of Black and Minority Ethnic groups (BME) who attend university have increased, yet their access to elite Russel Group universities remain low'. For those who do attend the top universities, Bhopal (2018, p.93) goes on to say that 'racism and racist practices dominate the experiences of Black and minority ethnic students'. As in America, this explains the attainment gap that currently exists in UK universities, with Advance HE (©2019) reporting a gap of 15.6% in 2015/16 between white and BME students, which can be broken further down into: 6.6% for Chinese students, 8.1% for Indian students, 17% for Pakistani students and 28.3% for Black students. As the Oxford University faction of the #RhodesMustFall campaign indicates, architectural objects play a crucial part in perpetuating this problem. I briefly mentioned in the thesis introduction how, in 2016, a group of Oxford students protested the presence of a Cecil Rhodes statue at Oriel College, recognising the significance of such 'violent iconography' which, they argued, 'maintain(ed) a toxic culture of domination and oppression' that 'continues to colonise the minds of future leaders' (RMFO 2018, p.11). Like students at the University of Cape Town, the Oxford RMF group highlighted how the Rhodes statue was just one of a number of physical objects that gave shape to the racist higher education institution and impeded upon the lives of Black students residing there. In a public petition, the students noted how 'the university is strewn with visible symbols of its colonial inheritance', meaning that 'those whose histories…have been marked by imperialism, are shadowed by statues of their oppressors as they walk through the University and find their history held within the archive of oppression' (RMFO 2018, p.11). Unfortunately, unlike their counterparts in South Africa and the US, the Oxford contingent were ultimately unsuccessful in their attempts to have the statue removed, as several donors (allegedly) threatened to pull funding from the college if it complied.

Despite the reluctance of institutions to properly reckon with the colonial legacy and current reality of racism in British universities, there are clear signs of resistance from those inside and outside of the academy; with Black activists, writers, artists and cultural commentators taking up a central role in the gathering movement. As well as best-selling critical commentaries on race, class and education (as seen with Akala and Reni Eddo-Lodge), there is award-winning fiction from Zadie Smith (*Swing Time*) and Bernardine Evaristo (*Black, Girl, Other*), and popular podcasts by Over the Bridge and George The Poet. The presence of George The Poet and Akala in the list above also points to the ever-

growing influence of UK Hip Hop and Grime on British education generally and higher education specifically. This is epitomised by none more than Stormzy; a pioneering Black British artist who, as well as consistently calling out social and political injustices online and through live performances, has launched his own publishing imprint, Merky Books, and set up a scholarship that pays the tuition fees and living costs for two Black students attending Cambridge University per year. As Stormzy himself often attests, all of these successes are the result of a number of people coming together and exchanging ideas with care, warmth and love.

Attending to this cypher, this new wave of critical, creative and compassionate activity, as well as the systems of oppression it attempts to redress, is essential work. For non-Black academics of colour like myself, this means curating opportunities for the burgeoning cypher to further expand, examining the function of whiteliness and antiblackness within our own borders, and ceaselessly reflecting on our own complicity in how they operate. The decision of whether to conduct this work within the walls of the university is ultimately down to the individual. For me personally, I think perhaps not. I'm going home.

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Filmography

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