# Picturing Whiteness in the National Collection of British Art, 1897 - 2024

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# Abstract

This thesis draws from established methodologies locating whiteness within visual arts contexts, to inform how whiteness surfaces at Tate, as the National Collection of British Art. Together, the three main chapters, ‘Portrait’, ‘Landscape’ and ‘Institutional Whiteness’, focus on artworks within Tate’s collection, and on staff perceptions of whiteness and the gallery’s institutional practices and working environment. The thesis finds that whiteness is shaped by a combination of economic, political, social and epistemological factors: Tate’s reliance on its funding sources and public remit; institutionally embedded investment into canonical aesthetic conventions, and staff participation in unconscious affective norms that reinforce racialised difference. As such, existing theories of whiteness, which tend to centre on artworks without regard to their contexts, cannot fully explain the nature of its presence at Tate. The thesis argues accordingly that Tate’s efforts to understand whiteness as a matter of representation within artworks can overlook how canonical aesthetic preferences intersect both with epistemologies of racialisation and racially unequal distribution of economic and normative social capital. The chapters ‘Portrait’ and ‘Landscape’ offer visual analyses of whiteness in relation to two artworks, positioning collectors’ whitened racial status and wealth, and projections of racialised desire onto the artworks as both formative and unacknowledged in their continuing canonical status within the gallery. ‘Institutional Whiteness’, the final case study, explores the broader discourses relating to whiteness at Tate, which provide a methodologically necessary contemporary context to ‘Portrait’ and ‘Landscape’. Ultimately, this thesis finds that it is through consistent dismissal or misrecognition of the concept that whiteness gains its continuing power. This thesis strives to contribute to knowledge both empirically, through locating contemporary expressions of whiteness at Tate, and methodologically, through combining visual and contextual analysis in order to identify the strengths and gaps of existing theories for this specific context.

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# Introduction

This thesis is about perception, and its relationship to the imaging and imagining of racial difference. It is about the logics that not only justify the existence of race, but which even ostensibly *know* race, and the evaluative characteristics associated with it, to be a truth. It is about the tensions between conscious and unconscious thought and the ways in which individuals' unconscious understandings of race proliferate into a structural formation. Although this thesis attends closely to the reasons for which differences in lived experiences of race exist, it is nevertheless not foremost about individuals' lived experience, either of those who are imagined as racial others, or of those who do the imagining. It is, instead, about this very imagination itself, and the structural parallels of its shared existence between people. This phenomenon of attributing racialising evaluative criteria to what is perceived is, as this thesis explores, whiteness as an epistemological worldview. The shared existences of these individual worldviews, meanwhile, constitute the structural formation of whiteness itself.

Whiteness is said to exist in plain sight, yet often remains undetected by those who enact it. In epistemological terms, it represents a limit of knowing and simultaneously a claim to universal knowledge. Its existence is at once denied and unfelt by some, yet inescapably and viscerally experienced for others. It is projected onto people and artworks as a way of making sense of visible difference. Efforts to acknowledge its presence are fraught: for some, the dismantling of whiteness is crucial for social equity; for others, it is the very suggestion of its existence that creates social division. As such, whiteness as a topic is contested: not only are its definitions disagreed on, but even the legitimacy of searching for it in the first place. This thesis holds that whiteness exists; that it is a potent force which structures the lived experiences of everybody, regardless of skin colour, though skin colour plays a determining role on the different ways in which people look and imagine, and are seen and imagined. The very ability of the word 'whiteness' to strike the divisive chord it does is a symptom of its deep

psychological rootedness: although often unconsciously-held and thus obscured to some, it is powerful.

This thesis draws in name and motivation from Paul Gilroy's display *Picturing Blackness in British Art, 1700s – 1990s* at Tate Britain (1995-6), and looks to distinguish the characteristics of whiteness specifically in the context of Tate, in its capacities as custodian and mediator of 'the National Collection of British Art' (Tate 2024a). As did Gilroy's project, this thesis seeks to determine how the perception and imag(in)ing of race relate to experiences of artworks, and in turn how these experiences relate to the broader contexts of racial understanding in the United Kingdom. However, differing to *Picturing Blackness*, the thesis focuses on the ways in which race is understood from positions of racial normativity, in order to construct a picture of what racial normativity means. Accordingly, this thesis takes an expansive view of the word 'in' in 'raced representation *in* the national collection of British art.' 'In' refers to the artworks of the collection, but it also refers to the constitution of the institution itself, and its practices of collecting artworks. 'In' signifies the institution where Tate's staff are selected, hired, and paid differential amounts to interact with each other as a place of work. 'In' also refers to the acts of sight, perception, understanding and imagining that occur in relation to Tate's collection, because as this thesis hopes to evidence, racialised meaning is imposed onto artworks and remains sticky at least until it is actively unstuck, and maybe even continues to persist after that. The methodological importance of such an interpretation of 'in' is suggested through the observations of Emily Pringle, formerly Director of Research at Tate, who writes,

> …I was bemused as to why, for example, research on items in the collection appeared to be without controversy, sanctioned as a vital responsibility of curators and academics, recognised by universities and rewarded by academic funders as a core epistemological activity within the organisation, whilst the extensive curatorial research that took place prior to any temporary exhibition or acquisition seemed not to warrant such approbation. (Pringle 2019:xi)

In light of these words, and as this thesis will discuss throughout, all kinds of 'in' in the project's title are relevant in locating whiteness. As 'Picturing Whiteness' attends not only to the artworks within Tate's collection but to the very workings of the institution itself, the stated timeframe of the thesis title refers explicitly to the

period between Tate's founding in 1897 and the year in which data collection for this project came to completion, in 2024. The thesis nevertheless explores in detail two artworks within Tate's collection which pre-date the gallery's founding, and so the time period under investigation, as in Gilroy's project, should be treated by the reader as extending as far back as the 1700s in these instances.

Writing in his autobiography, cultural theorist Stuart Hall notes the primacy of sight in the British Post-Windrush context as one such mechanism by which race is perceived, validated, and projected onto bodies:

> The field of vision shifted. [...] New modes of looking emerged—had done from the time we boarded the boat out. They did so day by day in our new lives: in the street, at work and in the neighbourhood. And they entered the feelings we took home with us at night to our rooms, free from the immediate gaze which—intentionally or not—worked to position us as outside the shared habitus of England (Hall 2017:175).

Here, sight, a racial imaginary, and claims to citizenship intersect in the holder of the gaze to delineate between looker and looked at; between white and not white, and between British and not British. In a different text which refers to a time three decades after this Post-Windrush context, Hall writes again, '...this Englishness is black': that Black Britishness needed to be claimed still meant that there remained, at the time of Hall's writing in the 1980s, a need to reckon with broader forces that suggested otherwise (2019a:80). The same, this thesis finds, is true but in different ways today. Whiteness is not only about the imposition of racialising sight onto bodies, but also about how such categorisation has been, and continues to be, rendered culturally normative, even by many seemingly *known*, through a collective understanding of perception–primarily sight–as axiomatic.

This thesis strives to provide an empirically informed study of how these ostensibly axiomatic racialising forms of perception, namely sight, are produced in relation to artworks at Tate, and the ways in which these projections imposed onto artworks both stick to them, and account for the ascriptions of aesthetic and national value associated with them. Accordingly, the sections 'Tate As Context' and 'Tate In Context' explore the dominant discourses that contextualise Tate's

broader position and responsibilities, and as such provide a necessary backdrop for determining how Tate relates to whiteness as a broader social structure. The thesis also strives to offer a methodological exploration of *how* whiteness might be searched for. Ultimately, this thesis finds that there exist factors in part external to Tate, such as its reliance on outside funding and influence by public perceptions of race, that affect how whiteness surfaces as a form of meaning within its institution and collections. Existing methodologies concerning whiteness in visual cultures, while certainly not lacking, have not been designed for such a purpose: in their tendency towards being artwork- rather than context- focused, they cannot sufficiently explain how artworks' meanings are determined by the specific political, economic and social paradigms in which they are situated. These empirical and methodological offerings together form the contributions to knowledge that this thesis offers. It is hoped that the findings will be applicable to other institutional contexts in the United Kingdom.

The methodological thrust of this thesis, thus, concerns itself with establishing how the political, economic, social and epistemological dimensions interrelate and take root at Tate, and influence meaning within the artworks that comprise its collection, via key viewers of the artwork historically. In this vein, core to this thesis from the start is a taking heed of Hall's caution that 'One must start [...] from the concrete historical "work" which racism accomplishes under specific historical conditions—as a set of economic, political, and ideological practices, of a distinctive kind, concretely articulated with other practices in a social formation' (Hall 2019a:213). Empirically, the thesis seeks to contribute the findings of its research methodologies in the form of an analysis of how these differing dimensions intersect. This research straddles a liminal space that can be understood in both literal and conceptual terms: as an Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Collaborative Doctoral Project (CDP) between University of the Arts London (UAL) and Tate, it is informed by scholarly methods that stem from the academy and the museum. As a project which concerns viewers' encounters with artworks and Tate's mediation of these encounters, but also whiteness as a structural phenomenon, it attempts a difficult task of

connecting empirically sourced micro instances of racially dominant behaviours with macro theoretical constructs of power distribution.

This liminality, too, has been subject to insightful cautions in both its literal and conceptual expressions, with both of which this thesis strives to adhere. In the first, more literal instance, this thesis tries to operate within the parameters of what Dewdney, Dibosa and Walsh call the 'post-critical', whose position is 'intended not to find the museum wanting from the remote position of analytical critique, but on the contrary, to develop a position which brings together academics, museum professionals and others in productive ways' (2013:2). In other words, this thesis aims to present empirical and situated research in collaboration with Tate, rather than imposing upon it a distanced and sweeping, and therefore potentially unhelpful 'theoretical critique' (2013:15). In the conceptual terms of Historical Materialism outlined by Hall, 'the analysis of political and ideological structure must be grounded in their material conditions of existence; and [...] the specific forms of these relations cannot be deduced, a priori, from this level but must be made historically specific…' (2019a:193). As such, and as is necessary in addressing a topic whose expressions operate on the micro and macro scale alike, this thesis seeks to bring together the theoretical with the specific in a way that generatively acknowledges the multifaceted and complex nature of whiteness in the given context of Tate, at this specific point in time.

While the study of whiteness in the context of visual studies has been growing in momentum over recent decades, the tensions inherent in its claims to disciplinary orthodoxy have remained a consistent feature. In 2001, art historian John P. Bowles wrote about 'an increasing number of artists and art historians […] taking up the issue of whiteness' (2001:39), a sentiment echoed by artist and educator Danny Giles in 2020: '...the growing awareness of Whiteness Studies in academia [presents] especially compelling implications for the fields of art and visual studies which a growing cadre of artists and academics are beginning to consider' (2020). Two decades apart, a sense that Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) is a developing practice in the visual field appears to stand firm, a characteristic elucidated by visual culture theorist Nicholas Mirzoeff, who notes in

response to the 2017 murder of the counterprotestor Heather Heyer at a white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, that 'it became horrifyingly clear that as well as this scholarship had been done, there was now more to do' (2023:x). That the efficacy of reading whiteness within visual culture and its associated disciplines is contingent on the variable and rapidly shifting broader social contexts in which they operate goes some way to explain the consistently heterodox status of CWS. However, Mirzoeff's realisation that 'whiteness [is] deeply connected to everything that visual culture might be' (ibid.) suggests, too, that there is something inherent within the very discipline that renders whiteness difficult to locate, at least for some.

That visual studies methodologies may conceal and perpetuate the very racialising sights and desires they seek to reveal is a point attended to by art historian and whiteness theorist Martin Berger, who writes,

> It should come as no surprise that a culture blind to whiteness developed similarly oblivious art historical methods. All methods are fashioned from distinct perspectives and priorities, each with an internal logic. Such logic ensures that methods have built-in blind spots, at times because various issues are deemed extraneous to the central inquiry, but also because they may not even register as issues: empiricist approaches tend to miss the cultural relativism of truths (2005:14).

As such, the project of locating whiteness under the disciplinary umbrella of visual studies can be seen as an enterprise not only in surfacing empirically the various modalities of whiteness within specific contexts (in this case Tate) and how they relate to broader patterns (in this case the political, economic and social conditions that form the contemporary context in which Tate is situated), but also an acknowledgment that the very disciplinary practices themselves may constitute what Audre Lorde referred to as 'the master's tools'[1] (2018). In this sense, the claims of CWS to empiricism in being applied to visual culture disciplines must necessarily go hand-in-hand with disciplinary self-reflection. It is for this reason that this thesis strives to make a contribution that is self-reflective in its methodological

[1] Lorde argued that it is impossible to address systemic oppression using the racist, sexist and homophobic logics which derive from those same systems.

and empirical claims: ‘Picturing Whiteness’ finds, in line with Berger’s observations, that claims to empiricism often come at the cost of subjectivity, and that this is a core essence of epistemological whiteness more generally.

It is important to acknowledge the specific nature of Tate’s multiple contexts and functions in order to determine why visual studies methodologies searching for whiteness may not be sufficient. This thesis makes the case that whiteness arises chiefly through the transmission of this racialised, axiomatic sight between individuals that is not acknowledged as subjective. This is the very idea that will be unpacked and evidenced throughout the thesis, but for now, this means, crudely, that when one individual either claims or is perceived to have authority in legitimising knowledge, but any racialising epistemologies they might have relied upon in order to assert these claims are not detected, the (whitened) racial subjectivities that underpin their claims to knowledge proliferate. In other words, in the context of Tate, the hypothesis is that whiteness–defined as a necessarily structural entity–can be said to be present when racist ideas, even those held unconsciously, are not detected in their transmission between individuals, and as such become even more broadly disseminated and undetected as an epistemological norm. This thesis strives to test this theory. The methodologies employed here are, I believe, both novel and effective, and founded in empirical evidence. With this hypothesis in mind, the thesis strives to focus attention on some of the different points at which knowledge relating to Tate and its collections is (or has been) transferred between individuals, and between individuals and artworks. It tries to evaluate at each point whether these transfers of knowledge are influenced by epistemologies of whiteness. The thesis also attempts to provide insight into the extent to which epistemologies of whiteness, past and present, influence Tate’s core aims respectively of collecting and displaying *art*, of collecting and displaying an art that is presented frequently to audiences as being *British*, and of having the capacity to influence visitors’ ‘understanding’ and ‘enjoyment’ of this British art (Tate 2024b). If it is true that undetected racist ideas have, in their not being perceived, been taken for granted as normal, then this has significant implications on Tate’s claims to mediating ‘understanding’ and ‘enjoyment’ respectively.

Knowledge is claimed and transferred between individuals, and between individuals and artworks, in numerous ways at Tate. Each of these points of claiming and transfer are potential focuses of study, as they all carry the possibility for racialised sight to be claimed and more broadly understood by others as axiomatic, despite the hidden potential for (whitened) racial subjectivities. The multiple functions of the gallery are succinctly described by art historian and museologist Anjalie Dalal-Clayton, who speaks of the variable instances in which what she calls 'mediation of knowledge' occurs. As Dalal-Clayton explains, all of these sites of mediation have the potential to reveal much about how power intersects with knowledge claims:

> …the process of display (as the result of complex decision making processes and factors, including museum objectives, collecting policies, classification methods, display styles, object groupings and textual frameworks) remains highly significant, not only in the communication of knowledge (as not every visitor will take advantage of these accompanying programmes), but also in the mediation of knowledge (2015:8).

While, as Dalal-Clayton outlines, there are many different ways in which Tate mediates knowledge, this thesis claims an approach that situates it, at least primarily, within art history as a discipline. As such, it is, in a very broad sense, object focused: the sections 'Portrait' and 'Landscape' each attend to one artwork within Tate's collection. However, the thesis also makes the case that traditional art historical methodologies based on visual, technical or stylistic analysis are not fully sufficient in themselves as a means for understanding the inequalities and reproductions of power distribution, which are necessary angles that an investigation of whiteness needs to take. As such, despite the thesis claiming its situation in art history, the section 'Institutional Whiteness' does not focus on artworks. The introduction and 'Exploring Whiteness', the latter of which functions as a literature review of relevant texts addressing whiteness, in particular, discuss the primary importance and influence of broader discourse upon whiteness in both visual cultures and in specific contexts. Consequently, this more institutionally-focused case study provides what will be evidenced as a necessary

contextualisation of the broader discourses that surround and inform Tate's artwork collections practices.[2]

Such marked attention to this expanded view of context that this thesis promises is necessary for multiple reasons. To start with, whiteness is defined as a structural concept. This means that individual instances of racialised thinking, while certainly necessary to locate, can from the outset be considered methodologically insufficient as attention to them alone cannot explain the broader existence, persistence and sharedness of racialising thought. To understand how whiteness occurs as a structure, thus, it is necessary to understand the various ways in which its logics are upheld. This thesis tries to do this by locating commonalities between these individual and collectively-held expressions of whiteness as an epistemological standpoint. The limitations of what might be understood as predominantly visually focused methodological searches for whiteness have already been acknowledged by scholars, whose respective approaches and insights will be discussed in 'Exploring Whiteness'. These already-noted methodological limitations can be framed as the question that 'Exploring Whiteness' discusses: 'Is whiteness a matter of representation?' Ultimately, this thesis finds that it is not. If whiteness is considered to be a matter of artistic representation and attention is not given to the ways in which its epistemologies proliferate, then the subject in question is not whiteness. However, persistent attempts to confine whiteness to one place or another (such as the representation of race rather than the structural mechanisms that serve to allow these representations to go unnoticed) are endemic throughout Tate and art history alike. Indeed, this thesis finds that this very characteristic of conceptual quarantining constitutes one of the many ways in which whiteness is expressed.

[2] Another valid avenue of inquiry, notably, could have been to explore what might be implied in the instances during which Tate has staged 'Black displays' and 'Black' themed exhibitions, particularly in its aspirations towards an increasingly diversified audience terms of audience development. I recognise in particular in this regard the importance of key exhibitions at Tate such as *Migrations: Journeys into British Art* (2012) and *Artist and Empire* (2015-6) which could be said to have simultaneously acted as mechanisms by which whiteness was made manifest within Tate, and also as means by which Tate attempted to disrupt public perceptions of it as a white institution. Despite the importance of these exhibitions, due to the wealth of existing scholarship on these aspects of the exhibitions, I have opted to focus on instances where whiteness has not been previously observed.

In making a case that whiteness is as much about the visual representations of race as it is about the ways in which these representations are collectively justified, the thesis attends closely to the role of economic and social capital distribution. This methodological approach, while outlined in other conceptual arenas–such as feminist art historian Griselda Pollock's consideration of patriarchal canon formation, which is discussed in 'Portrait' – has not been applied in detail to whiteness as its own kind of structural formation, especially within a given arts institutional context. This destabilising of artworks themselves as the primary focuses of art historical attention, too, has its own implications: also discussed in 'Exploring Whiteness' are the mechanisms of artwork meaning production. The conceptual frameworks developed by the whiteness and visual culture theorists Nicholas Mirzoeff and Martin Berger are of primary importance in this regard, and their respective (though not necessarily incompatible) approaches are detailed, too, in 'Exploring Whiteness': together, their own explorations bring up important questions about who creates meaning in artworks. It is necessary to grasp whether artworks' meanings are inherently deducible from the artworks themselves, or whether they are subject to viewers' projecting of ideas onto them. This thesis evidences ultimately that both of these methodological approaches can be said to be accurate, but nevertheless each inevitably provide an incomplete explanation of whiteness in any given institutional context, for which they were not designed. As such, this thesis fills in some of the inevitable methodological gaps, namely through a deliberate foregrounding of economic and social capital accumulation, and the influence of these factors on the production and agreements between individuals of racialised meaning in artworks.

## Methods and Structure

Firstly, a note on language: I have chosen to capitalise first letters referring to the racial category ‘Black’, but not ‘white’. There is a history to the practice of capitalising ‘Black’: in 1898, W. E. B. Du Bois campaigned for the capitalisation of the ‘n’ in ‘Negro’, arguing, ‘I believe that eight million Americans are entitled to a capital letter’ and suggesting that to not capitalise the word would be both belittling and insulting (Grant & Bricker Grant 1975:435). As Eddie Chambers notes, Du Bois’ efforts were echoed by Marcus Garvey in the 1920s, attesting to their ongoing significance (2017:x). That the strategy remains important to this day is indicated by similar calls for widespread capitalisation of the ‘b’ in ‘Black’, with *Associated Press* as an example of one large scale media body being publicly called to follow suit (Lanham 2020). As Chambers puts it, ‘Black with a capital B refers to people of the African Diaspora. Lowercase black is simply a color’ (2017:x). This is the strategy that I have opted to follow throughout the thesis. However, as Chambers and others have suggested, capitalisation is not without its complications: it has the potential to be experienced as an imposition by those it refers to, and to suggest that there exist discrete, definable, and ontologically subaltern qualities that unite them across time and context (ibid.). The aim of this thesis is to attend to the ways and reasons for which, in manners relevant to Tate and its collections, these very perceptions of discrete racial characteristics have been imag(in)ed. It pursues the case that whiteness is an epistemological position that creates such notions of race, which is upheld by unequally allocated resource distribution across racialised lines.

As such, the choice to capitalise ‘Black’ might, justifiably, be seen as being at odds with this central premise of the thesis, given the limitations of such a strategy that Chambers outlines. Given, too, my own white identity, this capitalisation risks both further imposition and a suggestion that racial designations can be spoken about in shorthand. However, the thesis strives to speak in depth about race as a social construction, and consequently, this symbolic linguistic choice, I hope, is justified and unpacked by the arguments that follow. My choice,

then, not to capitalise ‘white’ might also be seen as a paradoxical one, and in some ways it is: ‘white’ as a racial category is also constructed, though largely self-constructed. However, the risk of paradox is, to me, a far lesser concern than the risk of positioning white identity as worthy of elevation. In attempt to navigate this paradox, I have chosen at points to use the term ‘whitened’, as suggested by whiteness scholar Shona Hunter as a means by which the non-fixity of visible markers to racial beliefs can be signposted (2010:454). With regards to capitalisation, I have, however, left all quoted material as it was originally written. However, I have, in places, chosen to redact some overtly racist language in quotations, and to avoid quoting some texts altogether, despite their relevance to the thesis. In these instances, my decisions have been outlined in footnotes.

The title and remit of this research, ‘Raced representation in the National Collection of British Art’ has a dual interpretation of the word ‘in’ as referring equally to the artworks and to the institution that houses them. As such, the thesis draws from methods broadly from art historical and sociological disciplinary practices, presenting data in three case studies that assess how whiteness might be understood to manifest in both. The thesis begins with ‘Tate As Context’, a section which discusses how Tate’s publicly-stated aims and intentions have the potential to position the institution as having, in its audience’s eyes, if not necessarily in the eyes of its own staff, the appearance of authority in producing and legitimising knowledge. While the section ‘Institutional Whiteness’ finds that staff do not necessarily believe that authority can be claimed, Tate’s vision and mission statements, as explored, nevertheless suggest some degree of influence. This appearance is significant in terms of mediating visitors’ understanding of whiteness, and is attended to in detail in ‘Tate As Context’.

‘Tate In Context’ explores the understandings of race, racism and whiteness in broader British discourse. This is discussed in detail as a necessary underpinning for the following methodological exploration of whiteness in arts institutional contexts. As the section ‘Exploring Whiteness and Establishing a Methodology’ examines, there is some tension in existing theoretical approaches to excavating whiteness: while some approaches theorise that artworks carry

racialised meaning which is communicated to the viewer, others prioritise a model whereby racialised meaning is projected by the viewer onto artworks. It is in order to underpin the latter model that the section 'Tate In Context' focuses on this broader political discourse, as it is this discourse that provides the context for Tate visitors' understanding of race. Particularly relevant as one such framing for visitors, and therefore of significance to this thesis, is a consistent, politically-endorsed understanding of racial inequalities as separately quantifiable to class-based inequality. This, as the thesis goes on to argue, is a key reason for which whiteness is misunderstood as a topic. This section, therefore, provides a crucial context for the later analysis pertaining to the relationship between whitened racial positioning and canon formation, which, as the sections 'Portrait' and 'Landscape' argue in particular, is facilitated by whitened people's historic and ongoing disproportionate access to economic capital and social opportunities.

Next follows the section 'Exploring Whiteness and Establishing a Methodology', which positions this research within existing methodological explorations of whiteness in visual arts contexts. This section focuses in particular on the methodological reasonings offered by scholars Nicholas Mirzoeff, Martin Berger, Maurice Berger and Richard Dyer. Explored together, these scholars' approaches have relatively distinct emphases regarding the extent to which whiteness can be understood to be a matter of representation visually discernible from artworks or not. Furthermore, the theories of Mirzoeff and Martin Berger offer contrasting but not incompatible models of excavating whiteness with contrasting emphases on the directionality of racialised sight. These theories and their methodological implications on the subsequent analytical chapters of this thesis are discussed in detail in this section. The debate between whether or not whiteness is a matter of representation has parallels with broader, and at least ostensibly unrelated debates within art history on the extent to which formalist and contextualist methodologies can determine artworks' meaning. As 'Institutional Whiteness' finds in particular, this question, phrased as an ostensible binary between Tate visitors' 'enjoyment' and 'understanding', arises frequently, and is furthermore echoed by Tate's own mission and vision statements. As such, the methodological implications of contextualist and formalist approaches are also

discussed in this section. Next in ‘Exploring Whiteness and Establishing a Methodology’ follows an attention to Critical Whiteness theorists’ discussions of race respectively as ontological and epistemological constructs as a means of establishing a definition of whiteness that is pursued throughout the subsequent chapters. In conclusion, this section explores the role of capital accumulation in upholding canonised perceptions of British aesthetic and national value. As this thesis argues, there is a widespread absence of recognition regarding the ways in which wealth and dominant racial positioning intersect in art historical disciplinary practice. This is one of the gaps that this thesis strives to begin to fill.

The following section, ‘White Skin Objective Masks’, attends to my own racial positioning as a white researcher undertaking this project. Through this foregrounding of my own positionality, I hope to signify that I consider myself to be as much implicated in the very logics of whiteness as those I point towards in the thesis as a whole. This also provides, therefore, a necessary foregrounding for the analysis sections that follow, which comprise the main body of the thesis and which are split into two sections, ‘Visual’ and ‘Institutional’. These chapters present documentation, information, data and evidence in order to understand what whiteness means in the context of Tate, and how it arises within the institution. ‘Visual’ focuses on two specific artworks in Tate’s collection, and in doing so is divided into two further sections titled ‘Portrait’ and ‘Landscape’. ‘Portrait’ centres on Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s painting, ‘The Beloved’ (1865-6), and explores how whiteness can be located in an artwork in which the portrayals of the human form are overt. ‘Landscape’, conversely, takes as its departure point Richard Wilson’s ‘Llyn-y-Cau’ (c. 1765-7), and seeks to understand how whiteness might be said to arise in an artwork whose subject matter is not so immediately recognisable as human.

For both of these case studies, an understanding of the artists’ intentions relating to identity and power comprised a methodical starting point. In order to determine how Rossetti in ‘Portrait’, and Wilson in ‘Landscape’, might have configured racial difference in their artworks, I looked first to existing primary sources relating to their lives, and in the case of Rossetti, the lives of his immediate

Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood contemporaries. For ‘Portrait’, the primary biographical information available is extensive: I looked first to Rossetti’s diaries to find evidence of his epistemological positioning, based on his own reports pertaining to the themes of race, gender and class that might belie either his self-perceptions, or perceptions of others he encountered. I also looked for all the primary documentation I could find relating specifically to ‘The Beloved’, to other artworks and poems made by Rossetti representing people of colour, and to the artist’s financial transactions with his clients. This initial analysis of Rossetti’s diaries and correspondences allowed for a reconstruction of how he might have unconsciously understood his own racial positioning, which remained unacknowledged throughout his writings. From this could also be ascertained the extent to which his artistic output was mediated by his clients’ own expectations. Next, I looked for secondary data pertaining to how Rossetti and his artworks, specifically ‘The Beloved’, have been received by others. There are a number of important sources in this regard, such as excerpts from the Pre-Raphaelite magazine, *The Germ*, and the arts reviews in *The Athenaeum*, in both of which Rossetti was frequently mentioned by his peers. These are all available at the British Library.

‘Landscape’ took a similar starting approach in its initial broad sweep of primary documentation relating to the artist, in this case Richard Wilson. Here, the online Catalogue Raisonée compiled by Paul Spencer-Longhurst for the Paul Mellon Centre was indispensable. From this online resource, I was able to track the ownership histories of each of the three known versions of the painting in question. While there exists by comparison to Rossetti very little primary data concerning Wilson’s biography, the writings of his student Joseph Farington constituted key sources. As Wilson’s understandings of race and identity cannot be determined from primary sources, ‘Landscape’ took an approach that read formal readings of the painting against the primary sources of aesthetic treatises of his time, to understand the extent to which he complied with them. To facilitate these understandings, I also conducted an in-person interview with the art historian and Richard Wilson scholar David Solkin, regarding his ownership of one of the other versions of the painting on display at Tate. Similarly to ‘Portrait’, I then consulted

secondary sources, particularly those which contextualised ‘Llyn-y-Cau’ and spoke about Richard Wilson as a figure. This too required extensive newspaper searches at the British Library.

As ‘Exploring Whiteness and Establishing a Methodology’ will go on to suggest, an understanding of artists’ intention is not sufficient in locating whiteness due to its primarily unconscious enactment and structural nature. As such, what was important to gauge, next, were the reasons for which these artworks gained their canonical quality. Accordingly, from these earlier searches for primary and secondary sources, I was able to find information regarding key admirers of ‘The Beloved’ and ‘Llyn-y-Cau’ respectively. From Rossetti’s correspondences I learnt about George Rae’s role in the shaping of meaning and the provision of funds facilitating the artist’s work on ‘The Beloved.’ Given the premise established in ‘Exploring Whiteness’, that in terms of whiteness, artworks’ meanings are potentially co-created by all those who project racialised meaning onto them, Rae’s understandings of race and identity were therefore highly significant. Consequently, I researched his own diaries, correspondences and biographical information, all of which are held (in consideration that he was chairman of the North and South Wales Bank) in the HSBC archive in Canning Town, London. While for ‘Landscape’ I was not able to find out who the initial buyers of the painting versions were, I did nevertheless determine from Tate’s website that the version on display there had been gifted to Tate by the collector Edward Marsh. There is extensive information to be found on Marsh in his capacities as collector, artists’ benefactor and civil servant, which can be found in the National Gallery archives and the Cadbury Research Library in Birmingham University. Marsh’s personal correspondences with friends were significant in determining his views regarding British identity, people of colour and aesthetic preference. His autobiography, available in the British Library, was also instructive in this regard. For both case studies, I consulted Tate’s curatorial and acquisition files in Tate archives, in order to understand its institutional treatment of the respective works over the duration of its custodianship of them.

‘Institutional Whiteness’ seeks to explore whiteness according to the second kind of ‘in’ that the thesis title ‘*in* the National Collection of British Art’ suggests: it

looks to see how whiteness surfaces in Tate as an institution. This is both an important dimension of the thesis in its own right, and can also be seen as providing a necessary broader context to the studies of the artworks themselves. While 'Portrait' and 'Landscape' consider artworks and their object biographies as relatively discrete conceptual entities in their own right, 'Institutional Whiteness' investigates the contemporary relevance of Tate as an institution in the experience of viewing artworks, and questions the extent to which whiteness in its methodological application to Tate's collection can be considered solely an issue of representation in its collections. This section argues that Tate's institutional characteristics make for a context of art viewership that is bound in hidden relationships of power, perceived social obligation and capital, and that these qualities of whiteness function institutionally beyond the artworks, as well as through Tate's mediation of them.

The methods of this section took a number of different iterations before arriving at success in terms of data collection and the final approach was influenced among other factors by the arrival in London of the Covid-19 pandemic five months after I started the research, and, in some cases by what I understood to be a certain amount of institutional resistance to the topic. In the instance of my initial intention to focus on the exhibition *British Baroque: Power and Illusion* (2020), these resistances are presented as data in 'Institutional Whiteness.' I found that my access to Tate was at some points highly mediated, a point in itself suggestive as to the stakes of surfacing whiteness. Initially, I had intended to hold a number of in-person focus groups to explore different viewers' responses to the paintings 'The Beloved' and 'Llyn-y-Cau', but the pandemic quickly made in-person meetings impossible. As such, my data acquisition had to be carried out online for the whole duration. As an initial change of approach, I constructed an online questionnaire which was distributed internally with Tate staff members, through which I had hoped to gain qualitative data on the experiences and perceptions of whiteness from a representative sample across the organisation. However, the questionnaire was not widely responded to, and another change of approach was required.

I then decided to hold semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of members of staff. I wanted to hold interviews with members of staff from every department, but given the in-person limitations presented by the pandemic I was not able to reach those staff members without a Tate email address. As such, while the research does aim to represent a spread of seniority within the organisation, it is not entirely successful in its overall reach. I chose people across a selection of departments, mostly people who I knew from my time becoming embedded within Tate to be involved with or sympathetic to anti-racist activity at Tate. In some instances, I chose people from departments without knowing their stance on anti-racism, in order to get a spread of answers from different hierarchical positions within the organisation. Due perhaps to the nature of the topic, some people I contacted did not want to take part. In some cases, the people I interviewed recommended other people who would be willing to be interviewed. The institutional ethical procedures on the part of University of the Arts London and Tate alike required that all of my questions were approved in advance, and although the participants did not see the questions before the interview, they did already know that this would be a questionnaire about whiteness. In this sense, the respondents were not taken by surprise, and as such this may well have affected their responses. Fourteen members of staff were interviewed: a breakdown of their departmental affiliations can be found in the thesis appendix, as can the interview questions and their rationale. As such, this is a limited, qualitative data set, but one which nevertheless suggests themes and patterns in thinking that are shared beyond the immediate cohort.

Taking for now as a given that there is much potentially at stake in excavating whiteness, there was a particular need to exclude any information that could allow the reader of this thesis to identify the interview participants. As such, a conflict in ethics exists between transparency and anonymity. Including the interviews in full as an appendix to this thesis is not possible: in every case, even without their names being included, the continuities between answers would allow participants' identities to be traceable. Participants' personal identifiers of key importance within 'Institutional Whiteness' are variable: at times, their racial identity is of relevance when presenting and analysing their answers. At other times, it may

be their gender, their hierarchical position within Tate, or the department within which they work that elucidate their response. I have also decided where I consider necessary to choose between naming participants' racial identity, gender identity and position within Tate, rather than disclosing all at the same time. Given that there are far more white people in positions of seniority at the time of writing, I have in some instances named people as being white and in a particular position within Tate, because this does not compromise their anonymity. This approach has its own ethical pitfalls: it is not a given that people hold particular beliefs because of their identities, racialised or other. As such, while such an approach has the potential to reduce participants to single aspects of their multifaceted identities, I have tried, too, to address this sensitively. The understanding that whiteness is unconsciously enacted, as explored in 'Exploring Whiteness', poses further ethical problems in this research. Firstly, there exists a strong possibility that I unknowingly participate in the logics and affects associated with whiteness; secondly, that in seeking to understand what is unconsciously implied through the responses of the participants I could either undermine or misinterpret them. The analysis does not seek to discredit the participants: I do not wish to reduce any of them as individuals to the discussed instances in which the behaviours associated with whiteness surface in our conversations, but rather to point to the ways in which these emotions enter into the narratives in discrete instances. In an attempt to mitigate against my own unconscious bias, I invited participants to ask me questions at the end of each interview.

## Tate As Context

Tate positions itself as ‘a leading global institution’ with the ability to ‘influence critical thinking about art practice’: consequently, its significance as a context where whiteness might surface is considerable (Tate 2024c:3). The gallery acts as custodian and mediator of ‘the national collection of British art’: as such, its public identity stakes a claim in defining domestically and globally a vision both of what is British and what is art (Tate 2024a). Taking (for now) for granted Tate’s ability to take a global lead in influencing critical thinking about art, its choices concerning the acquisition, display and maintenance of its collections may have worldwide significance in terms of maintaining or challenging the public’s perceptions towards the legitimacy of racially disparate claims to British identity. Tate’s core purpose, indeed, centres around viewers’ experiences of its collections: an experience that occurs primarily, though not exclusively, through sight. This thesis concerns thus not only the relationship between the sight and perceptions of race of viewers of artworks, but also Tate’s capacity, influence and role in mediating viewers’ experiences.

Whilst in its vision statement Tate emphasises its ability to ‘influence’ thinking, this thesis finds that whiteness is enacted unconsciously–sometimes even unintentionally–and consequently that the production of meaning in artworks, including whiteness as one such kind of meaning, is subject to influences that extend far beyond the gallery’s ability to consciously mediate them. In other words, whiteness in relation both to the artworks and to the institution is enacted sometimes as a result of conscious mediation but unconsciously racialising behaviours on the part of Tate staff, or conversely may stem from factors largely external to the gallery and therefore outside of Tate’s capacity to influence at all. Tate states that its mission is ‘to increase the public’s enjoyment and understanding of British art from the 16th century to the present day and of international modern and contemporary art’ (Tate 2024b). In searching for whiteness at Tate, this research finds that a number of words from this mission constitute significant indices that will be attended to throughout: in its promoting of

‘art’, there are thereby choices made about what is not art. Likewise, in its focus on ‘British’ art, evaluations have to be made, at least by implication, about what is and what is not British. An examination of the curatorial strategies regarding the treatment of Britishness as a topical concern is not the focus of this thesis. Instead, what is significant is that Tate’s aims as they are publicly stated have the potential to be seen by viewers as authoritative.

Both of these words, ‘enjoyment’ and ‘understanding’, are important to grapple with in order to understand the institution’s epistemological positioning, or at least its communication of an epistemological position to the public. The thesis will explore the pressures exerted upon Tate which mean that there is a distinction between these. The institution’s determination of what is and what is not art stems from a lineage of aesthetic inquiry and art historical premises in which hierarchies of taste and claims to connoisseurship have systematically excluded the contributions of people of colour. The staying power of these lineages is reflected in Tate’s statement through the words ‘enjoyment’ and ‘understanding’, whose meaning, as the thesis will explore throughout, are sometimes disparate and charged. As a simplification, for now, ‘enjoyment’ suggests that artworks can be read at face value, while ‘understanding’ suggests that their context is important in determining their meaning. As this thesis concerns how perception and understanding relate, the extent to which perception, both of bodies and of artworks, is positioned and understood to be axiomatic is significant. These words represent epistemological differences despite their neutral appearance. When it comes to whiteness, however, seemingly neutral appearances are often deceptive, especially when the challenging of their premises provokes strong reactions in viewers. This is true for these words, as will be explored in relation to public reactions to Tate’s curatorial strategies.

So too, Tate’s claims to representing a definable British identity, even in the ‘transnational’ and ‘transcultural’ terms of its vision aims, which states its attention to ‘Britain in relation to the world from the sixteenth century to the present’, (Tate 2024c) must be located within a context in which Hall’s declarations of a legitimate Black Englishness had to be asserted rather than assumed. While Tate makes

significant and conscious efforts to subvert the norms in which it is located, the unconscious dimensions of whiteness nevertheless influence its institutional practices. So too, Tate's various responsibilities to its viewers combined with viewers' disparate understandings of race and racism mean that the meanings produced within artworks are often too unruly for Tate to mediate. The necessity for studies of racism in the British context to acknowledge the role of nationhood is attended to in detail by cultural theorist Paul Gilroy, whose tellingly titled *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* writes, '...racism and nationalism should not be artificially separated and [has] been densely interwoven in modern British history. Britain's nationalism and racism are still routinely and symptomatically articulated together' (Gilroy 2002:xxiii). Throughout the thesis, whiteness will come to be defined as a function of endemic structural mechanisms that allow racialising imaginaries to become normalised. Given the interlinking of nationalism and racism as Gilroy suggests, whiteness, as such, can be understood as an ingrained, collective understanding that to be British means to be white. At stake, therefore, given Tate's claims to influence, are the broader claims to Britishness that the collection and Tate's mediation of it have the potential to represent to the public.

This research exists in the wake of other projects, *Black Artists and Modernism*,[3] *Tate Encounters*,[4] and *Picturing Blackness*,[5] all of which drew attention, directly and indirectly, and in different ways, to this epistemologically ingrained alignment both of Britishness and claims to aesthetic normativity with white identities in British art history and museological practice. This thesis is indebted to these projects, and seeks to provide a complementary dimension to the surfacing of these epistemologies through an exclusive focus on their sources. A need for this kind of approach was identified, indeed, after public responses to Gilroy's *Picturing Blackness*, from whose name this project derives, drew

[3] 'Black Artists and Modernism' (2015-2018) was a collaborative research project between University of the Arts London and Middlesex University, which foregrounded the contribution of British artists of African and Asian descent to British Modernism.
[4] 'Tate Encounters' (2007-2009), a collaboration between Tate, University of the Arts London and London South Bank University, strove to understand how narratives of Britishness were enacted through the curatorial practices at the Tate Britain site.
[5] 'Picturing Blackness in British Art' (1995-6) was a Tate display curated by Paul Gilroy, which investigated how Blackness is represented within key artworks in its collections.

unfortunate attention to the epistemological assumptions of various white viewers who encountered the display. Couched in the language of aesthetics, these responses demonstrated that the white claims to Britishness and the gulf between sight and racialising imagination identified by Hall was in 1995 still very much alive: some audiences believed that an inappropriate polemic had been forced upon them, one critic calling the display 'A Black Mark for the Tate' (Dewdney et. al. 2012:105; Packer 1996). As such, this PhD was collaboratively devised by Professor Paul Goodwin and Dr Martin Myrone, both of whom were at the time working at Tate. They were later joined by then-Senior Curator Dr Elena Crippa to form this project's supervisory team.

There are many antagonisms, too, within Tate's own self-distinctions, which have a bearing on how whiteness surfaces organisationally, as the thesis will detail: Tate could be understood both as past-oriented in its conservation of existing artworks, and as forward-looking in its search for new ideas. It is a place which states a commitment to anti-racism, and, despite its measures of staff diversity, whose most senior staff are disproportionately white (Tate 2024d, 2024e). The ramifications of this observation will be discussed in more detail throughout the thesis, which finds there is a certain inevitability that whitened people frame their understandings of race according to their own lived experience. Tate's intentions to be 'open, bold, rigorous, and kind' are often heard and stated, but there are people who have experienced the contrary, and there is much at stake in Tate being transparent (Tate 2022a:6-7). It is an organisation that publicly denies its founder's associations with slavery and simultaneously commissions artists who contest this institutional position (Tate 2024f). Artist Hew Locke, whose 2022 installation 'The Procession' did just this, and which took centre place in Tate Britain's Duveen Galleries, said accordingly,

> The line to toe was laid out: that Henry Tate – of Tate & Lyle, whose art collection formed the basis of the first Tate gallery – made his money from sugar cubes, but had nothing to do with slavery, as it was after abolition. Bish bosh, move on, the oracle had spoken, and there was no blame or guilt at the gallery to do with sugar and its problematic history. And I kept thinking, this feels uncomfortable. It was a statement that I had difficulty with (Tate 2022b).

Tate, thus, is not an institution with one single identity or stance. These competing features tend, as will be evidenced throughout, to give rise to institutional policies of containment, whereby the problems associated with racial disparity, as perceived differentially by staff, are quarantined to specific working mechanisms at Tate over others. Quarantining and blame-shifting are important themes made visible through frequent, and (seemingly) paradoxical, staff assertions that ‘whiteness is everywhere’ but ‘whiteness is not here.’

## Tate In Context

As will be detailed in the section ‘Exploring Whiteness’, the sources of racialising beliefs projected onto artworks derive sometimes from contexts entirely dissociated from the artworks themselves, and are projected onto them by those who look at them in different ways and for different reasons. This is a finding that problematises Tate’s unidirectional claims to influence as maybe implied in its vision statement. The ambiguous directionality of influence between public and gallery has been noted by scholars who argue conversely that galleries’ modes of knowing and doing are affected by the broader social contexts in which they are situated (Bennett 1995; Hooper-Greenhill 1992). As the section ‘Institutional Whiteness’ details accordingly, Tate’s freedom in acknowledging and addressing whiteness is shaped considerably by its multi-faceted dependency on the British government for funding, and on the public who vote for them. In other words, when it comes to whiteness, Tate may be as much defined by the context in which it is located as it is able to define it. One of the central methodological claims of this thesis is that whiteness in artworks is created in part through the projection onto them of racialising beliefs, which, as explored in the sections ‘Portrait’ and ‘Landscape’, contribute towards the artworks’ inclusion within Tate’s collections. This is true when these beliefs are, or have over artworks’ object biographies, been held by people whose racial positioning has determined their social and economic privilege and influence. Crucially, it is these privileges, unevenly distributed across society and correlating with racial designation, that allow certain artworks to reach Tate’s collections, and others not.

In crude terms, over the historical period that Tate’s collections represent (1500s to present), people racialised as white have been more likely, nationwide, to have both benefited from unearned wealth and, resultingly, from the elevated social positioning such wealth affords. This greater structural likelihood of access to wealth, opportunities and influence also made it more likely that white people could determine the terms of aesthetic preference inherent in gallery collections practices. This is not to suggest that people have different aesthetic preferences

according to their racial designation. Rather, irrespective of any artworks' aesthetic bent, racially unequal distribution of social and economic privileges has meant that people of colour have been, and continue to be, less likely to influence what is worthy of canonisation. As such, 'likelihood' is a pivotal word here: there are obvious exceptions to this rule, such as Ignatius Sancho, whose legacy as a figure of refinement is well documented (King 1997; Ellis 1996). It is, however, through the parallel occurrences by which whitened individuals have historically determined aesthetic sensibility and British inclusion, two such lineages that are traced in 'Portrait' and 'Landscape', that whiteness can be said to exist as a structural formation. This section concerns the broader context of racial and class-based disparities in the United Kingdom.

That the racialising sight that Hall perceived continues to this day as a politically -determined and -determining force is an assertion made by visual culture theorist Nicholas Mirzoeff:

> In 1978, Conservative leader Thatcher had shared with a TV interviewer her belief that "people are really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture," referring specifically to people from the Commonwealth (the former British colonies). Welcomed by Enoch Powell, these remarks produced an immediate dramatic swing in the opinion polls to the Conservatives, leading to their election victory in 1979 and an eighteen-year term in office. Brexit and the politics of white resentment have been equally successful in generating a continuing twelve-year government since 2010 (2023:192).

Here, 'white resentment' is both formative in the successive elections of governments, and characteristic of white unilateral claims to British citizenship, and Thatcher's fear of 'a different culture', too, indicates a public perception that British history is white, and must be protected. Despite the relatively well-publicised work of historians such as David Olusoga, whose detailed historical account of the presence and contribution of Britons of colour was made into a BBC series, the exclusive sense of entitlement of white Britons to Britishness remains pervasive (Olusoga 2016). So too, as then director Omar Khan of the British thinktank on race equality Runnymede Trust notes, '...ethnic minorities have lived in Britain for millennia, contributing significantly to its economy and culture', a fact that still runs

contrary to collective white understanding (Khan in Runnymede 2020:5). The evidence that British history is multi-ethnic exists: as such, the claims to Britishness that underpin 'white resentment' are rooted in something for which evidence has not yet been sufficient in dislodging.

The perceptions of the UK public regarding the extent to which racism is a current issue defies evidence, a key finding by Runnymede Trust in its 2017 analysis of ethnic inequality in the British labour market. The report found that the British public widely believe racism to be both minor and largely resolved, explaining this phenomenon through a concept of 'frames', which they define as 'mental structures that shape the way we see the world' and 'a sort of mental shorthand – a quick way for us to understand the world based on existing values or preconceptions' (2017a:1,3). This finding corroborates the analyses of the relationship between sight and perception that are the subject of 'Exploring Whiteness', and points towards their relevance within the British context: the extent to which racism is believed to exist results not necessarily from what is seen, but instead from *how* what is seen is understood. Furthermore, *how* it is seen depends on the assumptions that people already hold before the act of sight takes place. This is crucial in terms of locating whiteness in the context of Tate: that lived experience plays a role in determining the extent to which racism is perceived suggests that the visual cues within artworks may also not provide sufficient means by which racism can be detected. Specifically, the correlation between *white* lived experiences of race with this gulf between what is seen and how it is perceived, and its intersection with economic and social privilege is what renders whiteness relevant. Whiteness is not constituted by individual instances of this gulf, but by the broader mechanisms that allow these individual instances to be articulated as ostensible fact. The Runnymede Trust report alludes to the structural nature of these gulfs in understanding: 'prevailing discourse reinforces particular values and beliefs' (2017a:3). Determining what this shared, 'prevailing discourse' is, and how it relates to individuals' derivation of artwork meaning, constitutes a key theme throughout this research.

While Mirzoeff's contextualisation of white resentment might well be pertinent in its linkage between Conservative ascendancy in the 1970s and its contemporary reconfigurations, the national 'prevailing discourse' on race cannot be said to neatly derive from one political party or another. The efforts of successive governments, Conservative and Labour alike, in introducing policies intended to address racial disparity, have been met with contention on account of their implicit definitions of racism and practices of addressing it. One such policy introduced by Labour, particularly relevant in its shaping of contemporary racial understanding, was its making illegal workplace discrimination of individuals with 'protected identities' (Equality Act 2010). While the Act is believed to have underpinned some improvements in race pay gaps, it focuses on individualised experiences of racism, and as such has been critiqued both for its diverting of attention away from broader structural mechanisms by which racial inequalities are reproduced (Morris, Patel, Stainthorp & Stevenson 2019). That New Labour policies enacted assimilationist visions of ethnic multiculturalism which reinforced white normativity is another recurring critique (Back, Keith & Solomos 2002). As such, governmental policy responses say much about how the problem is perceived on a national scale, and the assumptions that such perceptions entail regardless of party positioning.

A key finding of this thesis is that Tate's outward stance on whiteness, which, as we shall see, surfaces both in its institutional policies and in its mediation of the art collections, is heavily shaped through its financial reliance on public funding allocated by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS). As will be discussed in the section 'Institutional Whiteness', a number of senior Tate staff members believe that the gallery would risk losing its funding were it not to align with the current Conservative government's stance on race, racism and whiteness. As such, this section now turns to the 2021 Government Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities report, which outlines in detail these government stances on institutional racism, and provides insight into the current political context in which Tate is situated. In response to the sweep of participation nationwide in Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests that took place in the middle months of 2020, the report writes,

> We understand the idealism of those well-intentioned young people who have held on to, and amplified, this inter-generational mistrust. However, we also have to ask whether a narrative that claims nothing has changed for the better, and that the dominant feature of our society is institutional racism and White privilege, will achieve anything beyond alienating the decent centre ground – a centre ground which is occupied by people of all races and ethnicities (2021:27).

Here, through use of the words, 'idealism', 'mistrust', and 'narrative', the report suggests that the BLM movement is ideological, and their referring to protestors as 'young people' who are 'well-intentioned' alludes to an ill-informed naivety. The protestors' views are characterised as saying that '*nothing* has changed for the better' and that 'institutional racism and White [sic][6] privilege' are '*the* dominant feature of our society', in other words lacking in nuance. The movement is presented as threatening: protestors' actions may well 'alienate' what is 'decent', and what is 'decent' is presented as a multiracial 'centre ground.'

The disparities in language between the report's descriptions of the dissenters and its own presentation of racism in the UK presents a binary between an ostensibly mild and factually-evidenced objectivity of the latter, and an extremist irrationality of the former. The report writes that there is a need to 'take a broader dispassionate look at what has been holding some people back. We therefore cannot accept the accusatory tone of much of the current rhetoric on race, and the pessimism about what has been and what more can be achieved' (2021:27). Here, the government stance counters what they position as unnecessarily pessimistic, rhetorical and 'accusatory'. The protestors are described in emotive terms that contrast with the report's own claims to a 'dispassionate' implied-necessary optimism. That the government 'cannot accept' indicates its political authority to enforce, a position bolstered by the report's exclusive authorship by people of colour. The use of such language binaries intended to diminish the credibility of dissenting political movements was observed by Antonio Gramsci in his 'Prison Notebooks', in which he noted that a self-positioning of 'common-sense'

[6] See 'Methods and Structure' for discussion regarding capitalisation of racial signifiers

> appears as a moralistic accusation [...] (in the case of the movement's followers), of naivete and stupidity. Thus the political struggle is reduced to a series of personal affairs between on the one hand those with the genie in the lamp who know everything and on the other those who are fooled by their own leaders but are so incurably thick that they refuse to believe it (1971:167).

Gramsci's notion of 'common-sense' is useful both in pointing towards the affective and linguistic strategies employed to assert relational dominance, and also in its suggestion that its usage signals investment in an

> iron conviction that there exist objective laws of historical development similar in kind to natural laws, together with a belief in a predetermined teleology like that of a religion: since favourable conditions are inevitably going to appear [...] it is evident that any deliberate initiative tending to predispose [...] these conditions is not only useless but even harmful (1971:168).

As such, a Gramscian lens reinforces the report's dominant epistemological inflections, in that it characterises BLM protestors as harmful to an accepted teleology of sternly optimistic national progress.

As elucidated by Hall, Gramsci's 'Prison Notebooks' are also significant for studies of racism in their conceptualisation of social differentiation as both context-specific, and a multidirectional reinforcing nexus of political, positional and ideological factors (Hall 2019b:29). Arguing for the relevance of Gramsci's approach to analyses of race, Hall suggests that it paves way for studies that are 'based, not on a "one-way determination," but on the analysis of "the relations of force" and aims to differentiate (rather than to collapse as identical) the "various moments or levels" in the development of such a conjuncture' (Gramsci 1971:180-181 in Hall 2019b:29). In other words, attention must be given to the ways in which race both constitutes and is constituted by other forms of social differentiation, in particular class. Returning to the Government Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities report, it is stated that they opt to use 'regression analysis – meaning adjusting for relevant factors to get a more realistic comparison on a like for like basis. This is used by the Office of National Statistics (ONS), for example, in its

analysis of pay and wealth by ethnicity' (2021:50). In their selection of statistical methods, which control class-based indicators of disparity as a variable that is independent from racial disparities, the report dismisses the intersections of economic and social factors that contribute to inequality, and frames the data findings in a Gramscian teleological vision of progress: 'Evidence shows that certain ethnic groups such as Black African, Indian and Bangladeshi pupils perform better than White British groups, once socio-economic status is taken into consideration. This outstanding performance is in part due to what is termed "immigrant optimism" ' (2021:31-32). While 'taking into consideration' the socio-economic status of 'certain ethnic groups' is positioned as a necessary means by which statistical objectivity can be reached, it constitutes a distinct 'framing' or epistemological position of its own that, despite appearances, informs how racial inequity is seen and understood by the broader public.

One effect of this epistemological starting point is that racism can then be defined as predominantly characterised as the product of individual malintent on the part of an aggressor, and experienced as irrational sensitivity on the part of the recipient. These characterisations of racism are then robustly dismissed. For the report writers, 'Society has 'defined racism down' to encompass attitudes and behaviours that would not have been considered racist in the past. This is one reason for the rising sensitivity, the language of microaggressions and safety, and stretching the meaning of racism without objective data to support it' (2021:45). Given, however, that the structuring determinants through which class-based and racial disparities intersect are dismissed as a conceptual starting point, the historical resonances of racism are thereby divorced from their contemporary expressions and stripped of their structural quality, rendering experiences of racism as unfortunate yet independent incidents. A corresponding and frequently-held understanding of racism at Tate is explored in the section 'Whiteness as social', whereby staff members similarly focus, sometimes exclusively, on the ways in which racism is articulated interpersonally. This in turn evidences individuals' unconscious participation in similar kinds of conceptual 'frames' as present within the government report, and on an institutional level, determines the policies and

strategies employed accordingly to address issues of racism as staff perceive them.

The remaining conceptual ‘frame’ relevant to Tate’s positioning within its broader political context is the government’s overt stance to whiteness, characterised in the report as ‘counterproductive and divisive’ (2021:36). Addressing ‘recent instances where ethnic minority communities have rightly felt let down’ (‘the Grenfell tragedy’, ‘the Windrush scandal’ and ‘the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on some ethnic minority groups’) (2021:27), the report emphasises the unintended nature of their circumstances: ‘Outcomes such as these do not come about by design, and are certainly not deliberately targeted’ (ibid.). Attention is thus directed towards a social definition of racism that is necessarily intentional, deflecting away from a conceptualisation of racial inequality that might be simultaneously unintentional yet potent nevertheless: ‘...the exact same action can be racism or not racism - depending on how someone perceives it. [...] It is now possible for any act, including those intended to be well-meaning, to be classified as racist’ (2021:35). By this formulation, the disbelief that somebody ‘well-meaning’ might be ‘classified as racist’ creates a rhetorical negation of the possibility for racial disparity to be the product of unconscious bias, or as structural in character, while the proposition that ‘any act’ might be considered racist positions any prospective claimant as irrational. As will be discussed in the sections ‘Exploring Whiteness’ and ‘Institutional Whiteness’, whiteness is often unconsciously-enacted, and compatible with good intentions. As such, declarations of anti-racist intent present at Tate are not necessarily indicators of progress.

The definitions of racism presented within the government report demonstrate an epistemological positioning on the part of the writers which requires a dissociation between class-based and racial disparities in the British context. As a result, racism is framed as an individualised and predominantly social issue, rather than a structural one that intersects economic, political and social factors together. As indicated by the use of regression analysis to produce ostensibly objective data, these underlying assumptions both define how racism is spoken about, but also remain difficult to detect through the report’s linguistic and

affective signalling of a common-sense viewpoint. Such epistemological positioning is criticised by economist Faiza Shaheen: '…despite media and political discourse insisting on meritocracy and the possibility for everyone to raise their living standards if they adopt the 'right attitude', evidence shows that structural conditions rather crystallize the reproduction of inequality from one generation to the next' (2019:15). Here, Shaheen alludes to the widespread nature of the epistemological positioning inherent within the government report through use of the word 'discourse', suggesting that the 'framing' presented by the government, too, has a shared identity linking media and political spheres together. The report demonstrates various framings associated with the discourse of whiteness through its use of objective, common-sense language to obscure its subjective epistemological underpinnings and its gulf between what is seen as evidence and how it is manipulated to present data. The objective appearance of the report's findings is quipped by journalist Ash Sarkar who writes, 'A government who doesn't like it when people say institutional racism exists appointed a panel of people who don't believe institutional racism exists, and they've produced a report which argues that institutional racism doesn't exist' (Sarkar 2021).

Given the central role of the viewer in constructing whiteness in visual arts contexts, as will be discussed in the section 'Exploring Whiteness', the surfacing of whiteness at Tate needs to be contextualised within these broader tropes of discourse relating to the prevalence and nature of racism as perceived by the British majority, and as represented by the government position outlined within the report. The meanings that are derived from the artworks in Tate's collections are determined to some degree by the broader discourses that shape how people think about race. There is a need, as outlined by Runnymede Trust, 'to convince a sceptical public that the issue exists' by presenting and repeating alternative framings on race, given that 'people unconsciously tend to reject and discredit data and evidence that challenge their values' (2017a:1,3). They present an argument of how this might be done as follows:

> Stories or narrative are often used in politics to convey ideas and frame [...] the debate. They are a powerful way to persuade people. They are easy to

> follow because they have a clear structure: a beginning, middle and an end. We can empathise with the characters and become more interested and invested in issues that may not even affect us personally. The disbelief that characterises discussion about race and racism – its scale and even its existence – can be suspended. Where successful, the audience sees the story as removed from their day-to-day life, can feel less implicated in its rights and wrongs, and address it with fewer preconceptions (2017a:1,6).

Given these recommendations, it seems there is much that Tate might offer in the shifting of discourse around race. Indeed, emphasis on storytelling correlates with Tate's 2020-5 Vision statement, in which it speaks of its wish to engage diverse audiences through a 'focus [...] on powerful storytelling, sharing stories and celebrating different voices' (2020:21). However, given too that there exists a gulf between what is seen and what is understood in terms of how race and racism are constructed, the ability for Tate to fully determine how artworks are understood, at least at present, is uncertain: while Tate's emphasis on storytelling does not necessarily imply a prescriptive way of seeing, the meanings derived from artworks by viewers nevertheless have potential to be unruly. It is to the question of how sight and racialising imaginaries relate in the experience of artworks that 'Exploring Whiteness and Establishing a Methodology' turns.

# Exploring Whiteness and Establishing a Methodology

## Is Whiteness a Matter of Representation?

A fundamental tension in existing studies of whiteness relating to visual culture concerns the extent to which artworks themselves can or should constitute the primary point of focus in searching for the racial dominance in which they may be implicated. That the same question is pertinent, also, to the ways in which race is understood outside the visual studies arena was put starkly by James Baldwin: ‘ “It’s not the Negro problem,” he said to a sincere student questioner after a Harvard speech, “it’s the white problem. I’m only black because you *think* you’re white” ’ (quoted in Leeming 2007). Reframing the words of a prevailing discourse which ascribed moral responsibility to people of colour, Baldwin’s words drew attention to a fact: while physical difference exists and can be seen, the qualities that have come to be associated with physical difference are enacted as race, not by the looked at, but by the looker. Baldwin’s words make very apparent that racism does not exist because of any qualities, visually-apparent or in terms of personal character, in people who have come to be seen as Black: racism exists because people who have come to see themselves as white perceive Blackness as a racial category. This fact (for it is a fact) has significant ramifications on how whiteness might be considered in visual studies methodologies as well. Given Baldwin’s elucidation of race being something that is imposed onto bodies through sight, this section attends to how scholars have linked together white physical qualities of the looker with their epistemological positioning, and explored the ways in which such white epistemological positioning influences how they look.

In the context of Tate, this looking can be broadly understood as directed towards artworks. While the kinds of looking that pertain to artworks are therefore the primary focus of this section, it also considers at times the ways in which such looking is directed at people, in order to further elucidate the variable

epistemological positions that different kinds of looking at artworks signify. Tate's core aims of encouraging, even influencing visitors' 'enjoyment' and 'understanding' of artworks, points towards a core question of what artworks are supposed to do: whether or not they (should) constitute a means for aesthetic contemplation; whether or not they (should) provide the means for a recognition of broader social forces; and whether or not these approaches stand in opposition to each other are questions that are both central to Tate's mediation of artworks and which have significant ramifications on how whiteness might be made manifest to viewers. The ramifications on whiteness, and for the public, of Tate's relative emphases on 'enjoyment' and 'understanding' are explored further in 'Institutional Whiteness.' The question of whether or not artworks can or should be understood to speak for themselves has fundamental implications on how whiteness might be defined within arts institutions, and within the discipline of art history more broadly: with regards to whiteness, as will be discussed, this is a question that relates as much—perhaps more—to viewers' expectations as it does to Tate's curatorial strategies. This question can be crudely phrased as a tension between formalist and contextualist approaches, which, although often used together, constitute crucial polarities in the extent to which they consider sight to be axiomatic. The epistemological positions associated with each and how they relate to whiteness are, broadly, the subject of this section.

Whether or not artworks can constitute a finite parameter of study in themselves has been, and continues to be, a big methodological question for whiteness scholars within visual studies. Richard Dyer's seminal[7] study of whiteness in film and photography explicitly acknowledged a methodological choice to focus on the visual representation of white bodies. At that time, Dyer took the visual qualities of artworks as a starting point in order to address what he believed to be a pressing need to draw attention to the fact that

[7] This work derived from Dyer's 1998 essay, which was one of the first sustained enquiries into whiteness in its own right in visual studies. Whiteness studies can, however, be more broadly traced back to scholars and writers of colour including W.E.B. Du Bois, bell hooks, Toni Morrison, Stuart Hall and many others.

> as long as whiteness is felt to be the human condition, then it alone both defines normality and fully inhabits it. [...] White people have power and believe that they think, feel and act like and for all people; [...]. …white people create the dominant images of the world and don't quite see that they thus construct the world in their own image (1997:9).

Here, Dyer points to a strategic need to label white bodies in artworks as raced as a primary means of disrupting viewers' prevalent assumptions of white physical normativity. Indeed, that Dyer's approach was both novel and necessary was attested by Kobena Mercer and Isaac Julien, who believed that it allowed for a 'rearticulation of ethnicity as an epistemological category [that] involves the displacement of the centred discourses of the West (and) entails putting into question its universalist character and its transcendental claims to speak for everyone, while being itself everywhere and nowhere' (1988:6). At this point in time, the very naming of white bodies as white carried significant political and methodological importance: in its (re)subjectifying rearticulation of white bodies as represented in artworks, Dyer's project strove to draw attention in his readers to the assumptions inherent in dominant racial looking. Dyer justified his methodological approach through an observation that 'sight has been a privileged sense in Western culture since the middle ages, [...] since the mid-nineteenth century the photographic media have become central and authoritative means of knowledge, thought and feeling' (1997:xxxiii). As such, what is seen in artworks is of primary importance, and Dyer's mediation of the artworks was the means by which the ostensible axioms of racialising sight were reconfigured.

However, despite Dyer's stated methodological focus on the visual representation of white bodies, his scholarly input was nevertheless instructive in reconfiguring the gulf between looking and racial understanding. Such could be said to be true, too, for the approach of art historian and curator Maurice Berger, who similarly considered a probing of the visual indicators of bodies to be necessary for confronting whiteness. In the catalogue to his exhibition, *White: Whiteness and Race in Contemporary Art* (2004) Berger comments,

> ...much of what defines race in culture is innately visual. Ideas and observations about race are, more often than not, communicated through

> visual cues, symbols and stereotypes. To talk about race is to talk about skin colour [, ...] the shape of the eyes or the nose or the texture of the hair. To talk about race is to talk about clothes, or hairstyle, or body type (2004:45).

Described thus, race is something that can be deduced from bodies and their representation in artworks. Berger separates the 'ideas and observations about race' from the tangible bodily qualities that can be seen: to think of race is an act of mediation between the looking at bodies and the interpretation of what is seen. Berger's exhibition featured the work of artists who deliberately addressed the topic of whiteness: as such, and a similar scholarly guidance, viewers were provided with an interpretative frame through which to experience the works. Accordingly, like Dyer, Berger's focus on the visual markers of race and their representation by the exhibited artists allowed for a re-subjectifying of white bodies, but it was through his and the artists' provision of this conscious interpretative frame that the associations of race made by viewers were called into question. Without such guidance, it might not have been certain that all viewers would have registered the whiteness of the artworks.

While the specified parameters of Dyer's and Berger's projects meant that whiteness might have been subjectified through their focus on the visible representations of race, the need for interpretative mediation on their parts suggests that whiteness exists beyond the visible qualities of artworks themselves. Nicholas Mirzoeff signals the limitations of a focus on representation, advocating for a need to shift methodological focus away from understanding whiteness as an embodied property of that which is seen and towards what he calls 'white sight', which he describes as 'a key operating system of what is it to make whiteness' (2023:1). Reflecting on the Charlottesville rally, 'whiteness', Mirzoeff writes, 'was as visible as can be, yet the problem was far from solved' (2023:x). For Mirzoeff, the naming of white subjectivity is no longer adequate for the project of decentering it, and he provides a formulation of 'white sight' that suggests that it is something projected onto artworks, rather than something necessarily seeable within them. Mirzoeff, like the other scholars, similarly explicitly delineates his position on representation: 'It is not [...] a history of representations of whiteness, which is

implicit within art history. It is a tactical mapping of the contemporary forms of white sight and white reality…' (2023:3). Here, while visual properties remain key, emphasis is put on the role of the looker: for Mirzoeff, 'white sight' refers to the unacknowledged, dominant subjectivity of looking from the holder of a racially coercive gaze, which is structurally encoded through cultural artefacts. 'White sight' is conceptualised as a structural phenomenon in that artworks are interpreted via a shared, powerful and unconscious white imaginary which he names 'white infrastructures', which 'connect, distribute, enable, and store the set of desires and fantasies that comprise what it is to make whiteness' (2023:11). Thus, in contexts which do not consciously mediate the experiences of the viewer of material artefacts (as Dyer's text and Berger's exhibition did), 'white sight' creates whiteness as a collective, entrenched, dominant and unacknowledged pattern of projected meaning.

One such linkage between physical artefact and the white infrastructures with which they associate Mirzoeff explores in relation to John James Audubon's 1838 book *Birds of America*, whose mode of visualising nature is positioned as both informed by, and tacitly reproducing in its viewers, the logics of a broader historical context of plantation economy:

> Bird-watching [...] was a metonymy for settler colonialism. The settler sees the bird, kills it, classifies it, and has it stuffed. Alive, the bird embodies freedom. Dead, it was first an extractive commodity, and later it contained and expressed "higher" values of aesthetics when displayed as an attraction in museums of natural history (2023:100).

Here, Mirzoeff establishes relationalities of vision between looker and looked at– the latter in this instance being the birds the artist represents–as well as between artist and viewers, including those encountering his works today: 'You can buy originals and reproductions of it all over the internet, teaching racialized vision, one print at a time' (2023:103). If racialised vision can be taught, as Mirzoeff suggests, 'white sight' is, at least in emphasis, a unidirectional influence whereby psychic infrastructures of whiteness are communicated from the artist, and received and reinforced by the viewer through the materiality of the artwork.

That the represented subject in question is a bird further unsettles the relative methodological certainty of taking the visual properties of artworks at face value: ‘white sight’ positions whiteness as a product of an unacknowledged communication, even unconscious agreement, between artist and viewers in their respective relational encounters with the artwork, as opposed to something that is inherently deducible from a formal representation of skin, or even of human bodies at all. That whiteness might be a way of looking untethered from any particular visible subject is a point further illustrated by Mirzoeff: ‘“Whiteness” was formed in the making of this perspective rather than being something external to or represented in it. It is the colonization of space as space, presaging Europe’s half millennium of expansion’ (2023:34). As such, while the formal properties of the artwork remain significant, this is because they provide a visual locus for ‘a collective psychic projection onto reality from the cultural unconscious’ (2023:176). Mirzoeff draws attention both to the potential for artworks to carry racialising forms of sight into the present, and to their reception by viewers in the ostensibly neutral terms of aesthetics and perspective: ‘white sight’ might be understood as a projected, teleological linkage between racialising visions of the past which are reinforced through unmediated present-day viewership. In this formulation, the racial attitudes of the artist provide a representational proposition offered to the viewer, which has the potential to influence how they see.

Mirzoeff’s formulation of ‘white sight’ acknowledges the potential for visual objects to both create and reinforce teleological lineages that instate, in the present, and as ostensibly neutral, historic forms of racialising vision. For art historian Martin Berger (unrelated to Maurice), too, the existence of whiteness in artworks results, foremost, from the mediation between material objects and the logics of racialising sight that are imposed upon them: ‘Dominant cultural discourses residing in viewers interact with a range of secondary discourses suggested by the work’s subject matter and media to establish the outside boundaries for what the artwork might mean’ (2005:24). Thus, while Mirzoeff’s methodology emphasises how whiteness exists as a teleological linkage between past and present, Berger focuses on the potential for viewers to attribute racialised meaning that is the product of their own lived experiences. Berger continues,

‘...images do not persuade us to internalize racial values embedded within them, so much as they confirm meanings for which the discourses and structures of our society have predisposed us’ (2005:1). While the two positions may certainly be compatible, Berger’s methodology more explicitly centres around the subjective role of the viewer, and the possibility that it is contemporary discourse around race as it is lived which determines the kinds of racialised meaning they project onto artworks. While both scholars consider there to exist a broader reservoir of racialising logic that informs both what images depict and how they are seen, the directionality of sight is, at least in emphasis, different: Berger’s formulation suggests a potential for viewers’ meaning to derive entirely outside of the artwork.

The potential relevance of both scholar’s formulations was attested to by a recent event which suggested both that there exist culturally-sanctioned teleological continuities of vision attributed to artworks, and simultaneously that artworks might gain meaning completely dissociated from these teleologies. In 2022, two *Just Stop Oil* activists threw tomato soup at Van Gogh’s Sunflowers (1888) in London’s National Gallery. The intense emotions this act elicited, apparent in descriptions in newspapers *The Sun* and *The Daily Mail* of the duo as ‘smug’, ‘entitled’ ‘eco-idiots’ ‘laughing in the face of justice’, suggest that there exist normative, shared understandings of what artworks *should* signify, and also that there is something significant at stake in exposing these (Christodoulou 2022; Cotterill & Lockhart 2022). The collective nerve touched by this perceived affront indicates a broader, tacit, and perhaps inherited acceptance of certain ways of seeing. Meanwhile, the painting has gained new collective meanings that exist entirely beyond these accepted norms, and beyond Van Gogh’s own imagination: at the time of writing, a Google search for ‘Van Gogh Sunflowers’ reveals on the first search page articles about the protest, and the fifth suggestion on the Google search bar suggests ‘soup’. For many viewers, soup might be on their mind, despite it having nothing to do with the painting: this attests to the complexities of meaning attribution in experiences of artworks. That whiteness is frequently conceptualised as being unconsciously-held provides a further problem in terms of meaning attribution.

Beyond visual studies disciplines too, scholars on whiteness have sought to distinguish the visible markers of human difference from the collectively-held logics that seek to differentiate on racial terms. Despite their distance from art historical disciplines, there is a methodological parallel in their explorations of whiteness being formulated through an unacknowledged gulf between seeing and projecting meaning. For these scholars, whiteness is that which creates the very idea of race, and their attention to this conceptualisation of it seeks to disrupt notions that race might have any essential quality. Rather, whiteness is the phenomenon by which race *is understood*, or *has come to be understood* as having fundamental and evaluative properties. In her Lacanian analysis of whiteness, Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks suggests that whiteness exists as a 'master signifier' and that 'race is a regime of looking': reliant upon visual perceptions of alterity, whiteness 'founds the logic of racial difference' (2000:21-2). Here, she asserts that whiteness is characterised through the accepted and shared conflation of visible human difference with fixed racial categorisation. That race is a 'regime' suggests that there are consequences in not adhering to it: this, indeed, is a key finding of the section 'Institutional Whiteness.'

Seshadri-Crooks furthermore emphasises that what is visible is not the same as what is *perceived as* visible, thus suggesting that sight is contingent upon perception, as opposed to perception being informed by sight: in this sense, what somebody might see in another person or in an artwork is preordained according to the logic of the looker in question. In his study of racial prejudice, psychologist Gordon Allport, too, suggested that beliefs precede evidence, rather than the other way round: as such, this would mean that it is impossible to look without being informed by personal experience or ideology (Allport 1954). Such conceptualisations of whiteness being a function of human perception preceding evidence (including that of a visual kind) echo Runnymede Trust's concept of 'framing', and therefore further destabilise the possibility that the whiteness of artworks can be understood solely by looking at them. Understanding whiteness as a form of projection that informs how visual evidence is interpreted points towards a need, as Mirzoeff and Martin Berger in particular explore, to locate the subjective meanings that viewers create in their acts of looking, and the ways in which these

meanings might be informed by racialising beliefs. As Daniel C. Blight notes, ‘Brain research has shown that the human eye only partially captures the visual world, leaving much of what is taken as reality to be filled in by our brains, making the processes of viewing […] subject to ideology’ (2019:23). Just as whiteness as an epistemology signifies the overlooking of empirical evidence in favour of unconscious ideology with regards to people, the same is true for the act of looking at artworks: in understanding how whiteness surfaces in artworks, then, it is just as necessary to determine the subjective associations and affective resonances that are created in the act of looking as it is to understand artists’ own propositions of meaning.

That whiteness as a ‘master signifier’ exists untethered from fixed visible characteristics both in the looker and the looked-at is an idea given further form through a recognition that various social groups with white skin have historically been excluded from having ‘white’ racial status. Historians have noted how light-skinned people of Irish, Jewish, Italian and Eastern European origins have in certain contexts been dehumanised according to the racialising perceptions of them from those in positions of social dominance (Ignatiev 1995, Roediger 2006, Painter 2010, Levine-Rasky 2020). So too scholars note that certain racialised groups have in different contexts been viewed both as white and nonwhite (Frankenberg 1994, Rexhepi 2023), while others observe the ability, chosen or otherwise, of some racialised groups to ‘pass’ as white: all of these instances demonstrate gulfs, often context-specific, between how physical markers of race are perceived and the qualities ascribed to them (Piper 2001, Bonilla-Silva & Embrick 2005). In the latter instance, to ‘be white’ can sometimes be actively chosen, with the visible markers of difference being used to signal racial inclusion. As these instances all suggest, the perceptions ascribed to those looked *at* are variable, but it is known also that the visible characteristics of the looker, too, do not necessarily correlate with racialising logics: Thandeka’s *Learning To Be White* details how light-skinned children become exposed to, and resultingly accept, social norms of whiteness which are not instinctive (1999), while Hall, too, notes the possibility that people of colour might themselves subscribe to the epistemologies of whiteness: ‘There is absolutely no political guarantee already

inscribed in an identity. There is no reason on God's earth why the film is good because a black person made it. [...] There are no political guarantees of that kind' (2019a:79).

Given that visible markers of physical difference in bodies do not accord neatly with the ways in which race is projected onto them, there are difficulties, then, in speaking about racial categories in absolute terms. If 'being white' could refer to visible characteristics that are ostensibly seen–such as representations of light-skinned bodies in artworks–but at the same time, light-skinned bodies may not necessarily be seen as 'white', then methodologies of locating whiteness that take for granted what 'is seen' in artworks can only be insufficient. Furthermore, the 'being white' that speaks of visible characteristics and the 'being white' that refers to individuals' investment in racialising logics (regardless of their skin colour) have different meanings, despite their practical overlaps. The differences in what it means to 'be white' can be seen through interpreting the words of sociologist Ruth Frankenberg, who suggests that whiteness is 'a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society' (1994:1). Here, whiteness is positioned as a vantage point from which specifically white people look: to enact whiteness, it is necessary to be white. That the holder of the look is named as 'white' in this instance could point to their having light skin, and it could also point to their investment in the logics of racial differentiation that produce subjects racialised as white as well as racial others. The latter linkage between whiteness and being white echoes James Baldwin's assertion that 'as long as you think you're white, there's no hope for you' (1964:80): to be invested in having a white identity means as such to be invested in the logics of differentiation.

Conceptualising whiteness thus as a mode of thinking that projects and enforces subjective yet fixed perceptions of race onto the self and others, and which is not neatly fixed to visible characteristics, accords with race scholars' characterisations of whiteness as an epistemological construct. Charles Mills' description of whiteness as an 'epistemology of ignorance' that serves to create and maintain white racial dominance and privilege (1997:18) further highlights the discussed claims of scholars that whiteness is characterised by the cognitive

overriding of empiricism: as such, what is seen by the viewer is of more relevance than what might be taken at face value within the artwork. Expanding later upon the idea, Mills writes, 'Imagine an ignorance militant, aggressive, not to be intimidated, an ignorance that is active, dynamic, that refuses to go quietly—not at all confined to the illiterate and uneducated but propagated at the highest levels of the land, indeed presenting itself unblushingly as *knowledge*' (2007:13). In describing whiteness in epistemological terms, being that which imposes a racialising narrative upon what can be seen, it is possible to account for the variable relationships between physical attributes and the ways in which race is projected onto bodies. In other words, while whiteness may be expressed in myriad ways according to context, its logic remains nevertheless constant, or what Bonilla-Silva calls the 'changing same' at the core of race's unstable and changing construction (2019:14). It is this changing same that constitutes whiteness in its epistemological form: the assumption of racialised differentiation, and the ascription of hierarchy to these differences, with people perceived to have the visible qualities that signal white racial inclusion understood explicitly or implicitly to be at top.

Describing whiteness as epistemological establishes the concept as a mode of categorisation that creates race as relational, valorised constructs. Accordingly, given the inconsistent application of individuals' epistemological investments with the visible human characteristics that they evaluate, whiteness can be defined in part by that which it creates: the racisms that in turn produce the notion of race. Echoing the words of James Baldwin at the beginning of this section, Fred Moten notes thus how despite its possibility for being reclaimed, Blackness as a racial category is created by the epistemologies of whiteness: 'If blackness will have never been thought of when detached from anti-blackness, neither will anti-blackness have been thought outside the factity of blackness as anti-blackness's spur and anticipation; moreover, neither blackness nor anti-blackness are to be seen beneath the appearances that tell of them' (2017:viii). Whiteness conceptualised epistemologically, therefore, means that to 'be white' means to be invested in a lineage of imposing racial categorisation: there can be no white racial category without racial others. While in its reclamation Blackness has come to

mean many things, it nevertheless would never have come into being without the projections created by the logics of whiteness. Whiteness, in turn, *is* defined by the anti-Blackness it created, and continues to create. The dominance of the relationality of whiteness with its construction of the racial other is further acknowledged by George Yancy, who argues that whiteness is 'structurally parasitic': as such, it only exists through its acts of negation (in Blight 2019:192). The different ontological positions that Blackness and whiteness as such necessarily signify is explained by Hall:

> You cannot, as it were, reverse the discourses of any identity simply by turning them upside down. What is it like to live, by attempting to valorize and defeat the marginalization of the variety of black subjects and to really begin to recover the lost histories of a variety of black experiences, while at the same time recognizing the end of any essential black subject? That is the politics of living identity through difference (2019a:78).

That whiteness is nevertheless understood in ontological terms is outlined by Shona Hunter: 'The power of whiteness as the euphemism for the modern liberal subject lies in its epistemological power to control the criteria of incorporation and existence into general *human* existence. [...] …this epistemological power translates to an ontological power' (2015:12). Here, the power of whiteness to claim its ubiquity derives from its own fundamental misunderstanding of what race is: in considering racial difference to be fact, whiteness constructs itself as an ontological position. Locating whiteness at Tate, then, is just as much about understanding the ways in which viewers have projected, and continue to project meaning from a broader whitened collective unconscious, as it is to understand artists' intention. An example of whiteness as a by-product of its own negation of Blackness is illustrated by Eddie Chambers' analysis of white critical responses to the exhibition *Into the Open* (1984), the first survey of contemporary work by Black British artists shown across the country. In the exhibition, white art viewers and reviewers were found to consistently read 'anger' as a key emotion into works by Black artists who attempted to explore identity or challenge racism, thus demonstrating how whiteness is present through whitened impositions of meaning contrary to artists' intent (2011:21).

That race and the qualities perceived by viewers to correlate with it are projected onto artworks made by or depicting people of colour is noted by art historian Darby English, who writes, ‘The work of black artists for whom questions of culture are a subject but visualizing or representing race/identity is not an end obligates us to displace race from its central location in our interpretations of this work’ (2007:11-12). Understanding whiteness as an epistemological rather than ontological category, therefore, is necessary as a starting point in encountering artworks. This brings to light what Mercer and Julien meant when they spoke of the epistemological rearticulation that Dyer’s project enabled: while it was focused on the visual representation of white bodies, the methodological implications of centring race as a visible white category are starkly different to that of centring race as a visible Black category. Hall’s analysis of the different stages of political action in terms of the self-designation of Blackness as a racial category could be said to similarly account for the shifting trajectories of approach starting with Dyer’s and (Maurice) Berger’s focus on representation and finishing with Mirzoeff’s and (Martin) Berger’s focus on looking. Hall writes, ‘The histories that have never been told about ourselves that we could not learn in schools, that were not in any books, and that we had to recover. This is an enormous act of what I want to call imaginary political reidentification, reterritorialization and reidentification, without which a counterpolitics could not have been constructed’ (2019a:74). Efforts to name white bodies as white, therefore, might be seen oppositely as an act of diminishing the territory of whiteness and paving the route for subsequent theorisations of sight.

The understanding of whiteness as an epistemological position, whose relation with white bodily qualities is shifting, has significant ramifications on the question of whether or not whiteness can be understood as a representational issue in its being visibly determinable in artworks. This definition is important in considering the methodological ramifications for the art historical practices of formalism and contextualism. This is a matter attended to in detail by (Martin) Berger, who suggests that formalist approaches have the potential to ‘combine with our cultural blindness to whiteness to ensure that texts containing only white people–or those containing no figures at all–have nothing to say about race’

(2005:14). That, as discussed, categories of racialisation *are* applied by whitened viewers to representations of people of colour puts this into clear perspective: in other words, whitened peoples' absence of conscious racial awareness means that they might consider their formalist encounters with artworks to give them all the information they need in order to determine whether or not an artwork pertains to issues of race. Yet, given this absence of conscious awareness, they inevitably overlook any potential for racial thematics within the artwork. Neither does Berger consider contextualist approaches, which require analysis of the broader political, economic, social and philosophical contexts in which artworks are situated, to be necessarily sufficient, suggesting that while contextualist methods mitigate to some extent the risk of projecting personal biases upon artworks through their decentralising the stand-alone significance of the art object itself, they nevertheless still rely on visual evidence as a means by which ostensibly relevant themes of analysis are selected as priorities of study:

> ...at an early stage of analysis, contextualists buy into the representational systems of art, taking the subjects of illusionary scenes as meaningful to their inquiries. [...] …these connections by their very obviousness, which suggest themselves to every scholar and member of the public who but glances at the artwork, preclude the consideration of other, less obvious, contexts (2005:20-1).

It seems here that the limitations of a contextualist methodology in locating whiteness is not a problem with the methodology per se, but rather to the similarly obscured potential in scholars, as in a formalist approach, to determine what is and what is not relevant in terms of racial constructions.

Bruno Latour's Actor-Network-Theory is useful in exploring how viewer experiences of artworks are necessarily affected by their social experiences, and makes redundant the binary between inherent and subjective meanings in artworks. Latour writes,

> It is counterintuitive to try and distinguish "what comes from viewers" and "what comes from the object" when the obvious response is to "go with the flow". Object and subject might exist, but everything interesting happens upstream and downstream. Just follow the flow. Yes, follow the actors

> themselves or rather that which makes them act, namely the circulating entities (2005:237).

Using both models allows for an interpretation of artworks that takes into account multiple readings alongside the social factors that shape such understanding. This is what English calls ‘a practice of strategic formalism, one interested in the peculiarity of works within their varied contexts of meaning’ (2007:32). This thesis, therefore, does not seek to answer the question of whether formalism or contextualism is more appropriate, but, having recognised some of the potential pitfalls in each, tries to draw from each approach in unison.

## Whiteness as a Structural Concept

While the discussion so far has considered the ways in which whiteness functions through the communication and broader acceptance of a sight that positions racial difference as visually axiomatic, these definitions do not fully acknowledge either the structural occurrence or the reproduction power of whiteness. Furthermore, defining whiteness in solely epistemological terms does not provide a sufficient account of how such whitened thinking might align with light skin. This section of ‘Exploring Whiteness’ attends to these necessary definitional components of whiteness. As both (Martin) Berger and Mirzoeff suggest, to locate whiteness in visual studies contexts concerns a tracing and understanding of racialising viewership, but crucially as a mode of viewing that occurs in parallel as opposed to in single, isolated incidences. Both scholars suggest, with different emphases, that whiteness arises through a projection of meaning, whose conceptual sources derive from a broader, collective cultural unconscious whose connection to the formalist qualities of artworks are inconsistent. This means that in searching for whiteness at Tate, a study of individuals’ projections of racial understanding onto artworks in isolation would be insufficient in terms of accounting for whiteness as a structural formation. Similarly, a focus on individualised instances of racialising sight cannot acknowledge the damage that whiteness is understood to cause: for this reason, too, a methodology needs to be established which encompasses its structural propensity to differentially allocate resources, of some kind, according to

racial positioning. Lastly, in the largely epistemological terms offered thus far, it would appear that anybody, regardless of skin colour, might be equally likely to enact whiteness. Consequently, this section attends to how it may be understood that lookers' white skin relates with their epistemological positioning. These three points of focus for this section are all interrelated, and have important methodological ramifications that will be discussed as follows.

An acknowledgment of whiteness as both relational and structural is important not only methodologically, but is particularly pertinent to Tate, given the gallery's core function of mediating knowledge for the public. Given the argument established so far for whiteness relating to artworks being the product of a collaborative, if unintentional, projection of meaning onto artworks by artist and viewer together, the same may be true in a broader sense in relation to Tate. Given this model of shared meaning construction (and, indeed, the often unconscious nature of white epistemologies) the authority of the artist in determining an artwork's absolute meaning is undermined. On a broader scale, this model would suggest that Tate's authority in determining absolute meaning might be similarly undermined: this is significant given its claims to influencing artworks' meanings on a global scale. While Tate's claims to global reach may not be significant in terms of how the artworks are mediated by staff, they are nevertheless important in terms of public perceptions of Tate's publicly stated function. With this model in mind, whether or not Tate is able to influence public understanding depends upon its ability to recognise its institutional epistemological positioning, which is philosophically difficult given that whiteness is frequently seen to be unconsciously enacted. Were Tate to be able to recognise its epistemological positioning, this relational model of meaning construction would suggest, too, that regardless of Tate's intentions or dexterity in mediating racialising meaning, the artworks that comprise its collection would nevertheless be subject to rogue meanings attributed by viewers that stem from broader racial discourses, such as that detailed in the introduction to this thesis. As such, individualised encounters with artworks need to be contextualised more broadly, to understand whether, how and why there might be parallels with wider discourse.

Martin Berger's methodological work is important in particular in its offerings of how to locate whiteness in an art historical disciplinary context, but, in not being intended for such, is not entirely sufficient in explaining how whiteness might arise in the specific context of an institution responsible for the mediation of artworks' meaning. Berger writes that an analysis of race in artworks must take 'into account the historically contingent processes by which we read meaning from visual texts' (2005:14). As such, he points beyond the field of representation and towards the factors that influence meaning production: 'Convinced that discourses circulating outside art objects circumscribe their significance, I begin my study by analyzing the dominant discourses that established the parameters for what visual texts might mean, before attending to the visual evidence of the art' (2005:14). The ramifications of this discourse on Tate's ability to mediate knowledge pertaining to race are significant, as Berger's methodology would suggest, and are discussed in 'Institutional Whiteness.' The current dominant discourse on race, as detailed in the report written by the government's Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, suggests two key framings of particular significance to this thesis: firstly, that racial inequality can be extricated from inequalities of income, and secondly, that whiteness as an analytic approach is divisive. These two positions relate closely to each other, because both deny, and take this denial as a starting point, that there exists a preferential allocation of resources to white people on a structural scale.

To illustrate the significance of this dominant discourse, it is necessary to consider the relationship between individual racial prejudice and its broader structural enactment. This is a point attended to in detail by sociologist Albert Memmi, who suggested, contrarily to the government report, that racist beliefs gain their structural force precisely because they are interpellated by broader inequalities of resource distribution. Memmi writes, 'Racism is the generalized and final assignment of values to real or imaginary differences, to the accuser's benefit and at his victim's expense, in order to justify the former's own privileges or aggression' (2000:173). Here, Memmi suggests that what he names 'the accuser' already possesses privilege, which they seek to justify and protect. In other words, he posits that the articulation of human difference is in itself a human instinct, but what distinguishes racism is its justification of preferential resource allocation on

the grounds of ostensible racial categories. In such a framing, whiteness could be said to gain its power through the alignment of epistemological worldviews with other political, economic and social inequalities. As such, it is when visible difference–afforded by the looker with projected qualities of racial categorisation onto bodies–is bolstered by resource distribution that whiteness can be said to be present as a formation on a structural scale. As Memmi's words suggest, that there exist privileges preferentially allocated to 'the accuser' allows for a circular justification of such differential privileges: 'the accuser' has privileges that they wish to guard, and they are able to do so, resulting in further inequality. That racism is a function of differential resource acquisition as well as articulations of visible difference, and that such a model is denied by dominant contemporary political discourse on race, is a tension of substantial importance in contextualising Tate's acknowledgement of race and racism in its institutional practices and artwork mediation alike. Furthermore, in terms of art historical methodology, such a model requires any study of whiteness to acknowledge the ways in which resource acquisition has historically, and continues to align with whiteness as an epistemological worldview.

That white racial prejudices towards people of colour carry a greater structural significance than the racial prejudices enacted against them is a core understanding within scholarship on race. Such is noted by historian Mia Bay, who writes, '…the African-American discussion of white people as a race has never been anywhere near as vocal, voluminous, or well-publicized as has been white American thinking on black racial traits' (2000:5). As such, Bay, like Memmi, draws attention to the ways in which racialising epistemologies align with power to produce whiteness: that whitened epistemological thinking is more 'vocal', 'voluminous' and 'well-publicized' suggests that, while reversely oriented racial prejudice might exist, it is white peoples' preferentially allocated resources on a structural scale that allow their prejudices to be more widely disseminated, thus allowing them in turn to become even more shared, entrenched and vehement. This insight explains, too, why 'reverse racism' is impossible by definition. Speaking more explicitly about whiteness, CWS scholar Cynthia Levine-Rasky writes, 'I use the term "whites" to refer to the conglomerate of the racially dominant

group of people of European descent, and “whiteness” to the processes through which whites acquire and deploy social dominance’ (2002:2). Here, Levine-Rasky makes a link between people with the physical qualities associated with white skin and the *processes* that facilitate their acquisition and enactment of dominance. While the link between white physical appearance and investment in white epistemologies is a thread that will be picked up shortly, for now, attention can be drawn to the observation that there exists a particular, structurally-enforced means by which white people come to be, and continue to be, dominant. Acknowledging and tracing these processes in an art historical and institutional context constitutes what this thesis considers to be a crucial contribution to visual studies whiteness scholarship, undertaken by the developing of a methodology that combines visual and contextual approaches.

That white racial prejudice is, in Bay’s words, more ‘well-publicized’ suggests that these structurally dangerous expressions of white prejudice have gained their structurally dangerous nature in part *because of* their intersections with the preferential allocation of resources to white people on a large scale. There is a methodological implication that such a formulation invites, and which this thesis relies upon. Scholars have argued for the importance of attending to the intersections between differing axes of dominance in order to understand the ways in which different forms of social inequality might compound each other (Crenshaw 1989). When seeking to understand the effects of dominance, such a formulation is important and necessary. However, whiteness is a conceptual category that concerns only the racialising aspects of dominance: resultingly, this thesis looks to understand how dominance has been enacted and justified on the grounds of racial differentiation specifically. While an understanding of peoples’ lived experiences requires intersectional analysis, whiteness as an epistemological category is not about lived experience, but rather the phenomenon by which racial categorisations are produced from a position of racial dominance. In methodological terms, this means that while this thesis does look for individual expressions of racism relating to artworks in Tate’s collection, it also necessarily searches for evidence that these expressions have come to take on a structural quality. This insight suggests that in order to understand both how whiteness at

Tate functions in relation to broader discourse, and how whiteness manifests within its collections, a consideration of the ways in which resource accumulation has bolstered whitened epistemological worldviews is necessary, as much as identifying the prejudices themselves. The formulation that whiteness functions through a complex relationship between resource allocation and epistemological worldviews has significant implications, too, for the dominant political discourse that names whiteness as inherently divisive: if racial and class-based inequalities are extricated from each other, as they are in the government report, then the conclusion could only be that prejudice is an inherently white phenomenon, which would indeed be a divisive claim.

Attending to the ways in which racial and class-based disparities intersect, both with each other and with these individualised gulfs in perceptions of racism, is important to acknowledge in whiteness. Hall's famous insight that 'race is the modality in which class is lived, the medium in which class relations are experienced' (Hall et. al. 1978:394) is key here: while race and class have distinct features, they interlink in their structural articulation. As Faiza Shaheen notes, there is a need to 'Stop counterposing race and class. Analysis of – and the policy response to – both race and class should focus on material conditions as well as on prejudice and discrimination' (2019:5). In other words, while racism does exist as individualised instances of prejudice and discrimination, any analysis of its structural existence must take into account the ways in which discrimination has led, and continues to lead, to material inequality. Given, too, that whiteness is a term which expresses the structural phenomenon by which gulfs in lived experience lead to differential understandings regarding both race and the persistence of racism, it follows that individuals' access to material resources may play a role in further disseminating these understandings. Thus, whiteness is both the cause of material inequalities experienced more prevalently by people of colour, and the effect of it: whiteness is a circular economy through which people of colour have been allocated fewer resources historically, and continue to be allocated fewer resources through the denial of racism and its social and material effects. Such is noted, too, by sociologist Gargi Bhattacharyya, who writes, 'in the realm of the economic, racism is an attempt to safeguard the interests of those

deemed dominant or “unraced” ’ (2018:21). For Bhattacharyya, it is necessary to acknowledge how capitalism ‘infects our consciousness’: in terms of the present methodological enquiry, as such, it is necessary to understand how differential resource acquisition in terms of race, has, like the epistemologies of racial differentiation that underpins it, come to be taken for granted as normative (2018:4).

Without an understanding of the material inequities that are both cause and effect of dominant racial ‘framing’, or ‘epistemologies’, it is impossible to account for the prevailing force of racial inequality. It is also impossible to explain racism as anything other than a coincidental set of individualised prejudices. So too are inadequate analyses of class that do not take into account the structural formations of race, but that is beyond the scope of this thesis. Explaining how racialising epistemologies gather momentum through their intersections with material inequality, Shaheen continues, ‘As a result of race and class inequality from school to the labour market, privilege can be passed on from one generation to the next’ (2019:13). Thus, whiteness can be understood as an intergenerational issue as it expresses how capital, both in economic and social terms, is passed on as a form of unearned privilege relating to racial positioning. While the material causes and effects of whiteness are crucial to acknowledge, so too are the ways in which cultural norms associated with privilege can be transferred intergenerationally. Sociologist Mike Savage notes that there is need for a ‘recognition that possessing cultural capital involves being familiar with the “national” cultural canon, the cultural repertoires associated with “national belonging” ’ (2017:17). Here, Savage suggests that privilege is transmitted intergenerationally in social terms as well as economic, through individuals’ investment into canonised cultural forms associated in this context with Britishness.

Together, these two observations expressed by Shaheen and Savage have fundamental ramifications for the methodologies required to locate whiteness in the context of Tate. Recognising that social and economic privilege is acquired and accrued through successive generations, and recognising, too, that racialising epistemologies are known to be both cause and effect of these differential

privileges, it follows that there are causative and multidirectional correlations between the extent to which individuals recognise racism as a current issue, their access to social and economic privilege, and their investments into the cultural canons associated with Britishness. Each of these mutually-reinforcing factors need to be excavated in relation to artworks and their contexts in order to understand how whiteness surfaces at Tate. However, this thesis will from hereon refer to the 'cultural capital' that Savage speaks of as 'normative cultural capital', in order to reinforce that the very construction of canonical cultural forms as both important and relating to British identity is one contemporary expression of a dominant national narrative in which Britons of colour have been subject to social and economic marginalisation. In the context of this study of whiteness in an organisation responsible for the mediation of 'the' national British art collection, the concept of canonicity refers to the ways in which racial categorisations have intersected with unevenly distributed economic resources across racial categories to determine the kinds of art deemed relevant today in representing the nation.

That whiteness is not neatly tethered to essential white physical qualities, but is instead an axis of differentiation enacted by people with a whitened epistemological worldview gives weight to CWS scholar Robin DiAngelo's assertion that its manifested behaviours from the socially dominant (or in the terms of this thesis, the whitened looker) are similar to those from other axes of dominance, such as the structures of patriarchy, heteronormativity and capitalism, which all share behavioural investments into individualism, objectivity and meritocracy (2018). These behavioural framings may provide significant means by which the logics of whiteness might be located in spite of their ubiquity and often concealed nature. That these behaviours may be indicative of whitened worldviews is suggested by race scholar Shona Hunter, who speaks of how

> liberalism and whiteness become fused in their claims to represent *human generality*. Whiteness becomes the euphemism for the general of humanity defined through liberal universalism. The everythingness of whiteness is the embodiment of liberal values, individualism, universalism, rational progress and equality. [...] But, the more abstract whiteness becomes, the more it requires imposition through material, affective and symbolic work (2015:11).

As such, while there may exist similarities in the behaviours enacted to uphold different axes of social differentiation, it is only if said behaviours can be linked to the negation of Blackness or non-whiteness as a conceptual category that they might be said to signify the presence of a specifically white epistemological positioning. Similarly, the existence of these behavioural qualities may not in themselves necessarily equate to whiteness unless there is evidence of their role in upholding notions of racial differentiation.

Understanding whiteness as a solely epistemological or behavioural construct invites the potential to overlook how investments into racialising codes *do* align with physical markers associated with white racial positioning. As suggested by Thandeka, light-skinned children are conditioned into white racial thinking: whiteness as an enacted behaviour is learnt rather than innate. Likewise, the discussed government report indicates that epistemologies associated with whiteness can be enacted by people of colour as well. However, understanding white epistemologies in relation to resource inequality offers an explanation for this: with such acknowledgement of their interrelationship, it might be said that those who project race onto bodies they understand to be non-white are those who have a motivation to protect their resources of some kind. There are numerous scholars who have identified the existence of privileges associated with white skin, and this manifests in terms both of white self-perception and of the perception of white people by others. Some of the economic and social benefits of being white are discussed, for example, by George Lipsitz, who writes how

> Whiteness has a cash value: it accounts for advantages that come to individuals through profits made from housing secured in discriminatory markets, through the unequal educational opportunities available to children of different races, through insider networks that channel employment opportunities to the relatives and friends of those who have profited most from present and past racial discrimination, and especially through intergenerational transfers of inherited wealth that pass on the spoils of discrimination to succeeding generations (2018:v).

Here, Lipsitz points to how whiteness functions as an ongoing, intergenerational network of privilege: in these terms, white peoples' disproportionate and inherited

access to the means of social mobility allows for their children to benefit from the same.

While Lipsitz' project does not suggest this, it is important to note that whiteness cannot be reduced to its material consequences. Such is cautioned by Ladelle McWhorter, who notes a risk in whiteness studies of overly focusing on the 'economic metaphors of possession and distribution' over the 'political production of racial subjects' (2005:544). As such, and echoing Stuart Hall's aforementioned insights, the social, political and economic processes upholding racialisation need to be acknowledged in unison. Indeed a need to understand the social mechanisms underpinning whiteness are brought to light through a recognition that white people might not be conscious of their privileges or epistemological positioning. In other words, the instances in which white people *do* consciously think negatively towards non-white people might be explained in the terms of white supremacy as opposed to whiteness: as such, the psycho-social mechanisms in white people that allow such privileges to be both maintained and unrecognised need to be acknowledged in tandem with the economic disparities upheld. Zeus Leonardo writes about how the unconscious is a necessary explanatory factor in the construction of racialising epistemologies (2013). This is explained by Justin Grinage, who writes, 'The unconscious enables us to use the language of psychoanalysis to name these invisible inner forces working to oppress us, unbeknownst to our conscious selves, in relation to the outer forces functioning to achieve the same results' (2017:118). Here, Grinage distinguishes between conscious and unconscious kinds of racism, but suggests that they 'achieve the same results': as such, the unconscious nature of racialising epistemologies does not lessen their significance.

There have been significant studies which suggest that peoples' behavioural characteristics can serve both to indicate their whitened epistemological worldviews, and explain their motivations for upholding them. Thandeka's 'Learning to be White', for example, suggests that whiteness is characterised not only in its white racial self-constitution through its binarised categorisation in relation to non-whiteness, but also by individuals' binarised perceptions of their own moral worth

(1999). For Thandeka, whiteness is upheld by white individuals' need to see themselves as 'good': their conscious recognition of their role in upholding racism may elicit feelings of shame accompanied by denial in order to maintain their 'goodness' (ibid.). As Hunter elaborates,

> A revived academic interest in white shame is driven by the desire to better understand white identities as characterized by the interdependence of dominance and loss. It extends important work on whiteness as the strategic denial of privilege deployed to maintain social power [...]. Instead it views white disavowal as a sign of struggle to forget elements of the self which are in conflict with the desired image of self (2010:451).

Hunter's words offer continued insight into how white individuals' racisms might relate to whiteness as a structural formation: while the avoidance of shame might be a broader human propensity, it is white peoples' disproportionate access to economic and normative cultural capital that allows their emotional comfort to be both normalised and unscrutinised. In methodological terms, in its repressed state as suggested here, shame may be difficult to point towards. As such, omissions could be said to be as important as articulations in the study of racial attitudes in relation to Tate and its collections. That silence could be generative in its own right is acknowledged by Lisa Mazzei, who considers that there is great potential for a 'theorizing of silence [which] locates silence as "data," not as absence, lack, or omission, but as positive, strategic, purposeful, and meaning full' (2007:29). As such, this research strives, where possible, to surface where meaning remains hidden, and to understand the motivations behind such obscurement.

That the unconscious can serve to repress uncomfortable feelings is further given shape by Sara Ahmed, who suggests that individuals perceive their emotions to arise as a reaction, 'in the sense that what we do is shaped by the contact we have with others' (2004:4). However, emotions cannot be taken as evidence of an ostensibly neutral truth: 'how the feelings feel in the first place may be tied to a past history of readings, in the sense that the process of recognition (of this feeling, or that feelings) is bound up with what we *already* know' (2004:25). Here, Ahmed suggests that emotions are learned responses, but that they simultaneously have the appearance of immediacy. This provides a further elucidation of why individual white experiences might translate into a broader structure of whiteness: it is

individuals' lack of subjective self-understanding that aligns again with disproportionate economic and social resource allocation, to create a shared culture of racial normativity. In other words, while white emotional experiences may be subjective, other political and economic mechanisms render these subjectivities ostensibly objective. Indeed, Hunter links racial understanding in its social and emotional forms to this phenomenon of an 'affective network', building on Robert Hinshelwood's identification that an 'organisation can be viewed as an 'affective network' where 'channels of unconscious, non-symbolic communication are separate from, but intertwined with, the verbal and cognitive communication' (Hinshelwood 1989:77-78 in Hunter 2015:79). In these terms, whitened affect proliferates through its transfer between individuals: as such, Hunter and Hinshelwood offer an insight into how whiteness takes its structural form through emotional experiences and behaviours which, despite their white subjectivity, take on an objective broader appearance.

Given the possibility for emotions associated with white epistemological positioning to transfer, unrecognised, between individuals in the form of an 'affective network', whiteness might be signified through an emotional identity that is broader in scale than the individual. Scholars have explored how institutions can take on emotional identities of their own which, too, signify their collective racial positioning. Institutions' own emotional positioning in whiteness can, for Hunter, be suggested through attending to their Diversity and Inclusion policies:

> …multicultural claims to "value difference" and "work with diversity" constitute part of these relations of differential inclusion. Rather than presenting a straightforward challenge to the hierarchically ordered relations of racialized domination and subordination, these claims to liberal tolerance serve to reconfigure the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion through the creation of new categories of legitimate national and organizational belonging (2015:455).

As such, Tate's policy outcomes relating to its institutional position on race and racism may in themselves be determined by a shared epistemological positioning. 'Institutional Whiteness' finds that there is indeed some truth to this, but that these positions are highly regulated by the broader racial understandings of government and public alike. For David Theo Goldberg, similarly, an institutional proclamation

of liberalism may ironically point towards a marked intolerance of difference (1993:6-7). As such, institutional statements of anti-racist intent may not be decipherable on their own terms, but may conversely serve to conceal collective white shame.

## White Skin Objective Masks

I do not wish to collapse all kinds of white identity to my own experience, but I believe that there is an ethical need to recognise, as far as I am able, my own participation and investments in the concept. As suggested by numerous scholars, perhaps one of the most potent forms of whiteness is white peoples' tendency to point, with outrage and without self-reflection, to the racisms of others (Hunter 2015; Spanierman & Cabrera 2014). This is a tendency, indeed, that pervades this research: as 'Institutional Whiteness' details in particular, there are numerous instances of Tate staff implying simultaneously that 'whiteness is everywhere' but 'whiteness is over there'. Scholars have cautioned against the possibility for whiteness studies to reinforce the narcissism of white normativity (Hunter, Swan & Grimes 2010). However, an acknowledgement of my own subjectivities and their respective intersections with my light skin tone and white thinking is necessary both to put forward an argument that whiteness exists structurally and contrarily to white self-understanding, and to avoid unjustly blaming others for that which I too carry responsibility. Acknowledgement of my positioning is also necessary given that the premise of this thesis concerns the objectively-understood appearance of racialising epistemologies: I am unexceptional in terms of the extent to which I, as a white person, am inherently accommodating to whiteness as a concept: the chances of circumstance have strongly influenced me, and without these I reluctantly admit that I may have remained indifferent. Although I wish to be able to see and understand my whiteness, I know, too, that it is my whiteness that prevents me from knowing with certainty if I will ever achieve this.

Until ten years ago, at the age of 25, I knew I had white skin, but had never given much thought to what that might signify: I thought passively that I saw race, but nevertheless I didn't see my own. The significance of having white skin began to make itself apparent only when my partner's secondment to the Haitian government took us to live in Port-au-Prince. My recognition started in literal terms: I was a white person living in a Black majority, and I noted how much of an outsider I both felt and was assumed by others to be. I recognised, too, that I actually was

an outsider, and began to wonder what it felt like to be both British and a person of colour. I noticed that people often assumed at first glance that I was wealthy, an assumption that correctly correlated by skin tone with relative economic privilege. Over time, I began to understand some of the ways in which white people have historically been, and continue to be, responsible for Haiti's political, economic and social marginalisation. The country's ongoing political unrest results from its economic development having been impaired by an ostensible debt imposed on it by France upon independence: between 1825 and 1947, in return for diplomatic recognition, Haiti paid France what was in 2022 the equivalent of $560 million US dollars to compensate for property lost as a result of Haitian-won independence. This 'property' included enslaved Haitian people, whose enslavement had been calculatedly justified by racist ideology. It has been estimated that if that money had remained in Haiti's economy during that time, it would have facilitated the growth of $21 billion dollars (Porter et. al. 2022). While the direct obviousness of racism might be said to have shifted, the tragedies caused to Black lives by white racism are not confined to the past. France has never paid back to Haiti the money, a debt whose epistemological requirement said that said Black lives were property: the economics of white racism is responsible for an ongoing sabotage of infrastructure, opportunities and public services.

I personally experienced and witnessed some of the existential dangers caused by this lack of infrastructure. Some friends were in a horrific car accident because their car brakes failed on a mountain: MOTs, we learnt, are one such kind of infrastructure, and yet I had never before given even one thought to their importance. My partner and I were contacted, and it fell upon us to work out how to get a bag of blood for one friend's transfusion. For this, we had to go to a blood bank of an international NGO. Our panic and the fuss we made there had no effect: only when we had both waited our turn, time ticking constantly, first in line to donate then in the chairs watching our blood slowly fill the bags, would our two donations afford us one bag of blood in return. This we were advised to put in drinks ice which we hurriedly purchased from street vendors and put in an emptied bucket of cooking oil, so that we could frantically transport the blood to the doctors at the hospital waiting to save our friend's life, which they did. Judging from the

resignation of the NGO health workers and the doctors, all Haitian, our situation was sadly not unusual: national health services are another kind of infrastructure made non-existent by historic racism and its continuing economic legacy. So too is the expectation that even if something terrible happens, everything will be dealt with quickly, by someone else, behind the scenes. A couple of weeks later, one of my partner's Haitian colleagues[8] was severely injured by a gas explosion from a faulty canister he used to cook with; indeed, the same kind of canisters we had been using. Gas plumbing is yet another infrastructure. These incidents contributed so significantly to our diminishing sense of safety that (combined with my mother's death back home), we could no longer tolerate the existential uncertainties of living there. We had by any measure a difficult time, but nevertheless here is the privilege of being able to decide when enough is enough: a privilege that most Haitians are denied. We white people no longer wanted to live in a place rendered unsafe by white racism, and went home to live in a country whose wealth, like that of France, continues to derive from the historic extraction of Black labour.

When we arrived in Port-au-Prince, my partner's work paid for us to live in an extremely expensive house, chosen not by us but by his colleagues with whom we lived, and where we lived next door to the then- British ambassador to Haiti. Together, we shared a beautifully-maintained garden and swimming pool. I spent considerable time unemployed in that house, feeling extremely uncomfortable and guilty when the maids and gardeners, whom my partner's colleagues had chosen to employ, worked hard cleaning up around me during the daytimes while I myself had nothing to do but live (albeit unhappily) in luxury. I often locked myself in one room, in hindsight to not be confronted with the obviousness of the contrast between my white skin, leisure and proximity to money, and their dark skin and necessary hard work. The rest of the time I spent, paid generous consultant fees, in employment that I found variously problematic due to this same stark economic contrast made apparent by visible human difference: I worked, speaking very imperfect Kreyòl, teaching craft and construction techniques to Black rural artisans in the hope that they would be able to tap into a handicraft market. This market

[8] All people mentioned here have thankfully since recovered.

constituted one of very few possibilities for income given their lack of access to education, and their potential buyers were either not residing in the country at all, or were uniformly white, rich, missionaries whose presence in Haiti has contributed to the rendering taboo of its national religion, Vodou. Although I sometimes was generously received in their homes, I was too embarrassed to invite my artisan friends back to the place where I was living. I felt so uncomfortable in that place that my partner and I left to live somewhere less overtly plush–but comparatively luxurious nonetheless–and I felt much more at ease in my avoidance, again, of such close proximity to the structures of whiteness that while I had not chosen, I was nevertheless implicated within. But whether I chose to see them or not, these structures continued, and continue, to exist anyway.

Still, despite all of this hard evidence and the intensity of my affectively-known experiences, I understood whiteness in a relatively dissociated way and could not easily put my own positioning within the concept into words. Back in infrastructural safety in London, and compelled by these experiences to enrol on a postgraduate Postcolonial Studies course, my attention remained, though now fiercely motivated, for the most part externalised. This was until one Postcolonial Studies class in particular, where we were asked to discuss as a group Reni Eddo-Lodge's 'Why I'm no Longer Speaking to White People About Race' (2018). She writes,

> I just can't engage with the bewilderment and the defensiveness as they try to grapple with the fact that not everyone experiences the world in the way that they do. They've never had to think about what it means, in power terms, to be white, so any time they're vaguely reminded of this fact, they interpret it as an affront. 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, because they need to let you know that you've got it wrong (2018:6).

This was the moment I really recognised my whiteness for the first time: Eddo-Lodge had got me completely right. I thought, 'How dare she characterise me according to my skin? Isn't that the very prejudice she's advocating against? I care about equality!' Yet simultaneously, I could not deny that she knew exactly how I

reacted without needing to meet me. I also could not deny that my reactions were starkly different to those of my co-students of colour, who nodded with the same kind of resignation that the Haitian doctors had shown.

In the years following, I learnt that I can claim every single one of the privileges Peggy McIntosh described in 'White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack' (1989). Most relevantly, in terms of the present project, I can attest that

> When I am told about our national heritage or about "civilization," I am shown that people of my color made it what it is. [...] I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group. [...] I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behavior without being seen as a cultural outsider. [...] I can expect figurative language and imagery in all of the arts to testify to experiences of my race (1989:1).

Despite having strongly identified, growing up, with cultural influences that were largely white and cisheteromale (personal favourites were the bands Red Hot Chili Peppers and artists including Jan Svankmajer and Tim Hawkinson); despite living in a multi-ethnic neighbourhood in London and having friends of colour; despite my Dad's profession leading me to spend time as a child in Cuba, Ukraine and Russia, I didn't see a need to question my assumptions that the significance and appeal of my preferences were universal. I remember having had as a teenager conversations with a friend in which I stated that I was glad to be British, because, simply, it 'was' the best place to be born. This ingrained sense of cultural superiority that I must have held is now disturbing to me, but it suggests that, despite my then- self-understanding as open minded and receptive to inequality, I had inherited the very same kinds of tacit, pervasive and normative ideals of Britishness that I attempt to deconstruct in this research. Acknowledging this past gulf between my confident self-understanding and my casual, culturally blinkered sense of superiority means I cannot now ever be certain of the assumptions I continue to carry: this is an epistemological position I try to maintain, but not always successfully.

The privileges associated with how my white skin is seen more broadly have both sheltered me from harm and contributed towards my success, but in ways that

are perhaps only possible to see through counterfactual evidence of the comparative experiences of people not racialised as white. While undertaking this research has certainly required determination, I cannot say that I have needed to be single-minded in pursuing this normatively sanctioned educational status: the inconsistent motivation that characterises what is (to my mind very problematically[9]) labelled Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder has not affected me as much as statistics demonstrate it does for those, especially males, in the carceral system (Justice Inspectorates 2021) Those imprisoned are also disproportionately people of colour. As such, I believe that the social and economic dimensions of my 'whitened' positioning have insulated me from the ramifications of tendencies towards risky behaviours that ADHD can entail: in short, despite occasional, albeit minor, lapses in judgement, I have likely been perceived as deserving of the benefit of the doubt. I will have been the third successive generation in my family to obtain a degree at doctoral level, despite having only considered this as a possibility when I applied for the studentship resulting in the present thesis. While I was surprised to be awarded the opportunity, educational attainment figures suggest a likelihood that parents' educational status plays a significant role in influencing students' self belief (Adamecz-Volgyi, Henderson & Shure 2021). While my parents experienced tight times financially, they nevertheless managed to follow through in their choice to send me to a private school, whose students were disproportionately white. In other words, while I claim some ownership of my efforts, I also believe that my access to these various economic and social intergenerationally-accrued privileges statistically associated with white skin have both influenced my success and the likelihood that I am socially and financially rewarded.

This acknowledgement that I may not be able to claim full responsibility for my efforts and successes is an uncomfortable one to make. As a person, I am motivated by a wish to be seen as deserving, and as a scholar, I am invested in presenting an argument that is legitimate. Within the paradigms of academia, too, I understand that the latter is at least broadly expected of doctoral candidates: that

[9] My good friend Vishal Chauhan coined the alternative term, PAAG ('Passion Attunement Attention Gift' as a way of demonstrating the equal value of different neurotypes.

an argument can be made through a presentation of evidence is too, I believe, its own kind of subjective epistemological positioning made to have an appearance of objectivity, and one with which I have chosen to cooperate. Such is noted by (white) whiteness scholars Shona Hunter, Elaine Swan and Diane Grimes, who write, '...the relationship between critical race theory and critical whiteness studies is never straightforward, precisely because normative academic practices, knowledges, and ways of knowing are themselves racialized and as desirous of whiteness as the lives and practices of those we engage with through our academic work' (2020:411-2). In other words, I know from my own experience that there is much at stake in maintaining meritocratic appearances, and to admit otherwise feels uncomfortably raw and exposing. I am deliberately centering my whitened experience here because what it demonstrates is an individual instance of a motivation that this thesis shows is shared endemically, and which obscures an acknowledgement of structural inequality: that, like others I point towards in this study, I wish to be perceived as knowledgeable, deserving and progressive despite my access to unearned privileges that contribute to my success situates me as equally responsible as those who I point towards in this study. Here, too, in this thesis, is an instance whereby a white individual (me) is able to access the means by which subjective knowledge is claimed and disseminated, potentially to a broader public, in objective terms.

There are some reasons why I do believe, now that I have got here, that I may be unusually invested in pursuing an understanding of whiteness as a discourse despite my white identity, but this is not to claim exceptionalism: after all, as I have detailed, I have often chosen to prioritise my own safety and comfort in a way that the people of colour in my life have not been able, and it took a prolonged and often incidental presentation of undeniable evidence for me to even recognise that whiteness applies to me. As such, perhaps the biggest symbolic indicator of my whiteness is that I never thought of it until I physically experienced being a racial other. Nevertheless, for other reasons, aspects of my identity may have helped. I suspect, without certainty, that the intersection between my cisgendered female identity and being both neurodivergent and hard of hearing has influenced the intensity with which I view the patriarchal logic which has intricately structured

my existence. I see with rageful clarity, for example, that, even in some of my closest relationships, I am expected to be ‘nice’ rather than ‘real’: my whiteness is represented by the fact that I do not connect to the same intensity of emotion about racial inequality, despite the importance I place onto this in cognitive terms. Perhaps however, but only once I recognised whiteness in the first place, these intersections have contributed to my abilities in identifying correlations between the languages of normativity which uphold patriarchal and white structures respectively. Being neurodivergent and hard of hearing means that I have a lesser ability to trust my senses, and an innate need to add greater layers of interpretation to what I perceive: as neurodivergent, I often experience other peoples’ logic to be (like whiteness) at times stark, dominantly-enforced and illogical; as hard of hearing, I have to look closely at body language and facial expressions to fill in where I don’t hear. While I do, perhaps, have an innate need for self-questioning, this still does not necessarily accord with being able to recognise whiteness: still now, I am occasionally confronted with my own racialising assumptions and continue to be surprised that they exist even though I know this to be a fact. I continue to feel all of the emotions associated with whiteness that are discussed throughout the thesis, and like those who I point to, do not always catch myself before externalising these feelings. Lastly, and as shown by my experiences in Haiti and in my choice to leave, I still have a greater choice than my peers of colour to stop engaging with whiteness if I want to, a point put succinctly by race scholars Zeus Leonardo and Michalinos Zemblyas: ‘Whereas whites have the ability to put themselves in harm’s way within the anti-racist project, minorities rarely have the power to voluntarily choose to experience discursive violence. People of color have no recourse for an alibi. They are guilty bodies’ (2013:157).

# Visual

The section ‘Exploring Whiteness and Establishing a Methodology’ discussed the relationship between sight and the imag(in)ing of racial constructs, and how the unrecognised gulfs between them might be understood to intersect with uneven access to economic and normative social capital along the lines of racialised identity. Whiteness was positioned as a structural formation acting as both cause and effect of the racial disparities of these respective categories. The methodological proposition was, as such, that due to their historic and ongoing intersections with capital accumulation, the epistemological positioning of dominant lookers has historically excluded Britons of colour from accessing the means by which aesthetic sensibilities and British citizenship can be normatively evaluated. In other words, the evaluations of Britons of colour regarding these points have been structurally and systematically overlooked, and this overlooking has been retrospectively justified by the same evaluations that elevated white Britons in the first place. In turn, ‘Exploring Whiteness’ hypothesised that these epistemological values, or ‘frames’, thereby become either embedded within the formal properties of artworks, or projected onto them by subsequent viewers, or both. The directionality of influence in terms of racial framing was discussed: whether or not it can be understood that the viewer unconsciously ‘receives’ such framing from the artwork, or whether or not they project onto it—or both directionalities—was a point of debate. Determining the directionality of sight in relation to artworks is crucially significant in the context of Tate, because the institution’s public communications of its vision allows for a public perception of its ability to influence thinking about art: if racialised sight is a form of projection by the viewer, even in combination with a sight that is ‘received’ by the viewer, this complicates Tate’s claims to influence set out in the introduction. In the context of surfacing whiteness, the efficacy of considering artworks as discrete entities of study in their own right was explored, and the methodologies of formalism and contextualism were defined as being to some extent indicative of epistemological positions in their own right, but ones that have not always been wholly recognised as such within art historical practice.

This section, ‘Visual’, is split into two parts: ‘Portrait’ and ‘Landscape’. Together, they explore and test the methodological themes introduced in ‘Exploring Whiteness’ to see how they can be applied in action. In contrast to the section ‘Institutional Whiteness’, both ‘Portrait’ and ‘Landscape’ begin with artworks as their points of departure. One key formal difference between the artworks, discernible from the outset, provides the first clue into the respective directions each case study takes. While the subject of ‘Portrait’, Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s ‘The Beloved’, (1864-5) overtly centres a representation of human bodies, Richard Wilson’s ‘Llyn-y-Cau’ (c.1765-7), the subject of ‘Landscape’, does not. As such, the balancing of the methodological approaches introduced in ‘Exploring Whiteness’ necessarily look very different in each. The choice to focus in ‘Landscape’ on an artwork less immediately representative of the human form is a deliberate one, and the rationale for this decision is succinctly outlined by Martin Berger, describing his own methodological premise:

> [...] In illuminating the value systems that informed the meaning of genre paintings and adventure films populated exclusively with white characters, and landscape photographs and fine arts museums containing no human beings at all, Sight Unseen argues that a decidedly racialized perspective animated even those cultural products most removed from racial concerns (2005:2).

As such, the two parts of this ‘Visual’ section are intended to provide a contrasting, but ultimately mutually reinforcing interrogation into the question of whether or not whiteness can be visually determined as a formal quality of artworks.

**Figure 1**: Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Beloved* (1865-6). Photo: Tate

# Portrait

## Introduction

‘Portrait’ cross references the visually determinable markers of physical difference as represented in Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s ‘The Beloved’ (1864-5) with primary evidence documenting how its viewers have historically constructed race in relation to it, in order to locate and account for possible conceptual gaps between seeing and imag(in)ing in the period between the painting’s making and its current display. The case study begins with a discussion of art historian Griselda Pollock’s analysis of the mechanisms of patriarchal canonicity. Pollock’s analysis identifies the themes of universalism, connoisseurship, exclusion and inheritance as definitive factors in the processes of artwork canonisation, all of which factors are then discussed throughout this section in relation to Rossetti as an individual, to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood of which he was a member, and to the artwork itself. As is true of the thesis as a whole, a recognition of whiteness as a structural formation, as opposed to an individualised issue, is central to this section. As such, ‘Portrait’ draws upon Pollock’s insights as well as from the analyses of racial capitalism discussed in ‘Exploring Whiteness’ to determine whether and how the aesthetic preferences of Rossetti and his followers can be said to intersect with broader structural inequalities in the form of wealth distribution and privileged social networks. Given his roles in both financing and determining the formal qualities of ‘The Beloved’, particular attention is given to Rossetti’s longtime patron, banker George Rae and his projections of desire that take root within the work. Through exploration of these variously multifaceted and multidirectional teleologies of sight and meaning attribution, ‘Portrait’ tests the efficacy of the methodologies of white vision set out by Mirzoeff and (Martin) Berger, as discussed in ‘Exploring Whiteness’, and ultimately proposes that whiteness functions through the tacit epistemologies established through the painting’s mediation of a dialectic between artist, patron and viewer.

Alongside its necessarily structural nature, another key construction of whiteness that 'Portrait' foregrounds, as in the entirety of the thesis, is its characteristic of being broadly unconsciously-held. These points are both crucial in distinguishing the particular contribution of this study in the context of existing analyses of race within the works of Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and in 'The Beloved' more specifically. Of this existing scholarship, most notable, perhaps, is art historian Matthew Rarey's ' "And the *Jet* Would Be Invaluable": Blackness, Bondage, and *The Beloved*' (2020), which offers compelling insights into Rossetti's understandings of Blackness as a racial category as represented within the painting. Despite some similarities between this project and that of Rarey regarding the subject matter and its approach, the methodology I am attempting to advocate for is nevertheless different: Rarey offers an important and observant analysis of the ways in which Rossetti's constructions of race can be determined from the formal qualities of 'The Beloved.' While 'Portrait', indeed, is indebted to Rarey's scholarship in this regard, it also argues that to contain whiteness as a criteria of study whose parameters are defined by the painting's visual qualities is to quarantine whiteness as a matter which can be resolved through the politics of visual representation alone. In other words, in order to acknowledge the functioning of whiteness as a structure, it is necessary to understand *how* and *why* these visual representations of race that Rarey deftly analyses have come to be commonsensically enshrined within British aesthetic and national discourse. As such, Rarey's focus on the artist as sole producer of meaning does not account for why Rossetti's vision of race has been so widely accepted by his followers. Nor does an exploration of Rossetti's overt racism explain the ways in which whiteness may operate unconsciously. As such, 'Portrait' focuses on how racialised meanings are produced both dialogically and often unintentionally, and upheld by broader economic and social mechanisms which canonise 'The Beloved.'

While whiteness, as will be argued, is not defined alone by the formal qualities of 'The Beloved', the discussion that will follow nevertheless can be said to derive, in different ways, from the artwork as a starting point. Similarly, while this section asserts the methodological need to decentre the artist as sole producer of meaning, it may be difficult to grasp viewers' inferences without first attending to

some key biographical details of artist and artwork alike. Dante Gabriel Rossetti was born in London in 1828, sibling to poet Christina, critic William Michael, and author Maria Francesca, and the son of Italian scholar Gabriele Rossetti and British-Italian educator Frances Polidori. In 1848, Rossetti co-founded the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood with artist peers including John Everett Millais and William Holman Hunt: together, their artworks, mainly paintings, became widely known for their themes of romanticised medieval revivalism. Rossetti painted 'The Beloved', the central subject of this section, in 1865-6. The oil painting depicts six individuals whose racial categories have been differentially allocated meaning throughout the artwork's lifetime. The painting's title refers to a central figure with light skin, who is deliberately counterposed with a young child with dark skin. It is the differences between subsequent readings of the relative moral characterisations of these two representations in particular that inform the discussion of whiteness in 'Portrait'. This artwork was prominently featured by Paul Gilroy in the brochure to *Picturing Blackness in British Art, 1700s – 1900s*, in which he writes how the display's selected artworks 'can only hint at the larger processes in which images of black people […] were produced to explore perception, colour and beauty, to investigate identity, humanity, nationality and morality and to determine the status of difference itself' (Gilroy 1995:2). It was Gilroy's choice to feature this artwork, and Tate's own longstanding use of Rossetti's artwork's more broadly for marketing purposes – as will be explored – that informed the decision to focus on 'The Beloved' here: 'Portrait' strives to offer a continuation of Gilroy's project by examining these articulations and interpretations of racial difference with particular attention to whether and how whiteness is constructed as an ostensibly elevated racial category.

## Patriarchal Canon Formation

An understanding of the mechanisms by which artworks attain normative status is particularly pertinent to this thesis, given its specific focus on Tate: as discussed in 'Exploring Whiteness', Tate holds and continues to expand the national collection

of British art from 1500 to the present day and international modern and contemporary art. As such, there is the potential for two of the conceptual gaps between sight and imag(in)ing to be presented, both of which are significant to 'Portrait': firstly, what could reductively be called the assortment of physical objects that form Tate's collection have come from somewhere, and somehow been considered as worthy of the public's 'understanding' and 'enjoyment' as artworks. Secondly, although Tate's own stance regarding how Britishness relates to its collections is wide-reaching, there is nevertheless the potential for visitors to associate its collections with national identity: while Tate writes that 'British art is represented by artists chosen for their contribution to its history and development, rather than their nationality alone' (Tate 2024a), this is a definition that eludes many, as exemplified by one editorial comment in *The Telegraph,* titled 'Custodians of our culture conspire in its destruction' (Grant 2023). The matter of significance here is that it is often unknown exactly why the objects are seen to epitomise (or not), or deserve (or not) the status of British. It is often just apparently 'known' to be true, as attested here and by critics' responses to Tate's curatorial strategies as noted in the introduction. There is much at stake in deviating from these collectively-held perceptions of aesthetic and national value, as together they constitute what was referred to in the introduction as Gramsci's 'predetermined teleology': couched in common-sense terms, these perceptions, which are rooted in broader political and cultural discourse, signal an epistemological position regarding Britishness and its ostensible link to white identities.

That artworks' situation in a collections context is the product of canonic forces is by no means a revelation in art history. For the purposes, however, of understanding how whiteness surfaces, it is nevertheless necessary to understand how and why such common-sense 'knowledge' of what is good (and not) and what is British (and not) comes into being and influences perceptions of artworks' meaning. Whether or not 'The Beloved' constitutes good art, or even art at all, and whether or not it is emblematic of Britishness are not the questions of study here. Rather, the questions are how and why it is, and became to be, *seen* as worthy of these distinctions. The purpose of answering these questions is to pinpoint the masked but nevertheless present epistemological positioning of the various

individuals responsible for the production of meaning relating to ‘The Beloved.’ The methodological hypothesis set out in ‘Exploring Whiteness’ was that whiteness exists as a gulf in the looker between sight (in this case, of the objects known as artworks) and imag(in)ing of race. Whiteness, too, and its association with normative British identity, was conceptualised as often unconsciously-held. This means that the various producers of meaning–artist, patron and viewers alike–cannot necessarily recognise the extent of any gulf between what they see and what they think they see in terms of race. To locate whiteness in this context, it is necessary to locate the assumptions that are being made with regards to aesthetic and national worth, because these are the very same values that may be taken-for-granted as true, whether by Tate or by the public, or both.

The work of feminist art historians has been substantial in deconstructing the dialectics of power contributing to the historical formation of canonical artworks. These insights are useful in pointing towards how subjective aesthetic preferences and epistemological positions come to occupy positions of cultural normativity, but, instead, with particular focus on social constructions of gender. Art Historian Griselda Pollock proposes ‘that the canon should be understood as both a discursive structure and a structure of masculine narcissism within the exercise of cultural hegemony’ (1999:xiv). Drawing from similar language of psychoanalysis to the theorists on white discursive formation, Pollock presents the normative cultural position as one that is self-absorbed to the point of excluding that which it does not recognise: in this case, its own construct of femininity as a discrete, oppositional binary. That the ‘masculine narcissism’ of which Pollock speaks is all-powerful despite its subjectivity is pointed towards in its culturally hegemonic, structural character. So too, Pollock describes how the canon serves to uphold ‘the idea of naturally revealed, universal value and individual achievement’ but simultaneously ‘denies any selectivity’: here, the gulf between artworks and the subjective value that is placed on them is emphasised, through recognition of the distinct framings that serve to justify their importance (1999:4). These epistemological positions Pollock identifies as perceptions of artists as naturally gifted, universally important, and solely responsible for their own success. All of these positions are present in abundance in terms of how Rossetti and his artworks have been, and continue to

be, perceived by his followers. Following Pollock's line of enquiry, the question remains how these epistemological markers of canonisation relate particularly to how lookers construct notions of race.

Canonical artforms themselves come to be seen as benchmarks of normativity, thus starting a closed, circular economy of cultural legitimation by which those already excluded continue to be excluded. In the instance of 'Portrait' and its manifestations of whiteness, such exclusion relates to the extent to which people of colour have historically been likely in a broader social sense to have the economic and normative social means by which claims to Britishness and aesthetic worth can be legitimised. For Pollock, investment in the canon is inextricably linked to status, and functions as a means by which individuals can signal their ostensible refinement and education (1998:3). Rossetti himself was highly educated, and thus, while the extent to which he benefited from economic wealth is contested, his wealth in social terms is nevertheless apparent. He was able, through the education he had access to, to speak to a language of bohemian refinement that was valued by his followers, and which enabled his success. The wish in art viewers to be seen as educated, too, presents an important distinction between art objects themselves and the values that are placed upon them, and offers a potential correlation between sight, social status and investment into normative ideals of British identity: if, as Pollock suggests, to accord with the canon is to be granted entry into a distinguished social status, and given too, as Mike Savage suggested in the introduction to this thesis that canonised culture aligns with a collective national ideal, then it follows that to be invested in the canon means to thereby accept (or at least signal acceptance) as valid the ideals of taste, Britishness and its intersections with race accepted within broader cultural discourse.

Importantly, to do so, those who wish to signal themselves as refined through alignment with the canon are required to overlook what they themselves might see in artworks in order to conform with these broader discourses of looking. These broader discourses, couched in aesthetic terms, are those of connoisseurship. Thus, a wish to be seen by others as a connoisseur might

indicate an investment, or at least the appearance of such, in the 'predetermined teleologies' of (white) Britishness. Indeed, this is the case with regards to the reception of Rossetti's works by his followers: as will be explored, Rossetti's name was used to signal aesthetic sensibility even by those who had never seen his work. As such, Rossetti's ostensible worth can not necessarily be accounted for by sight, but instead by these factors of imag(in)ing. The language of connoisseurship, as we shall see, is that which positions sight, nevertheless, as ostensibly axiomatic, and thus functions as a means by which the epistemological positions associated with investments into the British canon are rendered obscured. As such, these canons, in Pollock's words, come to be 'the retrospectively legitimating backbone of a cultural and political identity', in that they come to signal inclusion into the discourses of archetypal British identity, with all the necessary aesthetic sensibilities that accompany it (1998:3). This common-sense positioning of cultural legitimacy in turn makes the processes that instate it all the harder to see.

In methodological terms, Pollock's description of canonisation could substitute 'masculine' for 'white' and sound similar to the characterisations of whiteness as 'structurally parasitic' as termed by George Yancy (in Blight 2019:192). One important difference, however, can be determined from Pollock's understanding that canons 'actively create a patrilineal genealogy of father-son succession and replicate patriarchal mythologies of exclusively masculine creativity' (Pollock 1999:5). In such a description, the identities associated with patriarchal canon formation are ascribed essential identities. Whether or not gender categories can be considered fixed or polar is itself contested, but is outside the scope of this thesis. However, as explored in the Methods and Structure section, to 'be white', or in Shona Hunter's terms '*whitened*', can be considered a function of individuals' epistemological worldview rather than (at least necessarily) inextricably linked with essential bodily traits (2010:454). With this distinction, Pollock's analysis remains useful in its observation that while the subjective ideological positionings associated with dominance have an ostensibly neutral appearance, they gain force through intergenerationally reproduced lineages of disparity. This bears resemblance, too, to Faiza Shaheen's previously discussed analysis of how the cultural norms associated with class inequality are

inherited over successive generations as explored in the introduction: as such, these patterns of inheritance–of wealth, aesthetic preferences, social signalling represented by connoisseurship, and perceptions of Britishness–can be understood as the intersecting, determining features of canonisation and represent a linkage into the present of historic inequalities.

In the case of 'The Beloved', however, the relatively overt constructs of (in this instance cishetero-) femininity that, as we shall see, legitimise what Pollock calls 'masculine narcissism' as a determinant of meaning relies in turn upon more covert epistemologies of normative racial judgement to uphold them. This is certainly not to criticise Pollock, who indeed explicitly acknowledges the importance of an intersectional approach to understanding the processes that bolster canon formation (1999:4). Rather, it is to say that the application of a feminist methodology does not in itself necessarily lead to the deconstruction of the role of whiteness in canonisation and meaning production. The broader need for intersectional feminisms, in the contexts both of disciplinary cultural analysis and in broader public discourse has been widely and necessarily attended to in particular by feminist scholars of colour, who draw attention to the epistemological positionings and limitations of so-called feminism,[10] epitomised by its own disciplinary claims to white universalism. As 'Portrait' will explore, the meaning that is *overtly* derived from 'The Beloved' by its viewers is one whereby a normative cisheteropatriarchal relationship is established between the central white bride within the painting and those who look at it. As letters between Rossetti and Rae attest, together with critical interpretations of the painting - including those of Tate, this meaning was clearly, widely and consciously understood by those who admired 'The Beloved.' While, as such, this fantasy construction of white cisheterofemininity has been widely accepted by its viewers, so too have the constructions of race that serve ostensibly to bolster the beauty, chastity and purity of the central bride figure. These constructions, however, and the racialising evaluative hierarchies they signify, have not been overtly recognised by those

[10] See, for example, bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (London: Pluto, 1982); The Combahee River Collective Statement (1977) http://circuitous.org/scraps/combahee.html.

same people whose sexual desire is made manifest within the work. The gulf between what can be seen in 'The Beloved' in terms of race, and how it has been (and continues to be) seen, constitutes the covert framings of whiteness. These framings both demonstrate the limitations of white feminism, and serve to silently canonise the artwork and the racisms of its producers of meaning.

## White Meritocracy, Britishness, Universality and Connoisseurship

In 'Exploring Whiteness', it was discussed how Nicholas Mirzoeff and Martin Berger both suggested, implying different nuances in terms of the directionality of influence within the vision entailed, that the viewers' readings of artworks relate to a broader, collective and unconsciously-held reservoir of white experiences and understanding. These insights suggest that the way in which artworks' formal qualities are experienced and understood by their viewers is determined to some extent by external forces. The potential for the subjective understandings in their followers of the Pre-Raphaelites to be a generative site of study in its own right has been suggested by art historians Michaela Giebelhausen and Tim Barringer, who write, 'we are concerned with reputations and with assessments of merit, individual and collective […]. …[W]e aim to unravel the complex implications of Pre-Raphaelite myth-making in the past and in the present, of what it meant and continues to mean to be writing the Pre-Raphaelites' (2009:2-3). That the meanings of Rossetti's artworks, specifically, have been and continue to be influenced by factors outside of their formal and physical parameters is suggested by Pre-Raphaelite scholar Barrie Bullen, who speaks of the 'totemic power' of artworks - in other words, their tendency to trigger responses in their viewers which, despite their appearance and claim of being lodged on aesthetic grounds, in fact reveal wider social anxieties and patterns outside of the work itself (Bullen 1998:2). Here, Bullen suggests both that artwork meanings shift according to context, and that viewers' allegiance to particular aesthetic sensibilities might obscure deeper social mechanisms at play. As such, attending to the specific contexts in which artworks are shown might tell us much about how they have

been historically perceived. Such an observation brings to mind historian Nell Irvin Painter's suggestion that whiteness fluctuates, expanding and contracting in its various expressions, over time (2010). It is the shifting public perceptions towards the nature and significance of race, nationalism and aesthetic preference that, thus affect the meanings of artworks at that particular point in time. As art historians Tim Barringer, Jason Rosenfeld and Alison Smith wrote, 'each generation has reinvented the Pre-Raphaelites in its own image' (2012:16). Whether or not this meaning then sticks to the artwork in its continuing display is in some ways a philosophical question, but nevertheless one that this thesis as a whole grapples with.

A specific example of broader British political context having influenced the meaning of Pre-Raphaelite works in the context of Tate is offered by art historian Deborah Cherry. Cherry suggests that, culminating in the 1984 Tate exhibition 'The Pre-Raphaelites', there was a trend from the 1960s onwards whereby the Pre-Raphaelites were presented increasingly as artists rather than designers, and seeks to explore why this might have been the case: 'What then did the figure of the artist as painter offer, and why was it so compelling for the Tate exhibition? Whereas accounts of design spoke about co-operative activity and production processes, a focus on fine artists reinforced narratives of individual genius, solitary creativity, and art as self-expression.' (Cherry 2009:21). For Cherry, the ways in which the artists were presented in the exhibition should be contextualised within a broader, though nevertheless not unified, spirit of enthusiasm for Thatcherite politics of 'self-help and individual endeavour' (2009:40). These qualities, as explored in the introduction to this thesis, and spoken of in the context of Tate, too, by staff interviewed in 'Institutional Whiteness', have specific implications in terms of how race is understood, and the extent to which racism is perceived to be an issue. Inherent within this kind of discourse on social virtue and opportunity is a distinct epistemological position with a common-sense appearance: a meritocratic, 'pull yourself up by your bootstraps' framing whereby everybody can be successful if they only try hard enough. As evidenced by the data methods of the current (also Conservative) government's recent 'Race and Ethnic Disparities' report (2021), such a framing has a profound resonance in terms of whether or not racial disparity

is understood by the public as intersecting with economic disparity. Tate's influence, albeit quite possibly unconscious, on its viewers' derivation of meaning is important here: the implication from its framing of the Pre-Raphaelites as individual geniuses is that its members *did* pull themselves up by their bootstraps, and did not benefit from unequally distributed privileges. ('Portrait' finds evidence to the contrary.) Given the absence of any people of colour (or indeed, women) in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Tate's framing of heroism could be seen to reinforce the Pre-Raphaelites' common-sense stake in British canonicity, and to disregard the role that their racial positionings might have played in their ongoing success.

Cherry's analysis evidences Tate's potential influence in determining how visitors understand artworks, but it is unclear thus far where Tate's subjective but commonsensical framings of the Pre-Raphaelites themselves stem from. Were the curators aware of how the subjectivity of their framings invoked broader discursive tropes? What factors influenced their own curatorial practice? Indeed, was this interpretation something imposed by the curators, or was there something about that epoch that caused exhibition-goers, including Cherry, to read these framings into the works? These uncertainties that remain following Cherry's analysis direct attention towards the various points at which ostensible knowledge and the epistemologies it conceals is both claimed and passed on between individuals. Somewhere along this chain of knowledge transference, maybe even long before the exhibition, it was established that the Pre-Raphaelites were responsible for their own success. Somehow, the role of their inherited privileges was overlooked. Even, perhaps, their privileges could not be more broadly recognised by those who were invested in their artworks. What was inherited, however, was a teleological acceptance of the Pre-Raphaelites' ostensibly objective value. Tate's claiming, as highlighted in the thesis introduction, of an ability to influence its visitors' critical understanding of artworks, here needs to be revisited: certainly, Cherry's analysis suggests that in the instance of the 1984 exhibition, Tate may well have influenced, or perhaps reinforced, the epistemological lens through which exhibition-goers viewed the Pre-Raphaelites' works. However, what is not clear is whether or not this was consciously done. Somewhere in the object biographies of these artworks, or in the biographies of these artists, the subjective aesthetic preferences of Pre-

Raphaelite fans have merged with aesthetic and national canonicity, and the subjectivities thereby rendered submerged. That the Pre-Raphaelites' works could be looked at and their value perceived as ostensibly self-evident constitutes the very gulf between sight taken as axiomatic and imag(in)ing, where whiteness lives.

It is unclear exactly where canonisation begins. It is, however, possible to locate multiple, parallel instances whereby artworks' meanings have been subject to influence by factors external to their formal qualities. Cherry pointed towards Tate's ability to influence the meaning of Pre-Raphaelite artworks, but, as noted, the extent to which its curatorial mediation was conscious remains uncertain. Given the possibility for such mediation of meaning to be unconscious, the broader spheres of influence to which Tate is answerable also provide a necessary context for the readings of the artworks the gallery displays. An acknowledgment of the economic pressures exerted upon Tate at the time of the 1984 exhibition suggests that some of the epistemological positionings espoused by Thatcher's administration were upheld out of necessity in parts of the gallery beyond the realm of artwork representation. The individualist framing as perceived by Cherry within the exhibition itself was present, too, in Tate's response to Conservative free market policies, whereby a reduction in public funding pressurised national public entities, including Tate, to act increasingly like competitive, self-sustaining, profit-making businesses (Dewdney et. al. 2013).

To ease the resulting fiscal deficit, then- Tate director Alan Bowness searched for alternative means of funding, and found it in the form of multinational company Pearson, whose sponsorship of the 1984 Pre-Raphaelite exhibition was one of Tate's earliest corporate partnerships (Brauer 1985:35). A year later, Tate convened a conference, titled 'What Price Arts Sponsorship', which discussed concerns resulting from these shifts in funding from public to private, fearing that 'a resistance to radicalism' would ensue, asking, 'could those missing out on sponsorship be those who most need it?' (ibid.). As such, it is not only the political realms of ideological framing that influence Tate's mediation of the meaning experienced by its viewers, but also the economic: here, political pressure to turn to private forms of funding, in line with the Conservative ideals of meritocratic

endeavour this time on an institutional scale, is equated with less freedom for more radical forms of representation. That Tate's situation within a broader political and economic context shapes its mode of representation is a key finding, too, of 'Institutional Whiteness.'

As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, notably in reference to the observations of Paul Gilroy and Stuart Hall, the extent to which artworks conform with the public ('whitened') majority's perceptions of legitimate Britishness align intricately with an ostensibly commonsensical ideal of mythical, uniquely white claims to national narratives. Although not necessarily the case at the beginning of the artists' careers, Pre-Raphaelite artworks have long been perceived as having an objectively and distinctly British aesthetic sensibility. When taken on its own terms as an ostensibly formalist quality of artworks, aesthetic sensibility, as argued throughout this thesis, can be understood as a code word that suggests the presence of axiomatic sight. Art historians Laurel Bradley and Julie Codell each locate different points at which the Pre-Raphaelites came to be widely positioned as quintessentially and symbolically British, with Bradley suggesting their ascendancy can be traced to the global fairs of the 1850s and 1860s, and Codell pointing towards the later 1908 Franco-British exhibition (Bradley 1997:199, Codell 1997). In some instances, Pre-Raphaelite artworks have been even overtly mobilised as a means to justify English superiority in its claims to colonial power. This, too, is noted by Bradley, who observes how they were 'offered up as evidence that English culture bore golden fruit; and that the success of English art was rooted in the very traits that created England a world power' (1997:199). Here, it is indicated that viewers perceived the Pre-Raphaelites' works to be able to speak for themselves: in this case, the ostensibly visibly axiomatic significance of the artworks' aesthetic and national worth enabled a justification of English superiority. Given the continuing British pursuit of colonial domination and the persistence of racialising ideology in broader discourse at that time, and given, too, the predominantly white skinned bodies represented within Pre-Raphaelite artworks, it is not a stretch to believe that the British ideal seen in the artworks was a white one.

As such, while the perceived representational values of the artworks may be influenced by the broader political and economic discourse they are situated in, they have the potential to be appropriated as a means to influence such discourse as well. While these scholars do not concur when the canonisation exactly began, what is importantly agreed upon is that enshrinement in the name of a definably British aesthetic did happen. Given the continuing contemporary ascription of value to Pre-Raphaelite works by Tate, this latter point is what matters: whiteness is represented by the uncritical reception and dissemination of this teleology of vision, and although a knowledge of the teleology's provenance helps to explain why whiteness might have taken root, it is nevertheless not required to indicate its presence. To this day, Rossetti's works could be said to be presented by Tate as emblematic both of Britishness and aesthetic achievement through their featured use in marketing material. One such example is the longstanding featuring of the artist's white-skinned 'Proserpine' prominently enlarged and displayed on one of the flags welcoming visitors into the Tate Britain site, though this is frequently paired with representations of Black figures from artworks by Black contemporary British artists Chris Ofili and Lynette Yiadom-Boakye. Whether or not the gallery's policy of diversification as a representational strategy can be considered successful in terms of addressing whiteness is the subject of 'Institutional Whiteness'.

For now, that Tate's top selling postcard is a reproduction of 'Ophelia' (1851-2) by Rossetti's Pre-Raphaelite colleague, John Everett Millais, attests to a public enthusiasm for Pre-Raphaelite imagery, and one which translates into tangible revenue for the gallery, further evidencing, if in this case a relatively minor way, that white representation intersects with economic factors (Tate 2024g). In isolation, the observation that a group of white artists have been positioned as a British ideal, and continue to be appreciated as such by the public does not in itself (necessarily) point to whiteness. However, that the continuing perception of their aesthetic and national value as objective, despite the privileges they enjoyed which will be discussed shortly, does. So too does the fact that the Pre-Raphaelites have no counterparts of colour occupying similar positions of British canonicity: were it true that there were artists of colour of the same period who are attributed the

same canonical status, then the alignment of white skin with meritocratic aesthetic brilliance and common-sense national importance would be unsettled. Thus, while the representational strategy of pairing together contemporary Black British artists with historic white ones might make Tate appear to be more inclusive, it does not necessarily negate the presence of whiteness as a canonising force. The argument for whiteness, as such, is one that is borne of negation, and mediated by the structural likelihood that the mechanisms upholding the Pre-Raphaelites' canonisation did not occur as an isolated phenomenon. The teleological continuity of their canonisation, too, evidenced by ongoing public enthusiasm and their continued recentring by Tate such as in the 2023 'The Rossettis' exhibition points to the embedded nature of these epistemologies of ideal Britishness within broader discourse (Tate 2024h).

Griselda Pollock's analysis of canon formation suggest that the ostensible worth of artworks is upheld by pronouncements of aesthetic universalism. Importantly, this relates, too, to the observations by scholars on race, discussed in 'Exploring Whiteness', that whiteness functions as an assumed benchmark of normativity. The parallels between the insights of Pollock and of these scholars suggests that one hallmark of whiteness in the context of artworks might be the claiming by their viewers that the representations within them speak for all. Rossetti's artworks, indeed, have frequently been described as having universal importance, as has Rossetti as a person himself. Such can be seen, for example, in William Sharp's 1882 biography of Rossetti: Sharp matter-of-factly states that the artist '*was*' 'one of the truest and most remarkable poets of his time', a 'genius', a 'master', an 'acknowledged leader', a 'lofty spirit', and a 'subtle and beautiful intellect', a 'poet and an artist such as *the world* does not often see' (1882:2-3 italics my emphasis). Here, Rossetti's import to no less than the entirety of humanity is not questionable. Similarly, author William Tirebuck wrote in an 1883 article in 'Art Journal' that 'It may be contended on behalf of Rossetti that to the extent that he expresses all emotion, and not an emotion, to that extent he is universal and truly great' (1883:27). Tirebuck suggests that Rossetti's brilliance is precisely his ability to express what everybody feels and experiences: his relevance and greatness, thus, is not only objective but transcendental too. The

authors' removing of the subject from these proclamations (ie, the difference between '*I think* Rossetti's work is…' and 'Rossetti's work *is*…') functions to position their subjective claims as a broader general truth which awards their words a further aura of authority. Indeed, these works actually did have authority through their having been taken in later instances to be matter-of-factly true: Sharp's biography was one of the key sources informing how Rossetti was presented in the 1883 posthumous two-man show at the Royal Academy, *Old Masters, deceased masters of the British School* (Cherry 2009:27).

As 'Landscape' explores, there historically have been, and continue to be, social incentives for individuals to signal their knowledge of ostensibly good taste: the practice of connoisseurship entailed learning how to recognise and evaluate artworks' inherent formal qualities according to criteria established by canonic consensus. This consensus, as suggested by Pollock, was both exclusionary and retrospectively self-validating of its exclusionary criteria. To be viewed as a connoisseur, thus, can be seen as an act of staking a claim to privileged social positioning. In this light, Sharp's and Tirebuck's respective proclamations of aesthetic universalism have a distinct motive not necessarily discernible through taking their words at face value: through their objectively presented evaluation of Rossetti as universally important, they signal ownership of authoritative knowledge. That such a claim, too, requires a learned adherence to aesthetic consensus rather than a reliance upon first hand experience demonstrates another instance whereby sight has both come to be rendered self-evident in aesthetic terms. Given that *Art Journal* and Rossetti's biography were intended to transmit knowledge, there would have been significant potential for readers to have been unproblematically influenced by the writers, thus signalling an unconscious reception of the authors' obscured epistemological positioning. That readers defer(red) to the claimed knowledge of Sharp and Tirebuck is difficult to evidence. However, a perception to this day that there are 'right' ways of looking at artworks is commonly found in viewers who claim ignorance when asked what they think. This was something I found in relation to 'The Beloved', too: as a part of the questionnaire forming the basis for data collection in 'Institutional Whiteness', I showed some staff a picture of 'The Beloved' and asked what they saw. Despite all of them having worked at

Tate, many were quick to claim that they didn't know, suggesting that the perception of a need for deference may be broadly internalised, even among museum professionals[11].

The signalling of connoisseurship and its consequent potential to transmit common-sense perceptions of Rossetti's work was evident almost a century later in the catalogue to Rossetti's exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1973: 'Rossetti's work is free of the faults that mar so much English nineteenth-century art, of triviality, insincerity, and sentimentality. […] …everything that he produced bears the stamp of an all-pervading and poetic imagination' (Gere 1973:9). The linguistic similarities of Gere's praise to that of Sharp and Tirebuck suggest a broader teleological linkage in the privilege-signalling motivations behind the presentation of Rossetti's artworks. Similar proclamations of universal brilliance occurred specifically in relation to 'The Beloved', too: writing in 1875, one of Rossetti's two non-artist Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood colleagues, art critic Frederick George Stephens, wrote in the Athenaeum that Rossetti's style was 'noble, powerful and original'; that he '*is* […] one of the most powerful of living artists', a 'rare genius', and that 'this masterpiece' (he refers to 'The Beloved'), displays 'an unbounded luxury of invention' and 'the student stands overpowered before pictures which, in these inestimable qualities are surpassed by none' (1875:444 italics my emphasis). Given the racialising frames that underpin the meanings widely perceived in 'The Beloved' (which will be explored later in 'Portrait'), and given also the lesser structural likelihood of Britons of colour having access to the social or economic means of legitimising knowledge, these claims to universalism can be seen as a manifestation of whiteness in their dominant and retrospectively legitimising masking of the subjectivities and privileges relating to white identity. I personally do not enjoy looking at 'The Beloved': it takes just one opposing opinion to these claims to invalidate their universal legitimacy.

[11] I eventually stopped asking this question as the responses were relatively unanimous in this sense.

Rossetti as an individual, too, was spoken about in the same terms, as evidenced by an 1882 article in The Times, which discussed the artist's exhibitions at the Royal Academy and Burlington Fine Arts Club:

> Rossetti is, perhaps, among modern artists, the one in whom genius, properly so-called, manifested itself in the most striking manner. As a painter and poet he was distinctly creative, and the influence of his powerful individuality made itself felt in circles where, perhaps owing to his retired mode of life, even his name had never penetrated. [...] Rossetti at any rate stood alone (1882:6).

Here, again, Rossetti's distinctive individualism is emphasised, and it is suggested that his personality influenced even those he had not met. As such, neither sight nor any other first hand perception of the artist was required for some to believe in, and even be influenced by, his greatness. That this is also true in terms of the supposed knowledge of Rossetti's aesthetic brilliance is attested by Tirebuck, who observes, 'So it has come about that men of feeling and capacity have been moved by his power. They have talked about it, written about it, spread the revelations gently abroad, until many people, though they never beheld his work, had a conception of his greatness' (1883:27).

Important here is the reference to 'men of feeling and capacity', which alludes to a culturally sanctioned exclusivity of the connoisseur's claim to knowledge. Who might be capable of such 'feeling' and 'capacity' is put in explicitly gendered terms here, but there is another distinction, in this case unconscious, unspoken and taken-for-granted: that knowledge and understanding (echoing Tate's words set out in its Vision statement), being the domain of the educated, would have been accessible only to those with sufficient social and economic privilege. Studies demonstrate the contemporary persistence of racial wealth and educational attainment gaps in Britain (Gillborn, Rollock, Warmington & Demack 2016). Nevertheless, an understanding of the historical mechanisms leading to their structural formation have at present a necessarily theoretical nature: again, whiteness arises here through what is rendered unpresent, or what theorist Fred Moten might call 'fugitive' (2008:202). Both absent and present in Tirebuck's words is a broader discourse that positioned white people as intellectually superior, and

which allocated them the social and economic means to uphold their epistemological positioning.

Perceptions of Rossetti and his works in the public eye were, as such, subject to a canonisation whose forces were determined by matters beyond what was visible in his artworks. Rossetti's contemporary, critic Ford Madox Ford, suggested that such mythologisation grew in scope after the artist's death: 'After Rossetti's death, the biographers began. They poured forth, official and unofficial […]. For thirty years or so Rossetti's figure was perpetually before the public, getting more and more pompous, more and more priestly, more and more like a German professor of the beautiful…' (Doughty 1960:6-7). Such an observation is put into perspective through the recognition of Rossetti's brother, William Michael Rossetti, that the artist was for a long while largely unrecognised: his rise in popularity started at some point during his lifetime and continued ever since (Rossetti 1884). Some of the mechanisms which facilitated this rise can be located in the suggestion of art historian Julian Treuherz that Rossetti consciously enlisted his brother and his friend Frederic George Stephens 'as unofficial public relations agents' (2004:17). Here, Treuherz draws attention to the importance of Rossetti's social networks in contributing to his elevated status in the public eye. The evidence that Rossetti was supported by his peers provides a distinct counterargument to his ongoing presentation, as at Tate, as an individual genius. Indeed, that he was an individual genius was one of the very arguments that Stephens publicly made, suggesting a calculated genesis of the epistemological teleologies which posit that the objective, singular brilliance of Rossetti's works can be visually determined:

> …there can be no other opinion than that to place the works before the world would be to ensure transcendent success for the painter, and to procure applause of the highest kind from all men of culture. […] We are afraid that students in the future will be strongly puzzled to account for the existence of these paintings at a period when so much ineffable trash passed current with no small measure of popular admiration. (Stephens 1875:220)

Stephens' allusion, too, to future generations is prescient: this statement may have created a self-fulfilling prophecy whereby these descriptions of Rossetti's value became gradually enshrined.

## Networks of White Privilege

Dianne Sachko MacLeod observes how it was members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood itself who first publicly identified their colleagues', including Rossetti's, artworks as 'the Gold Standard for the English school' (1997:202). The Pre-Raphaelites played an integral role in their own shaping as emblems of Britishness, and Rossetti benefited from the network, who were not only friends but a ready source of connections, legitimisation and support. William Michael Rossetti had thirty years of experience as a writer and art journalist before he started writing about his brother. Similarly, Stephens was a widely published writer for *Macmillan's Magazine*, *The Crayon, The Critic, The Athenaeum* and the *London Review*. (Cherry 2009:28). The investment and influence of others besides Rossetti in contributing to his success was not limited to his brother and friend, however. This is noted by art historian Pamela Gerrish Nunn, who highlights the importance of networks for these artists, writing that being a Pre-Raphaelite was 'very much a question of connections' (1996:43). The intersections between white, personal friendship (mostly patrilineal) and broader dissemination of Rossetti's aesthetic and national worth is evident through the observation that Ford Madox Brown's grandson wrote Rossetti's biography; Millais's son catalogued his life, and Georgiana Burne-Jones wrote his memorial (Cherry 2009:28).

An attention to the other creatives whom Rossetti's followers appreciated demonstrates a marked absence of people of colour (and women) from the networks, both canonical and physical, associated with the artists. That the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood themselves, and others on their behalf, were able to stake their claim to a British aesthetic ideal, and that the group were exclusively white is at the same time both unremarkable and important. There is no counterfactual: the

Black British girl of the same era who showed such great artistic promise, for whatever reason never made it into the public eye. Maybe the fact that she could only paint in the briefest moments between her work responsibilities meant her practice could not develop as much as she hoped. Perhaps nobody believed she really could have made those paintings. Maybe, those with greater social influence didn't like her or her work and she became fatigued by the need to prove her worth. It is possible she never painted at all. In any case, she has been long forgotten, while the importance of her white counterparts has become self-evidently common-sense. The negation of Black experience can in this instance only be rebuilt through what Saidiya Hartman might call 'critical fabulation', or an imagined reconstruction of canonical omissions (2008). It is hard to make a case for what is not there. But what *is* there is a distinct demographic uniformity both within the network and beyond, in spatial, temporal and conceptual senses. Revisiting that same biography of Rossetti that informed the artist's posthumous Royal Academy exhibition, the artist was likened to a 'remarkable' number of similarly 'diversely-gifted men of genius:' Michelangelo, Rafael, Dante, William Morris, Thomas Woolner, Noel Paton and William Bell Scott (Sharp 1882:1). Despite the fact that they were all white, male, at least relatively affluent, and either British or classically canonical, for Sharp they all merited 'a foremost place' due to their 'almost too disproportionate amount of talent in whatsoever they laid their hands to' (ibid.). That these individuals benefited from the time, money, education and influence that was not available to all is not recognised.

Sharp's biography of Rossetti also indicates that all of Rossetti's most intimate acquaintances were all white men, ranging from relatively to extremely affluent. These included his patrons: banker George Rae (whose influence will be discussed shortly), shipping magnate Frederick Leyland, Scottish politician William Graham, W.A. Turner and Leonard Rowe Valpy; his friend Henry Virtue Tebbs; artists Frederic Shields and Henry Treffry Dunn; poets William Bell Scott and Philip Bourke Marston; novelist Hall Caine and William Sharp himself (Sharp 1882:30, 32). It has been suggested that Rossetti's patrons in particular were attracted by his bohemian, artistic lifestyle (Helsinger 2008), and Helen Rossetti Angeli, Rossetti's niece, recalls how Rae in particular 'was a warm admirer of Rossetti the

man, no less than of Rossetti the painter' (1949:25). Here, kinship translates into financial gain: while it may not have been an active choice on Rossetti's part to have only white friends, it was these same white friends who had the wealth and influence to bolster him. This, too, is unlikely to have been a unique occurrence, given the structural differentials in wealth according to racial positioning.

The same demographic categories applied to the figures that the artist himself referred to. Rossetti's letters mention his favourites to be exclusively white and male: Shakespeare, Defoe, Horace, Virgil, Gavarni, Johannot, Nanteuil, de Kock, Cham, Grandeville, Daumier, Bertalls and Calame are all mentioned (Doughty & Wahl 1965). This is corroborated by Sharp, who writes:

> An ardent and appreciative critic, [Rossetti] seldom failed to select the peculiar excellences of any poem by a contemporary writer he might be reading, irrespective of the author's celebrity or insignificance; and it was the same in art, the mention at any time of such names as Sir Frederick Leighton, Sir Noel Paton, Millais, Holman Hunt, Frederick Shields, Ford Madox Brown, W.B. Scott, the late Samuel Palmer, Frederick Sandys, and others, being at once resultant in trenchant and generous remarks (1882:35).

In his not being deterred by 'insignificance', Rossetti is implied to be enquiring, perhaps even progressive in his tastes. This could be interpreted in multiple ways: Firstly, it is possible that the description of Rossetti as enquiring was indeed a fair assessment because there were only white men for him to choose from. Secondly, it could be that the demographic of Rossetti's influences was broader than Sharp realised, and Sharp only saw fit to recognise in his writing the artist's influencers who were white men. Lastly, there is the potential that Rossetti himself overlooked the possible influence of those who were not white men, and that Sharp's estimation of him as enquiring reinforced this as acceptable. In either case, the structural nature of whiteness does not require culpability, or at least not of one particular individual: the networks were still uniformly white, whether by means of actual absence of people of colour in Rossetti's networks, or in the canonisation of Rossetti's own value through Sharp's claiming and dissemination of seemingly objective knowledge. Somewhere, either on the part of Rossetti or of Sharp, the

absence of people of colour (or women) was so unremarkable that it was understood as reasonable that Rossetti's evaluations of cultural significance extended only within the parameters of known or unknown white men. This unremarkability marks another potential teleological provenance: that canonical networks could be solely white remains ostensibly unremarkable today.

As suggested by the earlier words of Giebelhausen and Barringer, the ways in which the Pre-Raphaelites have been written about constitute their own kind of canon with an associated code of unacknowledged, self-regulating norms. The affinities between artist and viewer, mediated by artworks, are not the only means by which racialising sight is accepted and disseminated between individuals: attention also needs to be given to the ways in which Rossetti has been and continues to be written about, because the presentations of ostensible fact pertaining to his life may also point to a presence of undetected epistemological solidarity between the Pre-Raphaelites, those who documented them initially, and those who continue to document them today. From this methodological attention to the potential for such solidarities to be reinforced, it is possible to locate the presence of a different kind of white network, this time as an intellectual lineage whose claims to knowledge determine how the Pre-Raphaelites continue to be perceived and understood by those who encounter their works. One such potential for assumed solidarity between artist and biographer can be found in his later descriptions of Rossetti, which corroborate a vision of the artist as socially and economically unremarkable, which, likely not deliberately, reinforce latter understandings of him as having a value that was meritocratically earned. Art historian Oswald Doughty and then- Tate director Alan Bowness alike considered that Rossetti defied the odds to achieve his national and international renown (Doughty 1960:44; Bowness 1984:13).

While accounts often suggest that Rossetti experienced financial hardship, he was ultimately never so poor that he had to forgo his aesthetic aspirations and focus on more lucrative occupations. As a young artist still developing his career and client base, he accepted payment from his patrons in the form of other pictures rather than money, which indicates some level of financial security (Marillier 1901).

Similarly, it is known from a letter to Jane Morris on 20th July 1879 that he had a housekeeper (Bryson 1976:100). That these biographical details may be taken within art historical scholarship to be unremarkable is suggested with reference to feedback I received from an anonymous reviewer upon submitting this section of 'Portrait' to a journal: they wrote that

> The fact that Rossetti had a housekeeper (his model and mistress, Fanny Cornforth) or received payment in pictures does not necessarily suggest privilege and ease; while of course as an educated white man in London, from a scholarly family, he was indeed privileged, his economic position varied quite a great deal over his career, even from one month to the next (personal correspondence 2021).

This feedback caused me to wonder why it may be considered unremarkable that Rossetti had a housekeeper or received payment in kind. If, as the reviewer implies, many people at that time employed housekeepers, then it is also true that there would have been more housekeepers to employ. It seems unlikely that these housekeepers would themselves have had housekeepers: as such, this observation appears to take for granted that artists would have had a certain amount of financial security. If being able to employ a housekeeper does not signify privilege and ease, then what does that mean for those who could not afford the same? What ramifications does this statement have on the lives of people of colour, who were, and are, less structurally likely than white people to have access to economic resources? This comment points towards a baseline expectation about historical knowledge which accepts, in the terms of Gramscian common sense, that the erasure of some social groups is to be expected.

The taking as a given of a certain level of financial means as to be expected, whatever that level is, is perhaps telling both as to the opportunities available to those in positions of servitude, and the broader acceptance of economic inequality as casual fact. Considering the reviewers' position of intellectual authority and my own wish to make claims to knowledge, convention would suggest that I should accept the suggested revisions: regardless of the relative veracities of my and the reviewers' biographical information, this point evidences that there is something at stake in accepting or dismissing pre-ordained

knowledge. As such, biographical descriptions of Rossetti may have the potential to say more about the writer and their social positioning, assumptions and motivations than they shed light on the artist himself, but nevertheless it is these positionings, assumptions and motivations that are rendered obscured by these very claims to knowledge. Invisible in these claims, including those regarding the lived experiences of Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelites, are the writers' subjective grapplings with perception and evidence that inform them. Whiteness, as previously discussed, is often understood by scholars as being invisible to itself: as such, authors on Rossetti may not necessarily be aware of their own epistemological position and its racialising ramifications. Nevertheless, the claims to knowledge that they make come to be more broadly understood as factual evidence.

That Rossetti's cultural reference points were almost only men, and exclusively white; that the people who admired him and his artworks were the same; that he was situated in a privileged white network of social and economic opportunities which he easily mediated through friendship; that he was proclaimed to be universally relevant despite these social omissions; that such social omissions in the form of race and gender structurally underpinned the differential distribution of wealth and opportunities in broader British society; that he could lay a claim to ideal Britishness and be believed, even by people who hadn't seen his work: these are the structural functionings of whiteness. All of these have influenced contemporary acceptance of 'The Beloved' as having both aesthetic and national importance. Given the racialising distinctions intended within 'The Beloved' by Rossetti and Rae alike, and the overlooking of these distinctions–consciously or unconsciously, it doesn't matter–by Rossetti's many white canonisers, these distinctions play a role in having legitimised the artwork's contemporary framing as significant at Tate. That those who have historically claimed Rossetti's importance have overlooked both the racisms within the work (which will be discussed shortly) and the absence of people of colour in normative British narratives also informs the meaning of 'The Beloved' that Tate mediates in its own claims to furthering its viewers' understanding and enjoyment. These points form a hidden context of their

own. Whether Tate understands the work, and whether enjoyment of it is possible with full knowledge of its epistemological origins constitute difficult questions for Tate to navigate, partly because whiteness is often upheld unconsciously and partly because the broader political discourse is not accommodating to such topics, as ‘Institutional Whiteness’ suggests.

## Rossetti: Positioning and Perceptions

While undeniable, taken by itself, evidence of Rossetti’s own racism cannot be said to explain the functioning of whiteness as a structural force: if nobody had appreciated his artworks, they would never have become canonised and continue to be equated with value to this day. That said, without understanding the tacit agreements established between the respective makers and viewers of ‘The Beloved’, the significance of the racial hierarchies represented within it to these canonical processes cannot be known. As discussed in ‘Exploring Whiteness’, Mirzoeff’s insights suggest that ‘White Sight’ is constituted by the casual acceptance by viewers of artists’ own racialising vision. ‘Portrait’ strives to expand this insight through an examination of the role George Rae played as deliverer of funds and co-deliverer of aesthetic vision in the proposition of meaning that served as one side of this dialogue of meaning construction between maker and viewer. Nevertheless, despite Rae’s role, Rossetti was obviously instrumental in proposing how subsequent viewers should understand his works. While a later section focuses on Rae, this part attends to Rossetti’s own such positioning and perceptions in order to account for the sight that he proposed his viewers to receive within ‘The Beloved.’ It explores respectively his understandings of and claims to British aesthetic ideals, and the qualities he associated with Blackness. It seeks too, to contextualise these within a broader recognition of how Rossetti himself was perceived by the public in terms of Britishness and race: as the section will detail, he too was at times considered an outsider both in national and aesthetic terms, but in ways that were, as history shows us, not insurmountable.

Evidence suggests that Rossetti did both casually and actively, that is to say both unconsciously and consciously, ascribe negative qualities to dark skin. William Michael Rossetti wrote, 'My brother had no very settled ideas about negroes, their rights and wrongs: he knew, and was much tickled by, Carlyle's "Occasional Discourse on the N-----[12] Question" ' (1911:675). Here, judging by the matter-of-fact tone of William's writing, Dante's own passively uncertain stance was not considered particularly remarkable. The stance towards Black people implied within Thomas Carlyle's Discourse, too, is broadly understood to be ambiguous: scholars have been divided about whether the humorous tone of its fictional narrator represented a flippant pro-slavery sentiment, or if the narrative device was intended to expose the hypocrisy of wider debates about slavery (Kinser 2012:139). In any case, the content of Carlyle's Discourse does not need to be repeated. It certainly presents crude racial stereotypes, and its ambiguous reception suggests that its use of irony, if that was the intention, was not made clear. In light, therefore, of Rossetti's exclusively white friendships acknowledged previously, the most charitable explanation of his brother's noting, above other potential responses to the text, that Rossetti was 'tickled' by it is that Rossetti was casually indifferent to, and affectively distanced from, the stereotypical presentations of Blackness within the text. That Rossetti was reported to have 'had no very settled ideas' suggests a possibility, implied as acceptable by his brother, that the settling one way or the other of these ideas was not a great concern.

Rossetti knew about transatlantic slavery and thus also, whether he accepted them as truth or not, the valorisations imposed on dark skin that upheld its continuing existence while he was alive. His distanced reception of Carlyle's text cannot, therefore, be put down to a lack of awareness (which would have its own implications in any case). His direct engagement with the topic of slavery is documented by a poem he wrote in 1853, twenty years following the 1833 Slavery Abolition Act and just over ten years before he painted 'The Beloved.' The poem was, as noted by Dante's brother William, actively inspired by Carlyle's Discourse,

[12] Redaction my own

and intended both as a parody of an American minstrel song titled ‘Old Uncle Ned’, and a criticism of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s anti-slavery novel, ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin’ (Rossetti 1898:20). Like Carlyle’s Discourse, this novel, too, had mixed reception and was criticised by readers for its racial stereotyping, but its clumsily enacted motivation has been more broadly accepted as supporting in intent, if not effect, of abolitionism. Echoing Carlyle’s ambiguous use of parodic tone, Rossetti’s poem is narrated by a fictional Black ‘Uncle Ned’ attesting to the stupidity of Stowe’s authorship: ‘De demand one fine morning for Uncle Tom died, / De tears down Mrs. Stowe’s face ran like rain; / For she knew berry well, now dey’d laid him out on de shelf, / Dat she’d neber get a publisher again’ (1898:21). Here, Rossetti continues Carlyles’ racial stereotypes for the purpose of skewering ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin’ as unreadable and unworthy of publishing, a fact noted by his brother who attests to its intent to be ‘in ridicule of Mrs. Stowe’s’ writing’ (1898:20). While the poem uses words that to a contemporary audience are explicitly racist, what is particularly notable for the present study is that Rossetti’s stereotyping presentation of ‘Uncle Ned’ is intended as a narrative device used ultimately to speak, if in ridicule, to a white author. There is an obvious absence of humanity, curiosity or depth in Rossetti’s presentation of the narrator, whose existence is only for the purpose of packing a punch at Stowe. Rossetti’s projections of the narrator’s Blackness are calculatedly used, but also casual: that Rossetti could anticipate the parodic value of the poem in his readers is telling both as to who his readers were, and to the broader perceptions within his circles of ostensible, monolithic Black identity.

While to my eye these words are certainly conclusive in terms of establishing Rossetti’s stance on Blackness, it also seems, judging from his anticipation of the poem’s parodic value, and his ever-increasing following, that his views were perceived as unremarkable. The project of locating whiteness is not one that finds the evidence of individual racisms sufficient to explain its existence, although an excavation of these racisms is necessary as part of it. Rossetti’s awareness of and indifference towards abolitionist debates correlates to what Matthew Rarey describes in his important article, ‘And the *Jet* Would Be Invaluable: Blackness, Bondage, and *The Beloved*’ as an avowedly apolitical self-

positioning on Rossetti's part (2020:30). Rarey, too, considers Rossetti's disengaged stance on abolitionism as evidence of his whiteness: 'To what extent, then, does Rossetti here disavow engagement with current debates over abolitionist and racial belonging while simultaneously engaging in a temporary performance of Blackness that, ironically, confirms his proximity to white masculinity?' (2020:39). According to Rarey, that Rossetti's performance of Blackness confirms his own whiteness is ironic. However, there is no irony to be found: whiteness is characterised by this very disengagement, but crucially also by the positive reception of his artworks by his viewers nonetheless. Whiteness points to the structural existence by which such performances of Blackness are quietly and uncritically accepted as common-sense. Pointing to Rossetti specifically, or determining if Rossetti was any different from his contemporaries does not necessarily matter, because this is not a knowledge that most casual viewers of 'The Beloved' will have had recourse to. Whether actively or passively constructed, the valorised representations of race within the artwork act as a formalist proposition set in motion by Rossetti (and Rae) that its viewers variously mediate in accordance with their own epistemological positionings.

Rossetti's claims to British and aesthetic canonicity were not always plain sailing: both his ethnicity and his aesthetic intentions were scrutinised and questioned initially by his contemporaries, evidencing an even broader dimension of whiteness implicated in the reception of his artworks. Bullen's notion of artworks' 'totemic' qualities, whereby the formalist qualities of artworks trigger broader social anxieties experienced by their viewers, is made manifest by the negative perceptions of Rossetti as well as the positive. Although Rossetti was born in London and his native tongue was English, his Italian ancestry has often been cited in order to account for his personal characteristics. This phenomenon was noticed by art historian Oswald Doughty, who notes that the artist's 'foreign origin was supposed to explain his dislike of sports and all athletic activities' (1960:42-3). Even Rossetti's closest contemporaries, notably William Holman Hunt and John Everett Millais, are known to have been initially suspicious of his heritage (Angeli 1949). A grappling by the public regarding Rossetti's claims to British pedigree remained after his death too, as seen in the catalogue to his 1883 posthumous

exhibition at the Burlington Fine Arts Club: ‘whilst always claiming his birthright as an Englishman, he inherited to the full the passionate fervour and ardent temperament of the South’ (Bradley 1997:205). Here, the distinct characteristics that Rossetti had which were not seen to be archetypally British needed to be accounted for and were explained through stereotype. Rossetti’s supposed Italianness was even retrospectively mobilised to rationalise the very aesthetic sensibilities which came to associate him with Britishness, as evident in the catalogue to his 1973 Royal Academy exhibition, which claimed that his ancestry acted as a ‘preservative which may have been partly responsible for saving him from the total eclipse suffered until recently by those contemporaries who were able to accept whole-heartedly the values of mid-Victorian society’ (Gere in RA 1973:9).

Despite this marked and ongoing scrutiny by Rossetti’s followers of both his ethnicity and aesthetic direction, and of the intersections between them, such grappling ultimately did not exclude him from British canonicity. Indeed, Rossetti himself shared these preoccupations, pointing towards his ability to join in with this normative discourse. From a young age, Rossetti aspired towards defining a national aesthetic, and from his early teens was invested in the idea that art not only could, but should, play a role in shaping a shared and ostensibly deserved sense of British superiority. Such is evidenced by his 1843 review of an exhibition at Westminster Hall which he thought ‘may be considered as a proof that High Art and high talent are not confined to the Continent. […] thus directly giving the lie to the vile snarling assertion that British art is slowly but surely falling, never more to rise’ (Doughty & Wahl 1965:16). This musing, written at age 15, is vehement in its equating of the notions of High Art and Britain as a necessarily dominant nation. That this link might be questioned was a thought that was ‘vile and snarling’: at a young age, he was emotionally invested in canonical cultural discourse as an expression of political might. The son of an Italian professor, Rossetti learnt Latin and Greek at school and was admitted as a student to the Royal Academy in 1846, pointing towards his participation in the circles of normative culture (Stephens 1896). That Rossetti was familiar at a young age with the discourses relating to art and nation; that he felt able to expect to play a role in determining the directions of

these discourses; and that his childhood expectations were ultimately actualised - all say something about his self-positioning, which was certainly confident and assured, and perhaps also distinctively privileged, male and white.

That Rossetti wanted Britain to be a dominant nation, and that he believed that the aesthetic endeavours that came to define the course of his life could play a role in this, are points that put into broader perspective his known perceptions of Blackness. The humanity of Blackness was, as suggested by his poem, ostensibly invisible to him, and he wanted Britain to be great: it is not a leap, then, to infer that Rossetti's vision of Britishness was a white one. Rossetti's teenage aspirations continued to motivate him and was shared by the Brotherhood, as indicated through the Pre-Raphaelites' earlier expressions of their intentions noted by Frederick George Stephens:

> An unprejudiced spectator of the recent progress and main direction of Art in England will have observed, as a great change in the character of the productions of the modern school, a marked attempt to lead the taste of the public into a new channel by producing pure transcripts and faithful studies from nature, instead of conventionalities and feeble reminiscences from the Old Masters; an entire seeking after originality in a more humble manner than has been practiced since the decline of Italian Art in the Middle Ages (Stephens 1850:58).

This clarion call suggests that the Pre-Raphaelites aspired for their works to be understood not only as of aesthetic importance but, by virtue of their very claims to aesthetic innovation, as of national importance. For the Brotherhood, as such, there was something at stake in claiming importance on specifically national grounds, and their aesthetic sensibilities served as an active means of justification.

There were broader anxieties concerning British normativity provoked in the public not only by Rossetti's ancestry but also by the formalist qualities of the paintings themselves, which, too, were understood to deviate from perceptions of a shared nationalist teleology. The then-innovative aesthetic values of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, too, needed reconciling with existing public discourse of canonical heritage, but ultimately this was possible. As such, despite the anxieties provoked, whose alignment with racialised perceptions of a mythical British ideal will be discussed here, the aesthetic intentions of the Pre-Raphaelites were

nevertheless ‘white enough.’ ‘The Beloved’ was one of a number of paintings that signified a marked shift in Rossetti’s artistic practice towards a more sensuous figurative style. This was intentional on the part of Rossetti, and a style that provoked an initially uneasy reception for some. Rossetti’s increasingly fleshy depictions prompted a criticism summed up by Rossetti’s Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood colleague William Holman Hunt, who considered them to be insufficiently chaste (Stansbie 2014). Similarly, the critic Robert Buchanan thought these works were morally repugnant, while Charles Dickens also criticised the Brotherhood as a whole on account of their alleged Catholicism (Buchanan 1871, Bullen 1989).

Here, attention can be drawn to the instability of artworks’ meaning attributed to them by viewers, according to the temporally shifting nature of broader public discourse on race. Rossetti’s intentional aesthetic development epitomised by ‘The Beloved’ and other works of the same period provided a means by which public fear about a rising status of Catholicism in Britain could be physically anchored. In the 1850s, Rossetti began to look to Venetian artists such as Titian and Veronese for formal inspiration (Surtees 1971; Phelps Smith 1995). Despite that, in reductive terms, this could be seen as one individual’s choice to experiment with the application of paint onto canvas, Rossetti’s shift in formal approach was perceived by viewers as threatening to their tacitly accepted self-perceptions of normative British identity. That aesthetic choices can be perceived as confrontational attests to the value and meaning attributed to them by individuals other than the artist, and evidences that Rossetti was prescient in his teenage understanding of art’s symbolic power in determining (or at this point in time deviating from) canonical Britishness.

That Rossetti’s aesthetic development displayed the formal qualities associated by their viewers of the time with Catholicism is posited by Bullen, who, in his description of Rossetti’s artworks, invokes William Makepiece Thackeray’s 1840 analysis of the work of French artist Jules-Claude Ziegler: ‘First, take your colours […] —bright carmine, bright yellow, bright sienna, bright ultramarine, bright green. Make the costumes of your figures as much as possible like the costumes

of the early part of the fifteenth century. Paint them in with the above colours; and […] the more 'Catholic' your art is' (Thackeray in Bullen 1998:23). This, indeed, sounds like a description of 'The Beloved', and intentionally so on the part of Rossetti: In a letter to Rae, the artist wrote that he intended 'the colour of my picture to be like jewels', attesting to his active intention to highlight the opulence of the artwork (Rossetti 1865:271-2). The ramifications of this choice in how his viewers at that time perceived the work are significant, taking into account a broader anti-Catholic sentiment made particularly vehement in the decade preceding 'The Beloved.' The reinstatement of the Catholic hierarchy of bishops in 1850 in England provoked extensive disquiet and fear amongst English Protestants, which was directed both against the perceived moral shortcomings of Catholics in British society more widely, and which caused the formal qualities of Rossetti's works to be fixated upon in their ostensibly concurrent representation of Catholic moral deviations from normativity (Stansbie 2014).

Rossetti's purposeful shift towards the painterly qualities of colourful fleshiness that can be seen in 'The Beloved', and the ostensible foreignness but value nevertheless of these formal decisions was communicated to his followers, too, as evidenced by the writings of his ever-faithful public relations representative and friend Stephens in *The Athenaeum*: 'The example now before us can only be called Venetian, because of the splendid colouring. Tintoret produced works which assort most fortunately with this one, and his finely-dramatic mode of designing reappears, so to say, in 'The Beloved.' The intensity of Venetian pathos is here exalted, if that term be allowed, in a modern strain […]' (Stephens 1875:444). Considering Rossetti's longstanding knowledge of and investment into British aesthetic canonicity, and the calculated influence of his peers in establishing his success, Stephens' text carries a hint that Rossetti and Stephens understood that the artist's aesthetic deviation from an ostensibly Protestant formalism needed to be actively accounted for and proactively celebrated. Furthermore, that the paintings' formal qualities elicited such visceral, morally anxious reactions is telling as to the extent to which viewers did indeed consider sight to be axiomatic: for the viewers uncomfortable with the alleged Catholicism of Rossetti's artistic choices, the artworks' formal qualities spoke for themselves. This substantiates the

argument for whiteness being as much a function of viewers' projection as it is artists' intention. In addition, that the Brotherhood were not only aware of the morally charged relationship between aesthetic and national discourse, but were also able to proactively anticipate and influence viewers' perceptions of the work, attests to their whiteness: while the formal qualities of Catholicism presented a perceived threat to viewers' British normative (Protestant) identity, the social and economic privileges the Brotherhood shared access to facilitated their group resilience and ability to ultimately diffuse this obstacle nonetheless.

Scholars on race have noted the consistencies between British Protestant subjugation of Irish Catholics with the discourses of assumed white superiority: the moral qualities projected from a position of social dominance respectively onto the Irish and onto Black people were both similarly negative and similarly 'not white' (Ignatiev 1995). This attests to the epistemological, as opposed to necessarily visible, nature of collectively ingrained sense of racial superiority as explored in 'Exploring Whiteness'. The malleable appearance of the racialised other constructed to justify and protect dominant claims to normativity, and the casual taking of such apparently racial difference for granted was, indeed, evidenced by Rossetti himself in a private letter, in which he wrote, again with humorous intent:

> Another fine story. Some Irish had settled in some part of Jamaica, and the n-----s[13] soon learnt their brogue. Some more Irish came, and while they were landing they were saluted by the natives from the coast with 'Och Paddy my boy', and how are ye?' They were stupefied and exclaimed: 'Arrah now! And sure are ye turned black already? (Bryson 1976:90).

This extract, and its presentation as a joke, suggests that the racialising equating of Irishness with Blackness in wider discourse was known, if not consciously, both to Rossetti and to the reader of the letter. Reading the development of Rossetti's artistic choice to invoke a calculatedly Catholic aesthetic against this letter renders somewhat ambiguous the artist's perceptions of his own racial status: on the one hand, given his passive characterisations of Blackness as negative, as previously discussed, a conflation of Irishness with these perceived qualities suggests a latent

[13] Redaction my own

envisioning on his part of Catholicism as inferior. On the other, Rossetti actively deploys an aesthetic whose implications on viewers identifying with a Protestant-leaning British normativity he and Stephens might well have anticipated. Indeed, that Rossetti did seriously equate Blackness and Irishness together cannot be definitively determined from his joke. Judging by his self-perceptions as financially insecure (whether accurate or not), and by, too, the known public interrogation of his Italian ancestry, it is possible that he considered himself to be enough of a racial insider to safely draw upon a counternormative aesthetic and still hope for canonical acceptance. Simultaneously, he may have perceived himself to be enough of an outsider to be motivated in probing the very parameters of normativity in which he sought such recognition.

## Desiring ‘The Beloved’

The rise to canonical positioning of ‘The Beloved’ is a product, in part, of its presentation of white heterofemininity, which Rossetti’s most socially and economically influential viewers experienced as a welcome reinforcement of their own symbolic desires. Correspondence between Rossetti and Rae suggests that these desires were intentionally constructed, while critical receptions of the artwork similarly indicate that the proposition of meaning collaboratively instigated by artist and patron was well understood and appreciated by its viewers. This embodiment of sexual desire, fixed by Rossetti with Rae’s influence, upon the painting’s white, female central bride figure calculatedly but tacitly invites an imagined, fantasy dialogue between the painting’s main subject and a viewer casually assumed to be heterosexual and male. This fantasy, heteropatriarchal dialogue between the white central figure and the imagined viewer has been explicitly celebrated by all the various kinds of meaning-creator throughout the artwork’s lifetime to date: Rossetti as painter; Rae as commissioner; Rossetti’s networks as facilitators of Rossetti’s trajectory towards canonical status; Tate as contemporary mediator of the artwork’s meaning. Less widely recognised, though importantly discussed by art historian Matthew Rarey whose contribution to this exploration will be detailed, is

how the painting constructs Blackness as a negative moral category, represented by Rossetti's inclusion of an intentionally secondary subject, a Black child, upon whom the artist projected a racial essentialism intended to bolster the white bride's desirability.

Not yet acknowledged, and constituting the contribution that 'Portrait' strives to make, is how whiteness functions through a relatively unproblematised historic and ongoing celebration of the bride's white heterofemininity, given the implicit negation of Black humanity as it is represented within 'The Beloved'. Rarey makes a crucial case for how white racial superiority is constructed by Rossetti within the painting's formal parameters. However, 'Portrait' argues that it is only through an acknowledgement of the ways in which these propositions of racial superiority have come to be perceived as acceptable and unremarkable in their reception by viewers that whiteness can be said to be present. To understand how whiteness as a structural formation has come to influence the painting's ascription by Tate of canonical aesthetic and national value, therefore, attention is given in this section to the various instances whereby the heteropatriarchal fantasy proposed has been both uncritically accepted and more broadly disseminated. There are numerous occurrences of this. That, as established, Rossetti's networks played a significant role in his success that continues to this day, and that these networks were uniformly white, also suggests that the racialised imagery within 'The Beloved' was not overtly scrutinised by his followers. So too, given the teleological acceptance of Rossetti's national importance, often learnt (as shown) as a means to navigate the discourses of connoisseurship rather than deriving from formal qualities inherently perceived within his artworks, there were further reasons why the racialised imagery within the painting continued to be overlooked. It is only because Rossetti's intention, conscious or not of the broader relevance of his beliefs, to negate Blackness was more broadly accepted that we can say whiteness is a defining force in the work's canonical trajectory: to position whiteness as a matter of representation within the artwork itself is to risk overlooking the ways the racial binaries within it have both upheld and reflected a broader, endemic racialising sight.

‘The Beloved’ depicts in the bottom left corner a Black child who looks out towards the viewer, holding a golden vase of roses up towards the central figure. This central figure, who occupies most of the painting, is a white bride, who also meets the eye of the beholder, and is surrounded by an entourage of four other women whose skin tones vary. It depicts what Frederick George Stephens, writing in *The Athenaeum* in 1875, perceived to be an interrupted moment in the bride’s wedding, and his erotically charged reading of the painting is emphatic as he narrates a descriptions of the bride’s ‘amorous-lidded eyes’, and the ‘two companion damsels’ either side of her as ‘in ripe virginity’ as if they were ready and waiting to be devoured (ibid.). For Stephens, the image represents a distinct snapshot in time, apparent in his description: ‘While advancing towards the bride-groom with an action at once most graceful and most natural, she half-thoughtfully, half in the conscious pride of supreme loveliness, has moved the tissue from before her face and throat’ (1875:444). Stephens here emphasises a vision in which the white bride’s youth and beauty are readily apparent, through its rendering of her seemingly innate eroticism in objective terms. In his eyes, her hands on her veil affords her a self-conscious, virginal chasteness that can be deduced from the painting’s form, while his use of the word ‘throat’ rather than ‘neck’ imbues the painting with a quality of eroticised seduction. The readers of Stephens’ article in *The Athenaeum* were thus encouraged to see the painting in a particular way: Stephens’ presentation, as with any kind of objectively-presented interpretation of an artwork, had the potential to motivate viewers to overlook their own, firsthand, visual experience in favour of an authoritative narrative presented to them.

Stephens could hardly have been clearer in his projections of male, heterosexual desire onto the painting, and his positioning of such as self-evident. Clear also is that, with reference to the biblical Song of Solomon (1:2) which Rossetti drew upon, this was an essential underpinning of the painting’s meaning as intended by the artist: ‘…men’s imaginations have been for ages moved by the text which is illustrated by that painting, –“My beloved is mine, and I am his; Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth; for thy love is better than wine” ’ (ibid.).

The ‘men’s imagination’ that Stephens refers to is one that looks upon the bride as incomplete without him, bringing to mind the ‘masculine narcissism’ of which Pollock speaks, discussed in the introduction. So too is it one that seeks to dominate: in Stephens’ words, it is this man’s lips that come to ‘possess’ her apparently freely available kisses:

> The carnations of her face are exquisitely fair and fine, having the least hint of blushes within the skin, as though the heart of the lady quickened, as we see there is tenderness in her look[…] The lips are pulpy, deep in colour as blush-roses, and one fancies they have lately become fuller than before; they already almost pout to meet “the kisses of his mouth” who is to possess them (ibid.).

The bride is both Madonna and Whore, at once innocently chaste and knowingly seductive. Her entourage of four only heighten the sirenic qualities of ‘The Beloved’ for Stephens, who envisions them as ‘chanting a nuptial strain, while they move rhythmically with the steps of the bride’ (ibid.). Stephens’ projection of heteropatriarchal fantasy onto the bride is abundantly explicit, as is his rendering very present what he sees as an absence of the bride’s male groom, a position available for the viewer: through his objectively presented reading, the purpose of the painting, apparently inherently visually discernible, is its validating of the male viewer as powerless in escaping the allures of the perfect and beautiful bride’s seduction.

Stephens’ reading was no anomaly: William Sharp, Rossetti’s biographer, too, inferred from ‘The Beloved’ a narrative of heterosexual desire, and one that, apparently determined upon looking at the painting’s formal qualities, was reciprocated by the bride. The combination of Sharp’s perception of the depicted womens’ interior experience alongside his objective, universalised presentation of his perceptions points to a sight that is understood to be axiomatic: ‘It is not reflection, or regret, or sorrow, or nameless trouble, or the mingled pain and pleasure of indefinite yearning that is seen on any face here, but healthy nature, joy in the pride of life, happiness ever near, and anticipation ever beforehand’ (1882:196). In this instance, Sharp’s projection of meaning suggests an unspoken,

latent wish on his part that his sexual desires be welcomed and reciprocated, and as such he attributes the bride as she is seen in the painting with an ostensibly self-evident sexual willingness. That such a vision rendered seemingly axiomatic inhabits a broader teleology of looking is evidenced by the shared nature of Sharp's reading with that of Stephens before him, and of others after him, too: the universalised, self-evident presentation of white femininity as being available primarily for the function male sexual fulfilment is apparent in later readings such as that by art historian Ernest Radford, who writes, 'Surrounded by her maidens she advances to meet the bridegroom, and at his approach she unveils her face, which for radiant beauty and purity is almost without parallel in the annals of pictorial art' (1905:24). A similar focus is offered by art historian Henry Marillier, who, in a similar objective tone, comments on the bride's 'face which for pure, majestic loveliness is unsurpassed on canvas' (1901:104). The focus of each of these writers on the bride's beauty and gaze suggests a reading of the painting whereby her chastity and sexual willingness, even seductiveness, is assumed from looking alone.

Here is a heteropatriarchal teleology of sight: the insecurities of male, heterosexual desire are made manifest as a 'totemic quality' in its unconscious fixation upon the artwork, whose formal qualities these authors understand to speak for themselves. Each of these assertions taken alone may not account to very much, but given the disciplinary intersections between art historical discipline with practices of connoisseurship, and the broader social motivations (both as explored previously) that incentivise individuals to defer to interpretative authority, these authors' temporal and physical proximities to Rossetti have been allotted a continuing appearance of objectivity. In other words, while their readings were subjective, they both claimed and have been subsequently awarded objective status despite the fact that they as white men have had disproportionate access historically to the means of legitimising knowledge. As such, the bride's sexual willingness has been rendered ingrained as an ostensible shared truth rather than as a quirk of individual perception. In some ways, it does constitute a truth that the painting carries these meanings, in the sense that this axiomatic sight was one that aligned with the very wishes of the painting's eventual patron, George Rae, who

writes about ‘The Beloved’ thus: ‘The same sort of electric shock of beauty with which the picture strikes one at first sight is revived fresh and fresh, every time one looks at it. It is one of the most beautiful and loveable pictures that I have ever seen. You might have fallen in love with the lovely central figure…’ (Rae 1866). For Rae, as for Stephens, Sharp, Radford and Marillier, the bride’s seductiveness is obvious, made apparent here, as with the others, through Rae’s removal of the first person in his assertions regarding how ‘the picture strikes *one* at first sight.’

‘The Beloved’ was one of several of Rossetti’s oil paintings in the mid-1860s either bought by or commissioned by Rae, which focused intentionally on representations of white, heterofeminine erotic allure from the point of view of a male viewer, whose assumed white racial positioning, in addition, will be discussed shortly. Despite the secondary involvement of Rae’s wife Julia in the commissioning of the work, it was for the most part George himself who was the main steward of the painting’s formal development with Rossetti (Treuherz 2004). Art historian Diane Sachko MacLeod has noted the tendency in that period for male collectors to fix their sexual desires in representational form, writing, ‘Ensconced in their artful sanctuaries away from the prying eyes of society, businessmen-collectors were free to unleash their most intimate fantasies’ (1996:282). MacLeod elaborates that Rossetti ‘satisfied his clients’ need for emotional stimulation by continuing the sensuality he had begun in Bocca Baciata’ (1996:282). As such, the representation of white heterofemininity as a manifestation of male heterosexual desire was a conscious and ongoing project. The ideal qualities of the represented white women in these eroticised paintings were consciously evaluated in dialogue between the artist and patron, as demonstrated by a letter from Rae to Rossetti discussing another commissioned artwork, Venus Verticordia (1868), about which the patron wrote, ‘The oil painting struck me as just a trifle too voluptuous in face &c for a respectable old timer like me…’ (Rae 1864). This extract evidences the eroticised investment Rae made into Rossetti’s white female subjects’ beauty: for the represented Venus to be too beautiful would have a negative ramification on the patron’s self perception as ‘respectable’: as such, the qualities of the white female figures Rae commissioned were created intentionally for Rae’s personal fulfilment of desire. Presumably,

given Rae's delight at 'The Beloved', he may well have considered the bride to be a suitably respectable expression of his desire. That this teleology of objective meaning has remained an authoritative one in subsequent interpretations of 'The Beloved', (as evidenced by the previously noted influence of Sharp on Rossetti's posthumous two-man show at the Royal Academy, *'*Old Masters, deceased masters of the British School'), means that the role of wealth, heteropatriarchal desire, and social positioning and influence in establishing this ostensible truth has become obscured through its continuation of being taken for granted by subsequent viewers.

Within this oeuvre of Rossetti's sensual paintings intended to fulfil Rae's heteropatriarchal desire, 'The Beloved' is the only one that also depicts visibly Black and mixed race figures. While an uncontextualised look at the painting could lead viewers looking to understand the racial constructions within it to ambiguous conclusions about the reasons for this, attending to Rossetti's and Rae's respective projections of morality onto skin colour suggests that the Black child in particular was included to fulfil a specific symbolic function. This section now turns to an examination of this symbolic function. The Black child was intentionally included in the painting in order to create a sense not only of formal contrast between the skin colours of the respective subjects within the artwork, but also a moral contrast designed to heighten viewers' perceptions of the white bride's qualities of chastity, monogamy, innocence, and beauty. While perceptions of the white bride's sexual ripeness have been often reinforced, the role of Blackness as represented by Rossetti in upholding these qualities has been frequently overlooked. While the subjectivities of heteropatriarchal desire determining the work's perceived meaning have often been undetected, the objective desirability of the white bride has been both overt and frequent. As such, while the artwork's patriarchal meanings as both proposed by Rossetti and Rae and understood by viewers have not been seen, the overt, objective positioning of her sexual availability has nevertheless in turn required a negation of Blackness that has remained similarly undetected.

It is through understanding that these negative qualities ascribed to Blackness, both intended by Rossetti and Rae and accepted by subsequent

viewers, that we can see that the presumed viewer of ‘The Beloved’ was not only heterosexual and male, but also white, or at least, similarly imperceptive to racist categorisation. Furthermore, the latter acceptance of this representation of white desire by writers and Tate alike have frequently not paid attention to the presence of the Black child, either in its intentionally secondary role of bolstering the white bride’s ostensible moral appearance as Madonna and Whore, or as a subject in its own right. This erasure of the Black child’s humanity, instigated by Rossetti and Rae and continued throughout the work’s rise to canonical status, points to the existence of whiteness as an unconscious determinant of meaning: the overlooking of the child and the symbolic appropriation of their racial appearance has, like the white subject’s supposed embodiment of sexual willingness, become an axiomatic feature of the artwork. This, crucially, has been upheld as truth due to racially disproportionate access to the means of canonical legitimisation: Rossetti and the white networks that he associated with were both economically and socially privileged, and simultaneously, as discussed, indifferent to broader discourses which positioned Blackness as negative. As such, the negation of Blackness in ‘The Beloved’ is both represented within it, as Rarey’s analysis attests, but also outside of it, given that the racist representational values have remained undetected by many throughout the artwork’s lifetime. It is through the structural likelihood that these ‘outside’ qualities of undisrupted negation proliferate more broadly in the canonisation of artworks as having aesthetic and national value that whiteness can be said to exist.

Attending to Rossetti’s few other known artworks depicting people of colour gives some further hints towards his intentions behind the Black child’s inclusion in ‘The Beloved.’ There exist four other known pieces by the artist that do so, which deploy stereotypes of Blackness concurrent with Rossetti’s poetry as discussed. One such image is Rossetti’s sketch ‘Gentlemanly Confidence: An Awful Result’ (1853), made in the decade preceding ‘The Beloved’, which depicts a Black man in a top hat and three white woman together, who all appear to stop what they are doing to look towards him. In the background, perhaps in a shop window, are advertisements for ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin’, known to be a point of derision for Rossetti. The man’s confidence appears to be emphatic with his long stride and

arms behind his back. Writing about the man's stereotypically caricatured face, Rarey comments, 'With contemporary pseudoscientific illustrations of racial types in mind, a white Victorian audience would interpret the man's physiognomy as evidence of Black people's animalism and evolutionary primitiveness, making the women's attraction to him even more shocking' (2020:39). As such, the work relies upon an anticipation on Rossetti's part of his audiences being shocked by the possibility of inter-racial relationships. Rossetti's own position on such might be suggested by the work's title, which positions such union as 'awful': whether any irony was intended here is uncertain, but, given his brother's report of the artist's 'no very settled ideas about negroes', the existence of irony would be tentative at best. If irony were intended, the artwork can nevertheless not be seen to disrupt any perceived notion in the work's viewers that Black men could present a threat to white heteromasculine claims to white women. Given that there does not appear to exist documentation attesting to Rossetti's ironic intentions, given that any such irony would be ambiguous in any case, and given his documented alignment with heteropatriarchal desire as a representational device, Rossetti's depiction reinforces male Blackness as a binarised category, whose potential union with white women is a source of white heterosexual, male anxiety.

This introduction of this imagined Black heteromasculinity into Rossetti's oeuvre, and Rossetti's anticipation of the audience's identification with the fears represented pictorially, provides a necessary context for understanding that Blackness might have been consciously appropriated within 'The Beloved.' It is known, too, that Rossetti was directly influenced by another artist's painting that consciously depicted a secondary Black figure for the specific purpose of ascribing qualities to a white subject: in November 1864, the year before Rossetti began work on 'The Beloved', he made a visit to Édouard Manet's studio in Paris, where he saw the painting 'Olympia', (1863) in which a Black maid, only much later found to have had the name 'Laure', holds flowers for a central nude white figure (Parris 1984). Manet's choice to include Laure has been a topic of considerable scholarship and is understood to have been a conscious decision to heighten the white male viewers' perceptions of the white Olympia's sexual appeal, as observed by artist Lorraine O'Grady, who writes,

> Forget “tonal contrast.” We know what she is meant for… [...]. Olympia's maid, like all the other “peripheral Negroes,” is a robot conveniently made to disappear into the background drapery. [...] Laura's [sic] place is outside what can be conceived of as woman. She is the chaos that must be excised, and it is her excision that stabilizes the West's construct of the female body… [...] Thus only the white body remains as the object of a voyeuristic, fetishizing male gaze (1994:3).

Combined with his known uncertainties regarding Black people, the formal similarities between his work and that of Manet suggests that Rossetti, too, sought to heighten his white bride’s perceived desirability through inclusion of the Black child.

Besides Manet’s possible influence, there exists considerable evidence that Rossetti did intend for differing moral qualities to exist within ‘The Beloved’, determined by visible difference. In a letter to Ellen Heaton, the original intended recipient of the painting before Rae eventually showed interest in it, Rossetti spoke about the darker skinned of the bride’s entourage in a dismissive tone, suggesting his perception of their secondary status to the white bride, writing, ‘The additional heads will only be 2 dark girls harping’ (Surtees 1971:1865). The intended importance of the white bride in comparison to her companions is further evidenced by Stephens, who asserts that the surrounding figures, particularly the child, serve, as in Manet’s ‘Olympia’, only to support the central figure, rather than carrying significance in their own right: ‘a negro girl, who, in the front of the group, and bearing a mass of roses in a golden vase, is adorned with barbaric jewellery […]. The negress and her burthen are intended to contrast intensely with the costume and face of the bride herself’ (1896:60). Here is notable Stephens’ description of the child’s ‘barbaric’ jewellery: that barbarism might be a contrast to the bride suggests that she is supposed to be perceived as refined. Meanwhile, the matter of fact observation that the child’s very existence contrasts with the bride’s ‘costume and face’ awards a differential value to each of the subjects: in referring to the bride’s ‘face’, in particular, rather than her whole person, it is implied that the child’s purpose is to provide a contrast to heighten her beauty. This is made more explicit in another source in which Stephens elaborates that ‘the contours of the

African's face and form, bust, neck, and shoulders contrast with the Caucasian beauty of the bride […]' (1875:444). Here, a binary is established, in more explicitly racialised terms, between barbarism and Blackness on the one hand and refinement and whiteness on the other. That, as with the constructions of heteropatriarchal desire previously discussed, these racialised qualities are understood to be visually determinable, points towards the shared understandings of race between Rae and Rossetti and subsequent viewers of 'The Beloved.'

Indeed, that the white bride should represent an ideal of beauty was of significant concern to Rossetti, evidenced by the known fact that he made alterations to the artwork long after it was initially finished. In 1873, Rossetti retouched the heads of the bride and her (white) right-side companion, and the bride's left hand were altered to make them, in his words, 'more ideal' (Rossetti 1889:55). The progression in Rossetti's formalist treatment of ideal feminine beauty as evidenced within his artworks of that period suggests both that it was a broader preoccupation of his, and, furthermore, that he calculatedly included non-white racial markers as an effort to bolster his white female subjects' allure. Further suggesting that Rossetti's trajectory towards ideal beauty aligned with a purpose of fulfilling heteromasculine desire, art historian Susan Casteras writes that from the 1860s onwards, Rossetti's representations were 'unprecedented' with the subjects being represented with large bodies, small heads, enlarged hands, thick wavy hair and full lips whose intentions were to 'connote[d] carnality and availability' (1992:29). These idealised projections of white femininity were subsequently perceived as non-white, as posited by critic Theodore Watts in 1883, who believed that Rossetti's subjects' 'sensuous fullness of the lips became scarcely Caucasian' (Watts in Casteras 1992:29). Watts' reading suggests that Rossetti may have consciously included such facial features, understood by himself and viewer alike as non-white, in order to further boost white feminine desirability, perhaps not unlike more contemporary white practices of 'blackfishing', whereby, as author Emma Dabiri puts it, 'today's most celebrated beauties are white women with augmented bodies and faces who've been cut and carved to produce a facsimile of blackness; pumping their lips and arses full of god knows what, to achieve the

same features myself and many others spent years of our lives being bullied for' (2018).

Thus, Rossetti's white bride is white enough to be perceived as chaste, and just Black enough to be perceived as licentious and exotic, but also not too Black: the child, whose sole function is to provide a chromatic and moral contrast provides the unacknowledged white viewer with a reassurance that she nevertheless stands apart from ultimate Blackness: in other words, the bride is fit to the purpose of fulfilling white heteropatriarchal desire. While the bride's features are voluptuous, she also blushes, further underscoring her purity in relation to a Black alternative, bringing to mind a passage by Thomas Jefferson in which he wrote rhetorically, 'Are not the fine mixtures of red and white, the expressions of every passion by greater or less suffusions of colour in the one preferable to that eternal monotony which reigns in the countenances, that immovable veil of black which covers all the emotions of the other race?' (1787:230). The delicacy of the bride's sentiment might, thus, be further understood to have been allotted visible form by Rossetti, Rae, and followers alike through her rose-tinted cheeks in comparison to the child's dark skin. In 1865, Rossetti decided that the child, who had until then been intended to be a girl, should in fact be a boy (Surtees 1971). As such, it is possible that it was an active consideration by Rossetti that the moral qualities associated with the white bride would be more effectively counterposed by a representation of childhood Black masculinity. Keeping in mind the artist's representations of adult Black masculinity as represented in 'Gentlemanly Confidence: An Awful Result', in which the Black figure is depicted as predatory and menacing in his confidence towards white women, it is possible that were the Black child in 'The Beloved' to be a man, the figure would have presented an intolerable threat to white heteromasculine claims to the bride. As such, while Rossetti's rendition of Black childhood masculinity provides a calculated and binarising moral counterweight to the delicacy of the white bride, it does so in a way that does not meaningfully disrupt Rae's desire to own her. So too, perhaps, the allotted gender identity of the child permitted Rossetti to depict him as naked, further underscoring the artist's intentions to depict the bride as worldly and refined.

Attending to the variable reception of Manet's 'Olympia' by past critics and contemporary scholars is useful in pointing towards a framework for understanding whiteness that acknowledges its structural persistence, and for bringing whiteness out of the frame of representation alone. While Manet's ascription of essential qualities to Laure can be seen as an enactment of racist beliefs, whiteness is present due to the fact viewers were ready to accept Manet's vision: by critics and art historians, too, she was either accepted in her pictorial function as subservient to Manet's constructions of white femininity, or not seen at all. These respective treatments are evidenced over a century apart by the writers Amédée Canteloube, who considered the black cat and 'negress' to be a 'vision of a nightmare', and T. J. Clark, who neglected to even mention Laure's presence in his lengthy reading of the work (Canteloube 1865; Clark 1980). Commenting on these lengthy critical omissions, whiteness scholar and art historian Maurice Berger writes, 'The racial attitudes of white art historians and critics are no different from those of society at large. Thus, it is the inherent racism of Western culture that has given the writer permission to erase Laure from the surface of Manet's painting. (2004:24-5). Here, Berger suggests that whiteness is apparent in relation to 'Olympia' not primarily through Manet's initial racialising objectification of Laure, but rather in the more widespread acceptance of her negation.

The child in 'The Beloved', too, has been erased both consciously and (probably) unconsciously. One such example I found when consulting the curatorial file in Tate's archives, in which can be found a photocopy of the artwork which almost completely obscures the face of the child, reinforcing to anybody researching by this means that the child's existence is of secondary importance. Walking, too, to Tate Britain from Pimlico station, there can be seen a reproduction in tiles of the painting on the station walls, but this time, what was probably an unintentional erasure on the part of Tate can be seen as a conscious omission: the Black child does not exist at all in this version of the work. While Tate was not involved in any way in the construction or display of this mural, the similarities between the child's treatment here and in Tate's curatorial file suggest the existence of a broader epistemological position. Indeed, it was only upon reading an interpretation of 'The Beloved' by my doctoral colleague Janine Francois that I

realised that I, too, overlooked the humanity of the child to some degree. Francois writes how upon looking at the work, their attention focused upon the child:

> I remember being taken in by their eyes; there was a deep pensive innocence to them, but also an uncertainty about his place in the world. Looking at them reminded me of my then pre-teen nephew and the liminal space Black boys occupy, when they find out society deems them a threat. So, I adopted them and promised I would visit whenever I was onsite, to at the very least be one Black visitor that saw him, and not his Blackness used to amplify the white bodies that surrounded him (Francois 2023).

Francois describes how upon their archival visit to view Rossetti's preliminary sketches of the child, they were 'overcome with emotion. I wanted to burst into tears, especially when I learnt that when modelling, the child was in deep distress and that Rossetti described him as "crying and calling out for his mother" '. While I do not wish to suggest that Francois' reading of the work would be inevitably shared by all Black viewers, it did nevertheless cause me to question my own contrasting affective distance. While I cannot say that I identify with the white bride, despite the similarities of our skin and hair colour, I did not notice the racialised violence of the work either: I considered 'The Beloved', at least in the beginning of my encounters with it, as a relatively neutral site of art historical analysis. This in turn prompted me to consider the broader effect my own whitened blind spots could have in attempting to present an analysis of the artwork. Who might read my thesis and believe that I have authority in what I am claiming to see? Whether conscious or not, the potential effects of my reading more broadly disseminated are similar to the symbolic omission of the child in the mural and the curatorial file: the Black child is perceived to be of lesser importance than the lighter-skinned figures. That 'The Beloved' was chosen for the Pimlico mural attests to the broader canonised ascription of its aesthetic and national value, but nevertheless, the very configurations of Blackness that it both constructs and negates are here rendered disposable and even more forgotten, despite their having fundamentally informed the positioning of the work as canonical in the first place. In a sense, the Blackness initially visualised within the work has been doubly negated by the mural and

curatorial file alike: in the rise of ‘The Beloved’ to canonical status, the child was only present to uphold the bride’s white superiority; in the latter physical reproductions of the work, the bride’s white superiority had become so self-evident that the Black figure was no longer needed.

Tate’s preoccupation with the constructions of identity as represented within ‘The Beloved’ can be determined through attending to the development in its interpretation panels explaining the work to the public. So too can be inferred - in itself an obvious point - that Tate considers its stance on interpretation to be influential in directing public understanding of the work. This observation is, however, important because it suggests that Tate, in accordance with its Vision aims, takes a stance that it has the ability both to know what the work symbolises, and to be able to mediate the public’s interpretation of its meaning. The validity of these core positions in relation to whiteness particularly will be detailed further in ‘Institutional Whiteness.’ For now, that Tate has grappled with the mediation of meaning is apparent from the differences between its past and present interpretations of the work. One interpretation, archived in the same curatorial file, reads,

> Rossetti’s theme is once again the overwhelming beauty of women, and man’s weakness and fascination in the face of it. The subject was inspired by the biblical Song of Solomon. It shows the bride pulling back her veil; looking straight out of the picture, she places the viewer in the role of her lover, gazing at her revealed beauty (Tate 2000).

Here, Tate’s mediation of the work to the public did not mention the child, nor the white racial status of the bride, instead focusing, like Rae, Sharp, Radford, Marillier and Stephens, on the dialogue between viewer and bride, which was rendered thereby only white through implication. In asserting that the bride ‘places the viewer in the role of her lover’, this contextualisation reinforced the teleologies of axiomatic sight imposed onto the work by these authors, positioning the white bride as ostensibly sexually willing, and overlooking the ways in which Rossetti’s constructions of race were intended to uphold her desirability. As such, the subjective readings of the very same agents co-responsible for Rossetti’s canonic

status were reinforced to the broader public through the medium of institutional authority.

While the current interpretation of ‘The Beloved’ does mention the existence of the child, it is only he who is raced: the bride, to echo Richard Dyer’s words, is just a person. Its display caption writes,

> This work is inspired by the biblical Song of Solomon. It tells the story of a young woman preparing to marry. Rossetti shows her lifting a veil from her face, her eyes fixed directly on the viewer. The bride is surrounded by her attendants. In the foreground is a young Black child, holding roses. The women around the bride appear to have darker skin and hair than she does. Some modern commentators suggest that Rossetti is celebrating beauty and diversity. Others see it as racist, and argue that it imposes white standards of beauty, positioning the bride as superior due to the colour of her skin. (Tate 2019).

Here, whether or not ‘The Beloved’ is ‘racist’ is positioned as a matter of opinion upon which experts differ, despite extensive scholarship that might be seen to support such a claim. As explored in greater detail in ‘Institutional Whiteness’, there is much at stake in Tate taking a proactive stance on depictions of racial hierarchies: as such this can be seen as a diplomatic attempt to remain non-committal. With the findings of ‘Institutional Whiteness’ in mind, this interpretation label can be seen as evidence against Tate’s claims to institutional authority in terms of mediating artworks’ meaning: while Tate’s Vision statement suggests that it has the ability to influence the public’s understanding of artworks, the fraught social and political perceptions of whiteness as a discourse, and the economic ramifications Tate might face by taking an authoritative stance mean that the institution is, in fact, influenced by disparate public opinion.

## George Rae: Producer of Meaning

While Rossetti’s racial understandings were fundamental in determining the binarised constructions between the white bride and the Black child in ‘The

Beloved', attending to whiteness as a structural formation requires an understanding, too, of the ways in which economic and social mechanisms have served to uphold his representations of race as broadly legitimised. While Rossetti was dependent upon his white networks who publicly validated his artworks and thereby contributed to his elevated status, his success as similarly inextricable from his patrons' involvement, not only social and financial but aesthetic as well. Without his patrons, he would not have been able to develop his aesthetic vision, or have the financial means to continue his artistic practice. As such, this section now attends to the role of George Rae in establishing the meanings of 'The Beloved' that were proposed to its subsequent viewers, who in turn received these meanings and contributed to the work's elevated status. Rae's role in the production of the work was indeed fundamental: a letter written by Rossetti in 1864, shortly before he painted 'The Beloved', details his self-perceived obligation to align his work with popular
tastes in order to make a living, thus making clear the intersections between financial and aesthetic influence that shaped his practice (Rossetti 1903:61). George Rae, the chairman of North and South Wales bank and eventual buyer of 'The Beloved', had considerable assets at his disposal, and, as discussed, played an active role in shaping the work according to his personal desires. As such, an exploration of Rae's own understandings of race and gender are, perhaps, equally important as those of Rossetti in understanding how meaning was intentionally proposed in 'The Beloved.'

Rae's travel diary documents a trip he made with his family to Egypt the same year that 'The Beloved' was completed. In his accounts Rae wrote about Egyptian people in a way that certainly elucidates how he himself might have constructed ideas of race on account of his experiences. During his travels in 1865, he wrote that he witnessed 'Universal jabber, and much quarrelling and gesticulation, especially amongst the natives, but no blows; although you expect them to tear each other to pieces on the spot—they fly into such transports of rage' (1898:39*).* Here, Rae assumes a universalist standpoint similar to those speaking about the imagery of 'The Beloved', which, like Carlyle's and Rossetti's own use of ambiguous humour in speaking about racial others, suggests a racialised affinity

with his readers. In suggesting that ‘you expect them [...]’, Rae has a writing style whereby his own subjectivity is obscured, and the reader’s agreement is anticipated. His observation of what he names ‘jabber’, ‘quarrelling’, ‘gesticulation’, ‘rage’ and a possibility of physical violence alludes simultaneously to disinterest and superiority, whereby Rae appears to take for granted his own distanced position of neutral civility. That he readily applies the hallmark racialised tropes of savagery to these ‘natives’ puts into perspective what he might have wished to see in ‘The Beloved’: Stephens’ description of the child’s ‘barbaric jewellery’, thus, can be seen as apt in illustrating how Rae, too, might have perceived Rossetti’s racial contrasts within the painting.

Rae’s dismissiveness towards the people he encountered is further manifested by his casual descriptions of children as ‘little Oriental brats’, suggesting both that he perceived them negatively, and that he aligned these negative perceptions with his vision of their racial otherness (ibid.:43). It is not only his accounts of the people he encountered that belie his distinct national and racial self-understanding through his casually assumed superiority in contrast with his perception of these ostensible others, but also of the country: later in his journal he describes Egypt as a land ‘flowing with milk and honey’, asking, ‘Why didn’t we have it when we might have had it, instead of the Crimean war?’ (ibid.:57). It is Rae’s matter-of-factness in speaking about ‘we’ and the implications of that ‘we’ in its shared colonial claims to national ownership that point towards his taking of British superiority as known fact: the casual nature of his reports indicate a sense of entitlement, anticipated to be shared with the reader, which is justified on the grounds of racial difference. While, perhaps, given his possible anticipation of the reader’s sympathies, he may not have been unusual in his beliefs, this does not matter for the methodological purpose of locating whiteness: indeed, that his beliefs were certainly indicative of a broader racial and national discourse points towards the embedded nature of whiteness as expressed epistemologically. These written accounts of Rae’s own configuring of sight and racialising perception demonstrate with relative certainty that he took racial difference to be an axiomatic, visibly demonstrable truth. It is this configuration, combined with the economic resources at Rae’s disposal, that further reinforced Rossetti’s own understandings

of race, and which contributed to the propositions of meaning offered to subsequent viewers of 'The Beloved.'

Rae's attitudes towards women, too, are evident from his travel accounts, and just as his writings corroborate Rossetti's latent constructions of racial difference, they also confirm that the representations of white heterofemininity within 'The Beloved' were shaped by an objectifying (white) heteromasculine desire. In his accounts, Rae documents that he travelled with his family, but he consistently mentions by name only his son Edward, referring to his wife and daughter as just that - his wife and daughter (1898). Any concluding questions as to Rae's perceptions of relative gender statuses might be put into further perspective through his descriptions of the women he encountered on his travels, who he described variously as 'a dirty old hag' and 'a fat and coarse-looking drab of fifty […] The old frump!' (ibid.:48, 68). Suffice to say, Rae did not ascribe intrinsic value, whether positive or negative, to the men he encountered by virtue of their appearance. That Rae equated beauty (or a perceived lack of it) both with a particular vision of ideal femininity, and with what he perceived as positive attributes of character (or lack of it) is also made apparent in the reverse as he muses on the ostensible mystery of a much younger woman on account of what he sees: 'She was about eighteen, with the most wondrous eyes, and the sweetest, saddest mouth, and teeth so lovely […]. Her eyes had the depth and mystery in them that you see in [Rossetti's] portraits of Mrs Morris […]' (ibid.:99).

The link between Rae's axiomatic perception of women in real life and Rossetti's representations of beauty on canvas is here explicit. Rae both saw Rossetti's artworks in real life, and saw real life in Rossetti's artworks: the duo's collaboratively-made constructions of difference, on racial or sexual lines or both, were accurate to Rae's perceptions of the world. These casually-held 'knowledges' of the moral qualities associated with human difference were likely accurate to the perceptions of Rae's contemporaries, too, as evidenced by his own supporters who presented him as uniformly good. Such can be seen in the introduction to Rae's 'The Country Banker', in which writer Ernest Sykes presented the man as scrupulously unbiased, drawing attention to the book's chapter headings: one such

example emphasised by Sykes is ‘Mistrust no man without cause, neither be thou credulous without proofe’ (1930:xi-xii). Speaking of good banking practice, Rae himself asserts in the same book that ‘It is hardly necessary to suggest that in your dealings with the public there must be a total absence of bias—religious, political or social’ (1930:2). Rae’s obituary similarly describes him as ‘Earnest and thorough’, and so a picture of Rae thus begins to emerge as a conscientious man who was careful not to be swayed towards any ascription of negative qualities on account of identity (Liverpool Daily Post 1902:2). It is possible that Rae kept his thoughts to himself and had, to those he knew, an appearance of not holding bias. It is also possible, however, and perhaps more likely given the casually-held nature of Rae’s racialising worldviews and his anticipation of his readers’ sympathies, that his contemporaries, too, did not notice race as a potential means of human categorisation.

As such, at best, Rae’s contemporaries overlooked what might have been distinct racisms on Rae’s part, and at worst, they whole-heartedly agreed. Somewhere in the middle (in terms only of the extent to which racialising perceptions are consciously-held) is the most likely possibility that those who admired Rae, like those who admired Rossetti, were those who could most relate to him, and thus shared his epistemological positioning that ostensibly knew white people both to share a race, and to be superior. In whichever case, the ascriptions Rae perceived to correlate with visible difference, and that were made permanent on canvas by Rossetti who was influenced by his own social positioning, remained unproblematised, and were able thus to proliferate. It is these experiences, rendered permanent onto canvas by Rae’s financial means, and presented as objective despite their subjective epistemological underpinnings mobilised by Rae’s elevated social positioning, that have been subsequently inherited, continually objective, by critical appraisers of Rossetti’s artworks. These appraisers, evidenced by the words of Rossetti’s followers such as Stephens, were similarly privileged and, like Rae, unaware of their racialising worldview, but continued to believe the vision offered within ‘The Beloved’ to be axiomatic. It is, as such, these racialising worldviews, taken as truth, which both influence how Tate interprets ‘The Beloved’, and which (taking for granted Tate’s claims of influencing the public’s critical

understanding of what they see) thereby have the potential to influence racial understanding to this day.

**Figure 2**: Richard Wilson, *Llyn-y-Cau* (c.1765-7). Photo: Tate

# Landscape

> …in the midst of my modern collection I still keep what I call my 'National Gallery Wall' of old English oil-paintings, dwarfed but honoured, like the original Portiuncula of St. Francis in the Cathedral of Assisi. Here the crowning glory is Richard Wilson's *Summit of Cader Idris* (which by a singular piece of luck I bought nearly forty years ago, for I won't say how little, at Shepherd's in King Street), painted when the artist returned to his native Wales after his long sojourn in Italy. It portrays a pool at the foot of a pointed mountain-peak, and Roger Fry said of it that in the maturity of his powers Wilson had brought to the service of the scene he had loved in his youth the classic symmetry which he had learnt by the Lake of Nemi. It is now recognized as one of the painter's masterpieces: it has been seen in Paris, Vienna and Amsterdam; and I had another proud day when Kenneth Clark told me that the Trustees of the National Gallery, meeting after the Exhibition of British Art at Burlington House, had unanimously entered it on their list of the pictures which really must be secured for Trafalgar Square. I need hardly say that I immediately altered my will, and it is now one of my pleasures, when I visit the Gallery, to choose the place where my ghost will see it on the walls (Marsh 1939:353-4).

## Introduction

The purpose of the previous section of this thesis, 'Portrait', was to explore how whiteness might be located in an artwork in which the portrayals of the human form are overt. In 'The Beloved', the subject of that section, the depiction of bodies within the painting provide a sturdy departure point from which the moral projections associated with skin colour by Rossetti, his patron, and those forming the broader social context in which they were both situated can be visibly ascribed to the individuals represented in the image. In this sense, locating whiteness within Richard Wilson's 'Llyn-y-Cau', the artwork that forms the central subject of this section, 'Landscape', takes a necessarily different approach: this section, by contrast, strives to understand how whiteness might relate to artworks whose primary function does not appear, at least primarily, to be a representation of human form at all. In 'Portrait', it was found that while the representations of differential skin tones of the figures within the painting were themselves visibly obvious, the ways in which these skin tones related to constructions of race

nevertheless required a broader contextualisation which was not evident within a formalist reading of the work alone. Instead, Rossetti's known stances on racial differentiation, and the understandings that his viewers might have inferred from the painting, were found to be what underpinned whiteness in its truest, epistemological sense. In this section, these parameters of context are further expanded, with a shared sense of Berger's methodological provocation in mind: 'to illustrate the power and ubiquity of race in conditioning the meaning of […] visual culture, I have selected the primary texts scrutinized here for their conspicuous distance from the politics of race' (2005:2).

Given the relative scarcity of primary biographical information pertaining to Wilson, marked in comparison to the many texts written about Rossetti by his contemporaries, a focus on the broader contexts of aesthetic meaning is necessary. This said, there does exist biographical information on Wilson which allows here for a brief setting of the scene. Richard Wilson was born in 1714 in Penegoes, Wales, where he received a classical education at home. In his late teens, he moved to London to be apprenticed to artist Thomas Wright, and began his artistic career painting portraits but changed direction in favour of landscape paintings after a period of time spent in Italy during the 1850s. 'Landscape' focuses specifically on the version of his painting 'Llyn-y-Cau' held in the Tate collection. While the exact date is not known with certainty, it has been dated as having been painted c.1765-7: as such, this section explores the earliest contexts of whiteness in the thesis as a whole. Despite the comparatively sparce primary texts speaking about the artist, Wilson's influence has been significant: it is known, for example, that J.M.W. Turner, whose artworks comprise around half of Tate's collection, consciously drew upon Wilson's practice. From this alone it can be surmised that Wilson's influence upon Tate's presentation of British aesthetic identity is considerable. Turner himself unambiguously claimed indebtedness to Wilson, painting a homage to the artist in his Royal Academy diploma, and stating that he walked 'in the footsteps of Wilson' around Wales (Postle & Simon 2014:130). Then director of Tate stated in the catalogue to its 1983 monographic exhibition of Wilson, 'The Landscape of Reaction', that Wilson had no immediate precursors: his vision of landscape, and the values underpinning it, which will be the subject of this

section, were both taken to represent a new phenomenon in terms of their validation by the public, and are deeply influential in the constitution of the British landscape canon as presented at Tate today (Bowness in Solkin 1983:7). While it is Turner's legacy that holds of the two artists the greater contemporary public esteem, it is Wilson nonetheless who is frequently credited as 'the Father of British Landscape' and 'one of our greatest landscape painters' (Spencer-Longhurst 2020; Bowness in Solkin 1983:7; Ford 1951:11). As such, 'Landscape' locates Wilson as an individual of key relevance in determining the canonical importance of British landscape paintings. In addition to the artwork's ostensibly conspicuous distance from the politics of race, Wilson's considerable influence, or perceived influence, is one of the core reasons for which I chose to explore this work.

'Landscape' continues along a similar methodological vein as 'Portrait' in that it explores how Wilson came to be considered as culturally significant, despite–unlike Rossetti–his relative lack of fame. While Rossetti's ascendance to canonicity was in part relative to his personal fame, Wilson by contrast remains lesser known as a figure in his own right. As such, Wilson's own understandings of race cannot so be easily determined. Accordingly, his paintings necessarily constitute a primary testimony through which his perceptions and aesthetic aspirations might be fabulated. In any case, as argued in 'Portrait', the active influence of the artist's racialising epistemologies on the artwork can only be part of the story. In the absence of biographical information on Wilson, therefore, 'Landscape' necessarily extends this idea to focus on an even greater extent on the roles of Wilson's various supporters in legitimising his artworks as aesthetic and nationally valuable. As Janet Wolff writes in her analysis of the social factors that underpin the processes of cultural canonisation, '…art and literature have to be seen as historical, situated and produced, and not as descending as divine inspiration to people of innate genius' (1993:1). Accordingly, 'Landscape', like 'Portrait', does not take Wilson's acclaim on its own terms, but instead focuses upon some of the many instances in which he has been positioned as a figure of ostensibly objective cultural importance, and seeks to determine the structural mechanisms that allows such claims to become entrenched.

**Figure 3**: Version A - Richard Wilson, *Llyn-y-Cau* (c.1765-7). Photo: Tate

**Figure 4**: Version B - Richard Wilson, *Llyn Cau* (c.1765-70), © private collection, London. Photo: Matthew Hollow, courtesy of richardwilsononline.ac.uk

**Figure 5**: Version C - Richard Wilson, *A View of Cader Idris* (c.1764-5), © private collection, Wales. Photo: Jerry Hardman-Jones, courtesy of richardwilsononline.ac.uk

## ‘Llyn-y-Cau’ in context

There are three known versions of the painting ‘Llyn-y-Cau’, all attributed to Richard Wilson: one that features in Tate’s collection (A), which will be the version of primary significance to this thesis; one in the private collection of Wilson scholar and art historian David Solkin in London (B), and the final painting belonging to the Mostyn family in Flintshire, North Wales, close to where the artist himself lived (C). While ‘Landscape’ focuses on the object biography of the Tate version, it touches too at points upon the contexts of the other two versions in order to further link between the aesthetic understandings and social contexts of the paintings’ various owners historically, ultimately making a case that whiteness is both cause and effect of intergenerationally unequal access to wealth, which corresponds to racial beliefs and preferences having been reproduced through aesthetic canonisation. In doing so, ‘Landscape’ draws particularly from the extensive historical and methodological work of Solkin, whom I interviewed in order to learn about how and why he came to acquire his version of the painting. Writing in the catalogue to Tate’s monographic exhibition of Wilson, ‘The Landscape of Reaction’ (1983), Solkin advocated that in order for contemporary viewers to understand Wilson’s work, there is a need to situate him within the broader contexts of his own contemporaries’ discourses of aesthetic intelligibility:

> …the immediate physical presence of these pictures should not lure us into the trap of assuming that they – or indeed any works of art – possess an inherent, timeless meaning which is therefore automatically accessible to our comprehension. […] …we must attempt to discover, at least as far as possible, what they signified to their original public, and how they functioned within their proper spheres of time and place (1983:11).

Thus, while ‘Llyn-y-Cau’ presents a scene that, as ‘Landscape’ determines throughout, is indeed taken by more contemporary viewers to be intelligible through looking alone, its pictorial significance cannot, in fact, be taken for granted. That there would, however, have been a mutual understanding between Wilson and his own contemporaries is more certain, however, as Solkin suggests: ‘Wilson formulated his pictorial statements on the assumption that his viewers would have

no difficulty in determining the meanings he wished to convey' (ibid.). Solkin's efforts to contextualise Wilson within the broader social understandings of his time can be understood in many ways as a radical disruption of the steadfast lineage of assertions made by art historians before him that Wilson's work had a timeless quality that did not require contextualisation in order for them to be appreciated or understood. For Solkin, to 'ignore the social dimension' is to

> embark on a road leading to the dead end of connoisseurship, where we can discern form and content without comprehending either the reasons for their existence or the meanings that they originally conveyed. Such an approach, moreover, takes us no closer to understanding why Wilson succeeded, where so many others before him had failed, in becoming the first British-born artist to make a full-time career as a landscape specialist; and it is this factor, perhaps more than any other, which commends him to our particular attention. To attribute his success to some abstract notion of quality, without trying to ascertain what qualities his audience was looking for, rests on a false assumption that standards of taste have remained unchanged since the eighteenth century (1983:12).

As articulated here, Solkin's scholarship of Wilson's practice can be seen as of strategic methodological importance in the surfacing of whiteness because of its refusal to accept meaning as visually axiomatic from formal readings of the artist's work. Furthermore, his acknowledgement of the role of Wilson's viewers in legitimising his practice through their financial validation is similarly important.

However, with regards particularly to the study of whiteness, 'Landscape' suggests that standards of taste may not have shifted as clearly as Solkin explains, but rather that the racializing values that came to be associated with 'Llyn-y-Cau' at the time of its creation, which this section discusses, have become entrenched through their continuing lack of recognition. As such, while 'Landscape' takes a similar scholarly approach in its focus on viewer understanding, it also tracks how the artwork has been understood subsequently, with particular reference to the person who donated 'Llyn-y-Cau' into public ownership: Sir Edward Marsh. 'Landscape' suggests, ultimately, that what Marsh understood in the painting was consistent with the aesthetic discourses of Wilson's time, and as such his own epistemological position regarding racial categorisation could be considered to

provide further evidence that despite the painting's ostensible pictorial neutrality, it represented and continues to represent among its inherited meanings a vision of racial dominance, binarisation and surveillance. The omission of race as a contextual factor in the study of Wilson's work, though perhaps more markedly visible in Solkin's analysis due to its important interrogation of other power structures, is nevertheless by no means unique to Solkin's approach: as such, this section, like the others, does not seek to single anybody out, but rather to acknowledge that such omissions are endemic within art historical study. Indeed, when I interviewed him, Solkin offered an acknowledgement of the limitations of his scholarship: he commented, 'it didn't really occur to me to interrogate that', continuing, 'I mean, at the time when I was interrogating a lot of other structures of power […] I hold my hand up. I would say that's a perfectly legitimate critique.'

A more apt setting of the scene for this section, in fact, can be found through reference to the critical responses to Solkin's curatorial interpretation of Wilson's works in the 1983 exhibition. As observed by Neil McWilliam and Alex Potts, not only Solkin's scholarly approach, but Solkin himself was received with suspicion and scorn by the British press of all political persuasions. They write,

> Traditionally in this country, the Right's refusal to recognize the politics implicit in high culture has been expressed in hurt accusations against the Left for dragging politics into culture. But times are changing. The right has now moved to the offensive, sniffing out the slightest hints of Marxist subversion. Nothing showed this more graphically than the acrimonious, and on occasion frankly hysterical attacks on last Autumn's Tate gallery show devoted to the eighteenth-century Welsh landscapist, Richard Wilson (1983:171).

For McWilliam and Potts, Solkin's approach was, if anything, notable for its intentions to leave the viewer to their own thoughts: 'The walls were free of didactic placards, the paintings simply allowed to "speak for themselves" ' (ibid.). However, they continue, the 'barely noticeable' contextualisations of the works places 'as far as possible from the paintings' became a fraught focus for 'eyes inflamed by visions of Marxist infiltration' who perceived them to be ' "soap boxes" of a political hack bent on destroying the spectator's pleasure' (ibid.). Here, as it will also be

discussed in the next chapter, ‘Institutional Whiteness’, contextualisation was considered to be anathema to enjoyment, and Solkin’s Canadian heritage was positioned as a core concern: his scholarly and curatorial approaches did not give ‘pause to the fury of the *Daily Telegraph* editorialist once he suspected that the eighteenth-century English landscape was being desecrated by a rabid foreign Marxist’ (1983:172).

The authors sum up the critics’ suspicion of Solkin and his curatorial methods through reference to a German culture magazine, *Westermanns Monatshefte*, in which they quote as having commented,

> Is conservatism then so deep-rooted amongst the English that they resist anything that smacks of a new point of view? Has patriotic zeal been aroused because an American has taken possession of an English painter? Or is English landscape painting so much part of English mythology, that people were provoked to fury by Solkin's materialistic notion that understanding can only begin where mythology ends? (in 1983:174).

This Gramscian ‘iron conviction’ (1971:168), holding as undisputed and shared knowledge that British history aligns with specific, pre-ordained values, constitutes the underpinning theme of this section and, ultimately, the thesis as a whole. That Solkin’s non-British nationality was drawn into these critics’ responses as a means to undermine his scholarly legitimacy is significant in understanding what a study of whiteness might have to contribute to the historiography of British landscape painting: as these responses suggest and as McWilliam and Potts, and Solkin himself observe, landscapes form loci whereby British national inclusion and exclusion is readily imagined but the politics of this imagining is nevertheless not recognised.

This is, indeed, a concern with continuing and marked contemporary inflections, as noted by Corinne Fowler, who writes in *Green Unpleasant Land*, ‘Whiteness, the logic goes, is native to the English countryside: anyone else is an outsider and an imposter’ (2020:22). This is a theme addressed, too, by artist Ingrid Pollard, whose series of photographic works, titled ‘Pastoral Interlude’ (1988) represent single figures in British landscape scenes in order to ‘disrupt […] simple

common-sense notions' and 'challenge assumptions of identity and ownership' (Pollard 2021). The writing accompanying one of the photographs in the series writes, 'it's as if the Black experience is only lived within an urban environment. I thought I liked the Lake District; where I wandered lonely as a Black face in a sea of white. A visit to the countryside is always accompanied by a feeling of unease; dread…' (ibid.). Pollard states that the writings are intended to be read in direct opposition to the images, which are 'holiday snaps […] People are happy in those photographs': as such, while the images are not supposed to symbolise an alienation of people of colour in the British countryside, the fact that this is the meaning derived from them might be read as telling with regards to the assumptions that are made about race and associated experience (Ghadiali 2022). That whiteness in a rural setting is a charged topic is furthermore attested by the defensively indignant tone, for example, of an article in *The Telegraph*, titled, 'Is the countryside too "white"? Last time I checked it was green' in which the author refers to a fictionalised 'Farmer Jones': 'Before he's even turned the key of his tractor in the chilly, early morning darkness, he needs to shoulder the burden of being a racist' (Sitwell 2024).

That there exist imagined signifiers of inclusion, which require a continued investment into historic ideals which position white bodies as deserving, powerful and superior is the argument that this section strives to make. Furthermore, 'Landscape' finds that Wilson's works were rendered intelligible to his viewers through their invocation of discourses that spoke, in ways no less explicit for their lack of conscious articulation, only to white people. The case study situates 'Llyn-y-Cau' and its reception by viewers within these broader impetuses towards aesthetic refinement and white exceptionalism, and evidences the ongoing legacy of the painting's tacit but firm association with these codes through studied acknowledgment of the personal politics, preferences and epistemological positioning–even overt racisms–of Marsh, without whom the painting would perhaps never have been on public display at Tate.

While Wilson's artworks are believed by some—such as the critics previously discussed and Edward Marsh, as will be explored,—to belong to a

lineage of artists whose claims to British aesthetic value are inherently ‘known’, the attribution of works to Wilson is particularly difficult to ascertain, as Wilson’s biographer acknowledges (Constable 1953:8). An example of this contradiction can be found in the catalogue to the 1949 Birmingham City Art Gallery exhibition of Wilson’s work, which writes how his ‘pictures defy analysis and speak for themselves, inspiring instinctive sympathy for their understanding of the English country and the tender quality of the painting’ (1949:7). Meanwhile, the same catalogue, however, suggests that Wilson’s work is more valuable than that of his associates: ‘Within a few years of his death Wilson’s work was confused with that of his pupils […]. The confusion has persisted and it is hoped that the present exhibition may help, in some measure, to separate the grain from the chaff’ (1949:5). Here there is an obvious paradox: while Wilson’s works are difficult to attribute, once they have been attributed to Wilson, they are known to be superior. As such, the vehement value ascribed to his paintings cannot be derivative from what is actually seen, but rather that which is imagined in association with Wilson’s existing canonical narratives. Speaking in our interview, Solkin recounted how the previous owner of his version of the painting had tried to have it auctioned with another painting by Wilson at Sotheby’s: ‘they accepted one that's by Wilson because it was in Constable's Wilson book. They didn't accept [‘Llyn-y-Cau’] because it wasn't.’ As such, the very validation of ‘Llyn-y-Cau’ as attributable to Wilson might yet be fragile, but the artwork’s claims to British and aesthetic canonicity nevertheless, as the study of Marsh in particular attests, requires an acceptance of his authorship as a premise. ‘Landscape’ seeks to understand what visual attributes and imaginings might have motivated Wilson’s followers to claim his work’s canonical status.

The three known versions of ‘Llyn-y-Cau’, each have slightly differing titles and formal emphases. While the exact dates the paintings were made are not known with absolute certainty, the given estimations (A: c.1765-7; B: c.1765-70 and C: c.1764-5) suggest a potentially chronological progression with the Mostyn version having been created first, and the other two, including the Tate version having followed subsequently. Indeed, that there may have been a shift in Wilson’s

**Figure 6**: Roxy Minter, *After Richard Wilson* (2022). Photo: Julian Boys

**Figure 7**: Richard Wilson, *Llyn-y-Cau* (c.1765-7). Photo: Tate

aesthetic intentions in best representing the scene might be attested to by the fact that the Mostyn version has the most marked differences from the later two. Comparing the three versions allows for some insight into Wilson's vision of aesthetic success: from such a comparison, which follows here, his awareness of the broader aesthetic discourses in circulation at the time of his life can be intimated. All three paintings depict the crag of Craig-y-Cau, the summit of Cader Idris, towering above the volcanic lake of the paintings' namesake Llyn-y-Cau. Contrasting the paintings with my own photograph taken from the same site (figure 6), it can be seen that the paintings' viewer is positioned on a fictitious slope, perhaps evidencing that Wilson wished to represent a sharper representation of depth down to the lake and crag than he saw. In all of the versions, the crag is also accentuated to a greater or lesser degree, with a much sharper summit than my photograph suggests, and the size of the lake, too, is emphasised.

Of the three, version C has the most formal differences: while still accentuated in comparison to the real peak shown in the photograph, its depiction of the Craig-y-Cau crag is markedly smaller than in the later versions. Furthermore, version C has a wider aspect, and thereby accentuates the surroundings of the mountain rather than focusing in on it as in the other two. In this earlier version, there are flecks of paint representing birds circling around the peak, and smoke rising in the distant far left, both of which are not included in the other paintings. In versions A and B, the crag is even bigger and sharper, with the foreground lengthened and aspect narrowed, giving the impression of a steeper angle between the viewer and the scene. While there are a handful of people depicted ascending and descending the peak in C, these are greater in number in both A and B with some additions of figures scattered around the lake, who are now illuminated with lighter paint and larger in size, making them easier to pick out from their surroundings. In A, the Tate version, the contrast between light and dark in the crag is more marked than either of the others, with shadows and highlights accentuating the striations in the rock. The most striking difference of all, perhaps, is that the earliest version omits the white-skinned figure with a telescope who appears in the other two, including that held by Tate. The figure's long shadow to the north east sets the scene maybe as a winter's afternoon. Their diminutive size

in comparison to my own posing in the photograph suggests, maybe, that Wilson wished to emphasise the viewers' distance from the scene. The formal alterations Wilson made throughout his engagement with the scene could indicate his painterly ambitions to represent the scene to the viewer in increasing accordance with prevailing discourses of taste and the sublime, a discussion of which follows shortly. Wilson's experimentation with aspect, contrast, perspective and scale all might be seen to attest to the artist's wish to draw attention to the viewer's position in relation to the mountain, itself represented in varying degrees of imposing grandeur. His differing attention to the presence of people within the scene, suggest, too, that he held a significance to humans' positioning in nature. What these formal significances might have been, although uncertain without explicit evidence of Wilson's intentions, can be surmised through attending to the work of aesthetic theorists of his time, who spoke about the relative merits of the various pictorial devices he grappled with.

That Wilson might have had in the forefront of his mind a consideration of humans' place within nature is particularly apparent with the respective omission and inclusion of the figure with the telescope, as noted by Wilson scholar and owner of version B, David Solkin. When I asked Solkin in an interview how he would approach the topic of whiteness in relation to the work, his point of focus, indeed, was this figure:

> I would probably start with the man with the telescope. Who is, in a sense, using technology as a means to knowledge [...]. You could certainly talk about those things in terms of gender without much difficulty: that this is about this capacity to see the larger picture; to literally rise above - to assume a kind of superior position overlooking nature. This is something which was generally talked about in terms of attributes of both masculinity and also of gentility. [There is also a] dialectic that this picture operates between the primitive and the civilised. This is presented as a primitive, strange landscape which is defined in some ways as other to the modern, sophisticated culture.

Here, Solkin considers the representational aspects of the painting as it can be seen, suggesting that whiteness might be ascertained in relation to the artwork as a function of Wilson's formalist intent. Within these parameters of formalist reading,

Solkin, too, considers the aspect and elevation of the painting to be significant, and in his interpretation of the figure with the telescope as a symbol of surveillance, aligns his reading of whiteness as related to masculine assertions of refinement and dominance over nature. Solkin's reading places whiteness as something that might be seen within the frame: as such, an emanation of Wilson's intention.

While no documentation attests to his understandings of race, 'Landscape' seeks to offer a provisional reconstruction of his epistemological positioning might have been through cross referencing these aesthetic progressions, including the themes that Solkin acknowledges, with popular aesthetic discourses of his time. Furthermore, in light of the discussions in 'Exploring Whiteness' which positioned whiteness as a form of artist and viewers' respective projections of meaning, this case study expands the study of whiteness beyond the frame to incorporate a recognition of the role of Wilson's subsequent collectors in establishing his aesthetic and national value. Indeed, Wilson's success was a noteworthy phenomenon in its own right as he is understood to have been one of the first landscape artists in Britain to have been able to garner enough financial support to make a living: as such, even if Wilson's intentions can only be provisionally reconstructed, his economic success points to a broader appetite for his work. Given that this new ability to patronise British landscape painters existed at this particular point in time—at which Britain was the world's biggest slave-trading nation and the world's dominant colonial power—the potential for a link between Wilson's artistic endeavour and broader perceptions of race in his socially mobile viewers is significant. With the trajectory of Wilson's pictorial development in mind, an analysis of how the third version of 'Llyn-y-Cau' might be seen to participate within and deviate from these discourses constitutes the first entry point of this case study.

## 'Llyn-y-Cau' and Aesthetic Discourse

It is difficult to ascertain from 'Llyn-y-Cau' alone whether or not Wilson engaged with or defied aesthetic norms of his time: in terms of the lineages of classical

landscape composition, the scene is an unorthodox one. Even to a scholar deeply familiar with the terms of these classical norms, Wilson's painterly intentions are disputable, as Solkin reflects:

> When I wrote about it in the Wilson catalogue I was struck by the tensions between the classical landscape composition and a highly unclassifiable subject. […] the spatial relationships between the foreground and the middle ground don't make any sense. […] I'm still figuring out how you have a picture with a central focus with the peak [...] …it's not the highest thing in the picture. […] …if you read it from left to right, it steps up. [...] …you're not meant to read a classical landscape from left to right. The highest point can be a tree, but it's something usually in the foreground. He clearly uses the rocks to anchor the composition. But for all of its inconsistencies; for all of its incoherence in some ways, it still works as a landscape. [...] …it's a composition which I admire. I think it was a brave thing to have done.

For Solkin, 'Llyn-y-Cau' is noteworthy in its disruption of traditional landscape norms. Such a reading suggests that Wilson may both have known how his viewers would have sought to understand the painting, and thereby deliberately intended to direct their vision towards the mountain peak. Given the methodological focus of this thesis on determining the points at which sight is rendered ostensibly axiomatic, and the role of viewers' assertions of aesthetic worth plays in determining artworks' canonical status, Solkin's words are noteworthy. While in itself unsurprising, given his ownership of this version of 'Llyn-y-Cau', Solkin speaks of his admiration both for the painting and the artist, suggesting that 'it works' as a landscape. He also speaks of his role in writing about the painting for the Wilson catalogue: as such, his role of scholarly authority can be seen to intersect with his aesthetic preferences. While it is unremarkable that scholars would choose to study what interests them, nevertheless a link, however obvious, can be established between subjective preference and its objective presentation as knowledge received more broadly by viewers.

As Solkin suggests, Wilson was indeed highly conversant with the classical traditions that his audiences appreciated, having been described by his contemporary the art collector and East India Company director Benjamin Booth as 'an excellent Classical Scholar, his father a clergyman being indefatigable in giving

him a good Education under his own Inspection, he being himself a man of learning' (Booth, date unknown). Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that the artist was highly proactive both in establishing networks with other artists of his time, and getting his work seen and appreciated by prospective patrons: this network of artists collaborated to exhibit their artworks to the general public, and shifted their styles in accordance with broader taste. In 1760, Wilson was a founding member of the Society of Artists of Great Britain, whose aims were to ensure that 'their Several Abilitys be brought to public view', and to 'encourage Artists whose abilities and attainments may justly raise them to distinction who otherwise might languish in Obscurity' (Walpole Society 1918:116). As these words from their papers suggest, the artists shared a conscious intent in positioning themselves as both visible and distinguished, and pursued a method soliciting public interest drawn from the French Salon exhibitions, thereby constituting the first organised public body of artists in Britain (Hargraves 2005:24). That Wilson's proactive and eminent status in the London art world was consistent over the period in which 'Llyn-y-Cau' was painted is suggested, too, by his founding role of the Royal Academy in 1768.

It can be surmised that Wilson was not only pragmatic in terms of his business acumen in establishing such kinship with his fellow artists, but also in terms of his ability to gauge the aesthetic sensibilities of his prospective buyers upon whom he depended for income. Much of his earlier work drew upon classical themes which were appealing to young aristocrats, for whom it had become fashionable to complete a 'Grand Tour' of Paris, Venice, Florence and Rome in order to signal a completion of their classical education (Black 2003). In 1751, Wilson himself travelled to Venice, where he happened to meet William Lock 'of Norbury', who paid the artist to visually document their subsequent journey around Italy in the form of sketches and landscape paintings (Public Advertiser 1790). It is suggested that Wilson made use of his time in Italy to sketch statues that were well-known to viewers back in Britain wishing to position themselves as connoisseurs, and that upon his return he had established a reputation for his own learned status and pictorials offerings of classical testimony (Constable 1953). As such, his earlier landscape works in their featuring of such kinds of classical

statuary may well have served to function for his buyers as a means of signposting their elevated position of learning. Wilson's Grand Tour, which lasted six years, was both financially and aesthetically productive, as attested by his pupil Joseph Farington, who noted respectively that the artist 'took from England eighty pounds and brought back one hundred', and 'had profited in that time in respect of improvement' (in Ferens 1936). That it is suggested in objective terms that Wilson's practice *improved* is significant in terms of signalling the broader function for buyers of classically-themed artworks of the period: there were shared and pre-ordained terms by which the ostensible aesthetic value of artworks could be ascertained.

While Wilson closely engaged with the aesthetic codes of classicism which his followers sought in artworks, his interest may have been conflicted and thus perhaps financially-motivated, as his pupil's words suggest: according to Farington, Wilson 'had little respect for what are called connoisseurs and did not conciliate their regard by any flattery or attention, but sarcastically ridiculed their attachment to old pictures' (Birmingham City 1949:7). This is corroborated by a subsequent suggestion in the catalogue to Wilson's Birmingham City exhibition: although Wilson was well acquainted with the tastes of connoisseurs in his time,

> he allied himself with none. His vision was not sufficiently picturesque, either in the Venetian or in the Dutch sense, to appeal to those who had been taught to admire the mythological pastorals of Zuccarelli or the idealized country life as represented by Cuyp; nor were his subjects sufficiently classical to appeal to patrons who looked mainly for literary allusions and did not appreciate the classic clarity of Wilson's compositions (1949:8).

As such, it might be understood that Wilson pursued his own aesthetic agenda, but also given his financial success, that he engaged sufficiently with the traditional terms of viewing that his buyers required. Furthermore, given Wilson's proactive stance in presenting his works to the public, a case can be made for his having had sufficient authority to influence his viewers' aesthetic sensibilities over the course of his career. Such an observation puts Solkin's reading of 'Llyn-y-Cau' into context: the painting, perhaps, could be seen to embody Wilson's dexterity in simultaneously nodding towards and deviating from the pictorial traditions dictated

by broader discourses. Thus, while Wilson had a financial incentive to pursue the aesthetic interests of his followers, he also had some degree of flexibility in how he chose to do so.

Significantly, during the decade preceding Wilson's painting of 'Llyn-y-Cau', Britain was engaged in major conflict in the Seven Years' War, which despite its name signified a nine year period of warfare for Britain (1754-1763). The war began in North America as a prolonged series of border disputes between French and British colonists and grew in scale as both countries sought to assert broader colonial dominion. Wilson's viewers' interest in the pictorial themes of classicism is significant, therefore, given Britain's eventual victory in allyship with Prussia. His landscapes featuring Roman ruins were particularly popular with the aristocratic Grand Tourists 'returning from what they took to be a lost Utopia' (Spencer-Longhurst 2020). Given the burgeoning success of British expansionism prevalent at that time, that there was such a marked appetite for scenes of past Roman grandeur might be seen as a comparison whereby the decline of the Roman empire symbolised a broader sense of nationalist entitlement towards the assertion of colonial power. As such, a picture of the epistemological positioning of Wilson's audiences, to which he catered both out of choice and necessity, begins to emerge. Analysis of the formal experimentations Wilson made in his various renditions of 'Llyn-y-Cau', too, indicate his engagement with broader aesthetic discourses of his time. The increasing attention of aesthetic theorists towards determining objective visual criteria for ascertaining artworks' value shared an epistemological thrust towards a similarly evaluative surveillance of nature not unlike Nicholas Mirzoeff's formulation of 'white sight' discussed in the section 'Exploring Whiteness'. The aesthetic treatises explored in this section, which informed a broader social discourse that influenced Wilson and his viewers alike, could be read as both symptomatic of and agential in the broader impetus towards a hierarchical categorisation of visuality. The broad investment, demonstrated by these treatises, in the idea that what could be seen could be objectively evaluated correlates in essence with the epistemological positioning that similarly categorised people. There is much, in terms of descriptive language and objective, superior positioning of the subject in question, that aligns the aesthetic enquiries of the

period with the broader aspirations of expansion and mastery, both domestically and internationally, and of people and nature alike. Wilson's pictorial engagement with this philosophical trend towards categorising nature signifies his participation, whether prompted by financial necessity or aesthetic choice–or both–in a discourse whereby such objective categorisation became normalised. His success as an artist, too, points towards a wider dissemination of these axioms of sight, which, through his subsequent influence on British landscape art, eventually gained canonical quality.

Indeed, also significant in terms of contextualising the broader discourses of viewership in this temporal period is that the eighteenth century saw Britain become the pre-eminent trader in enslaved people, with populations in the British colonies in the Americas increasing sevenfold between 1700 and 1775 (Walvin 1999:93). This had, firstly, profound economic impacts in Britain in its underpinning of rapid industrial and technological change during the century (ibid.). Secondly, this says much about how race was perceived within broader discourse. Simon Gikandi's important work, 'Slavery and the Culture of Taste' (2011) positions the logics of British aesthetic theory as both deeply entwined and mutually constitutive with those of enslavement. For Gikandi, the institutions might be thought of as two sides to the same epistemological coin:

> …slavery and taste came to be intimately connected even when they were structurally construed to be radical opposites; they would function as what Mary Douglas would call "rituals of purity and impurity" that nevertheless create "unity in experience." For Douglas, reflections on dirt and impurity are also commentaries "on the relation of order to disorder, being to non-being, form to formlessness, life to death" (Gikandi 2011:xii).

Gikandi's scholarship suggests that slavery and taste shared at their core a grappling with the 'two issues that would provide the fulcrum for a modern identity—the question of freedom and rationality', as particularly notable in the work of Emmanuel Kant and David Hume (2011:5). Gikandi continues, 'That the mass of African slaves who drove the European economies of the time were not free was not a matter that bothered [Kant and Hume] because the black was excluded from the domains of modern reason, aesthetic judgment, and the culture of taste' (ibid.).

Here, Gikandi suggests that European theories of taste—which Wilson himself engaged with—were united with the institutionalised enslavement of Africans through their shared justifications of racial difference and the categories ascribed to such difference: 'modern reason, aesthetic judgment, and the culture of taste' were faculties seen—by the white people who set these criteria—to be available only to white people. Furthermore, Gikandi suggests that the 'repressive tendencies' required to 'use culture to conceal the intimate connection between modern subjectivity and the political economy of slavery' is itself indicative of the culture of ostensible refinement that characterised the-mid eighteenth century (2011:17). Indeed, as the discussed critics' responses to Solkin's contextualisations of Wilson's work (and the understandings of Marsh to follow) attest, the investments into landscape paintings as signifiers of taste are fraught with repressed meaning relating to national inclusion and white positioning. With this inextricable epistemological relationship between the institutions of taste and slavery in mind, this thesis now turns to the aesthetic theories which can be seen to have influenced Wilson in order to articulate the ways in which the logics signifying the two institutions might be understood to be manifest in 'Llyn-y-Cau.'

Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, published in 1757, roughly a decade before 'Llyn-y-Cau' is thought to have been painted, is one such aesthetic treatise that defined the discourse on taste, and Wilson's pictorial treatment of the painting in turn points towards his engagement with it through his interest in the sublime as an aesthetic device. Burke considered experiences of beauty and the sublime as physiological binaries of emotional arousal that were the innate product of visual experience. Given that this new configuration of sight and its relationship with emotion constituted a pronounced shift in aesthetic analyses, Wilson is likely to have been conversant with Burke's argument. The Enquiry argued that aesthetic experiences elicit categorisable feelings, shared between individuals, on account of differing visual properties. Contrary to the lineages of Western theorists of the beautiful and sublime preceding him, Burke suggested that these elicited emotions did not necessarily relate to higher aesthetic importance. The intensity of these ostensibly innate responses to visual perception were significant, in Burke's eyes: he postulated that

‘the sublime […] is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling’ (Burke 2015:33-34). For Burke, ‘visual objects of great dimensions are Sublime’ on account of the pain caused by a large volume of sensory data entering the retina, which thus ‘vibrating in all its parts must approach near to the nature of what causes pain, and consequently must produce an idea of the sublime’ (2015:109,110). By contrast, beauty, conceptualised in opposition to the sublime in terms both of the formal qualities seen and the emotions elicited, Burke considered to relate to a pleasurable visual experience whereby nothing might ‘cause any twitching or convulsion of the optic nerve (2015:124).

For Burke, it was to be expected that the beautiful and the sublime would coexist in both nature and in art, and he explained the formal distinctions between the visual properties eliciting these contrasting physiological experiences as such: ‘sublime objects are vast in their dimensions, beautiful ones comparatively small; beauty should be smooth, and polished; the great, rugged and negligent; [...] the great ought to be dark and gloomy; beauty should be light and delicate; the great ought to be solid, and even massive’ (2015:100-1). Wilson’s experimentation, discussed in the introduction to ‘Landscape’, with contrasts of light; his narrowing of the painting’s aspect, and his increasing emphasis of the height and symmetry of Craig-y-Cau all could suggest his grappling with these aesthetic binaries. In the two later versions of the painting can be seen an increased focus on contrasts between light and dark, visible through his subtle highlighting of the rocks in the foreground and his darkening of the peak. The smoothness of the surrounding land, notably the middleground, too, is more emphatic in the later iterations, as is, as Solkin noted and as my photograph indicates, Wilson’s treatment of distance between the viewer and the scene. Spatial distance, too, Burke considered to be an integral factor of the sublime: ‘Greatness of dimension, is a powerful cause of the sublime. [...] Extension is either in length, height, or depth. Of these the length strikes least; an hundred yards of even ground will never work such an effect as a tower an hundred yards high, or a rock or mountain of that altitude’ (2015:59). While Wilson’s personal motivations as an artist are difficult to determine, his proactive stance on eliciting patronage and his awareness of his viewers’ aesthetic preferences are known. As such, it is entirely likely that Wilson wished to deliver

what his learned viewers would have perceived as an immediate emotional impact. Furthermore, it might be ascertained that his own financial success, and possibly his personal artistic satisfaction, depended upon keeping up to date with contemporary ideas: as such, these shifts in formal emphasis are compelling in their suggestion that Wilson engaged with Burke's ideas.

The binarised evaluative properties of formally-discernible perception that Burke explored was indicative of a broader topical concern that was shared not only with other eighteenth century aesthetic philosophers, but also, as the subsequent discussion will detail, marks a continuing lineage of Western thought. These binaries, explained as visual experiences eliciting innate, shared and predictable physiological responses, positioned in categorisable terms not only the experience of nature and artworks, but also the visual qualities of people. This is evidenced, indeed, in Burke's own writing, in which he states that '...the colours of beautiful bodies must not be dusky or muddy, but clean and fair' (Burke 2015:94). Here, the objective terms set out to describe visual experience are extended to skin colour, and the relative beauty of 'dusky' and 'fair' complexions are presented in a seemingly uncontentious tone. Burke's evaluations of the physiological pain that looking at dark skin might cause a given viewer are even more explicit, as he narrates a story whereby a white boy (not named by Burke as such), recently cured of his total blindness, 'upon accidentally seeing a negro woman, he was struck with great horror at the sight. The horror, in this case, can scarcely be supposed to arise from any association' (2015:116). Burke offers a simple scientific explanation for this response: this innate physiological and emotional response is, he explains, due to a painful contraction of the iris. Burke concedes that repeated exposure to blackness reduces the painful experience of the looker, yet, he says, 'the nature of the original impression still continues' (2015:119). As such, the negative categorisation of Black people by the universal looker is justified through recourse to science. Furthermore, that this universal looker is light-skinned is too obvious to mention or even notice: also obvious, then, is the tacit, white acceptance of these ideas by Burke's readership.

This matter-of-fact aesthetic language which makes explicit white subjectivity without naming it speaks, too, of the demographic to which Wilson catered. The cultural entrenchment of viewers' appetite for such treatises which fixed in objective terms a binary of power between a superior looker and inferior looked-at can be traced to earlier aesthetic texts. John Baillie's earlier 'An Essay on the Sublime' (1744), as one such example, positions the experiencer of the sublime is similarly heteromasculine and white, but even more overtly dominant: 'The affections unexceptionably sublime, are heroism, or desire of conquest, such as in an Alexander or a Caesar; love of one's country; of mankind in general, or universal benevolence…' (Baillie in Townsend 1999:197). Indeed, for Baillie, paintings could provide an affective proxy for the experiences of heroism, conquest, nationalism and superiority he speaks of:

> The sublime of painting consists mostly in finely representing the sublime of the passions […]. Landscape painting may likewise partake of the sublime; such as representing mountains, etc. which shews how little objects by an apt connection may affect us with this passion: For the space of a yard of canvass, by only representing the figure and color of a mountain, shall fill the mind with nearly as great an idea as the mountain itself (Baillie in Townsend 1999:203).

As such, the looker, whose white, masculine and dominant character is simultaneously explicit and unacknowledged, is the arbiter of universal value and experience. What this looker looks *at* might be nature, people or paintings - but what these objective categorisations of visual experiences have in common is their tacitly understood potential to engender a sublimity that is both innately experienced and nobly violent in quality.

The perceived ability for artworks to act as a stand-in for nature in eliciting these fiercest of emotions in the looker is agreed on by James Harris, too, who in his *Concerning Art: A Dialogue* (1744) writes,

> [Talking to 'Oh Art!'] Wide and extensive is the reach of thy dominion. No element is there either so violent or so subtle, so yielding or so sluggish, as by the powers of its nature to be superior to they [sic] direction. […] Nor does thy empire end in subjects: thus inanimate. Its power also extends

> through the various race of animals, who either patiently submit to become thy slaves, or are sure to find thee an irresistible foe' (Harris in Townsend 1999:175).

In this instance, it is specifically landscape art that provides the unacknowledged white viewer with the possibility of experiencing the noble emotions associated with domination. The use of emphatically dominant language such as 'empire', 'race' and 'slaves', despite the ostensible distance of aesthetic discourse from active practices of slavery, suggests that the cultural psyche from which these theorists drew (and to which they contributed) was one that was deeply fixated on racial difference. Furthermore, that these discourses are so unified in their presentation of unacknowledged, powerful, white *looking* points towards a unified epistemological basis that links them together. Here, Gikandi's invocation of Horkheimer and Adorno is instructive in understanding why artworks might have been seen to stir the same feelings in the viewer as their real life counterparts: 'as Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno posited it, […] "The work of art still has something in common with enchantment: it posits its own, self-enclosed area, which is withdrawn from the context of profane existence, and in which special laws apply" ' (2011:13). As such, it might be imagined that artworks allowed the assumed white viewer to maintain the requisite distance from what they looked at to ensure their conceptual non-contamination with the paintings' subjects and the feelings derived from them.

With Gikandi's analysis in mind, it is not a stretch to believe that this assumed white viewer was indeed white in actuality as well as implication. That good taste was achievable only by those self-selected groups with the means to pursue it is suggested by the words of the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley Cooper, written in 1711:

> One who aspires to the character of a man of breeding and politeness is careful to form his judgment of arts and sciences upon right models of perfection. If he travels to Rome, he inquires which are the truest pieces of architecture, the best remains of statues, the best paintings of a Raphael or a Caraccio. However antiquated, rough, or dismal they may appear to him at first sight, he resolves to view them over and over, till he has brought himself to relish them, and finds their hidden grace and perfections (Cooper in Townsend 1999:75).

Here, being able to acquire good taste can be seen to align only with the financial means to travel and the sufficient leisure to 'view […] over and over' those artefacts already deemed canonical. This was a widespread understanding, as suggested by Joseph Addison, who similarly wrote a year later in 1712 that the best way to improve one's taste is to 'read over the celebrated works of antiquity, which have stood the test of so many different ages and countries' and to 'convers[e] with men of a polite genius' (in Townsend 1999:108).

## Aesthetics and Broader Epistemological Differentiation

That the formal evidence of 'Llyn-y-Cau' indicates Wilson's knowledge of and investment in the logic of these treatises is significant in terms of identifying his and his viewers' perceptions both of sight as a means of claiming authority and of their attitudes towards what they were looking at. However, to distinguish Wilson as an individual to be any more responsible than other influential white men of his period would be to diminish the acknowledgement of the broader stronghold of these epistemological viewpoints in the temporal periods of Wilson and beyond. By the time of Wilson's lifetime, British society had already come to accept as normative the ascription of hierarchical categorisation to that which could be visually perceived. As such, while Wilson can be seen to have engaged in the discourse, his involvement might be said in itself to be primarily symbolic rather than constitutive of these binarising attitudes towards nature. Indeed, that Wilson's story is unremarkable in comparison to those of his peers attests to the normativity of white epistemological viewing. It is, more importantly, the ensuing widespread acclaim for his work, presented, accepted and understood in objective terms, that is crucial to understand: the fixing by subsequent figures of self-claimed (white, male) authority of Wilson's canonical positioning in British art historical narrative is, ultimately, what has come to structurally reinforce the logics represented by Wilson and financially incentivised by his patrons. That artworks' lifetimes span centuries of human generations is an observation that distinguishes art history from other disciplines as an epistemological archive of distinct importance: the longevity of their unchanging formal elements that can be seen, combined with the very idea

that artworks might be understood on their own terms is what allows these axioms of vision, and the categorising logics they signify, to proliferate.

The broader appetite for categorisation by the broader British public can be gauged, for example, by the enthusiastic embracing of Carl Linnaeus' *Systema Naturae*, which was published sixteen times during the naturalist's lifetime between 1707 and 1778 (Klonk 1996:37). This surging public interest in botany was intricately interwoven with European colonial expansionism: indeed, botany as a newly claimed science was an integral force in the expropriation of land and enslavement of people as it stemmed from a desire to understand and locate plants for their economic and medicinal potential. As Feminist historian Rachel O'Donnell explains, 'Science and the development of capitalism converged on the discipline of botany as ornaments in European gardens, sought-after medicaments, and profitable plants became the most important materials in the building of empire, but only after a new 'objective' science had taken ideological hold' (2010:60). Here, the claiming of science as a discipline, justifying its own disciplinary claiming of 'the' authoritative means by which the 'looked at' could be categorised, are located within this temporal period as both new and ideological despite their objective claims, and furthermore mutually constitutive with the exploitative practices of colonial trade and control.

Narratives of empire were central in the establishment of science as an objective means by which the world could be understood and documented for the means of European industrial growth: O'Donnell notes how 'Scientific narratives are [...] systems of meaning-production, rather than simply statements or language, encompassing texts and images and systems that 'fix' meaning, however temporarily, and enable us to make sense of the world' (2010:61). In other words, the very language of neutrality and objectivity that this burgeoning scientific method used served as an ideological obscurement of the privileges and subjectivities of the knowledge-claiming looker. Mary Louise Pratt notes how the travelling botanist was able to 'walk around as he pleases and name things after himself and his friends': as such, the existing social mobility of wealthy white men, in terms of wealth and access to opportunities and networks, facilitated their vastly

disproportionate claims to objectivity at the expense of indigenous and non-male voices alike (Pratt 1992:63). Linnaeus himself, indeed, actively gatekept the terms under which objective authority could be claimed, writing, 'no one ought to name a plant unless he is a botanist' (O'Donnell 2010:67): here it can be seen how the claiming of science as a legitimate discipline served to justify naturalists' claims to categorisation while simultaneously naturalists' claims to categorisation served, circularly, to legitimise scientific method. Like the discussed aesthetic treatises, Linnaeus' methods of categorisation, too, employed the terminologies of masculine and imperial conquest as he fitted natural species into 'Kingdoms' subject to ostensibly natural law, thus rendering the epistemological basis for his scientific method implicitly male and white (ibid.).

As the aesthetic treatises of Baillie and Harris in particular attest, paintings were seen as a legitimate proxy for nature in terms of the ostensibly innate emotional experiences they could engender. As such, like the shared propensities toward visually-justified evaluative categorisation in the name of disciplinary objectivity, scientific and aesthetic method was linked, too, in the idea that the world could be satisfactorily interpreted through representative sample. As Londa Schiebinger notes, 'European naturalists [...] tended to collect only specimens and specific facts about those specimens rather than worldviews, schemas of usage, or alternative ways of ordering and understanding the world. They stockpiled specimens in cabinets, put them behind glass in museums and accumulated them in botanical gardens…' (2004:87). That the ideologically-determined yet objectivity-claiming disciplines of science and aesthetics alike schematised and displayed sample visual representations of the broader world for the purpose of European public viewership constitutes a disciplinary convergence, wherein established ocularcentrist epistemologies became embedded and taken-for-granted in institutional practices of representation. In this vein, O'Donnell notes how 'Technologies such as instruments, books, maps and tables, now continue to mediate between people (as subject) and nature (as object)' (2010:69). As such, this genesis of institutional mediation of sight is significant in terms both of its influence on subsequent museological practice and in its contribution to the further tacit dissemination to the public of aesthetic and naturalist theorists' ideologically-

rooted claims to objectivity. Here, the observations of the visual theorists Martin Berger and Nicholas Mirzoeff, discussed in ‘Exploring Whiteness’, take root: these epistemologies of whitened vision, interpretation and legitimisation constitute in their ongoing reinforcement a continuing teleology of vision which continues to be inherited and unrecognised.

The structural presence of these epistemologies of vision at the time of Wilson’s life contributed significantly to the upholding and legitimising of class-based and gender disparities. To argue for the relevance of these disparities to a study of whiteness it is necessary to revisit Bonilla-Silva’s aforementioned observation that the logics of whiteness constitute a ‘changing same’ in terms of the ways in which they are expressed. This is a reflection put succinctly, too, by race scholar David Theo Goldberg, who writes, ‘An epistemology so basically driven by difference will ‘naturally’ find racialized thinking comfortable; it will uncritically assume racial knowledge as given’ (2000:155). Whiteness refers to the relational construct by which difference in the irrational terms of racial difference is invented, enacted and structurally upheld by the socially dominant. Although this undeniably produces raced experiences that are lived both by those understood to be white and those understood to be non-white, the non-fixity of these invented racial categories attests to their irrational status. While it is true that whiteness produces race, it is also true that whiteness is created as a result of its own production of race: in terms of the looker’s epistemological position, therefore (and only in terms of this), to distinguish between whiteness and other axes of differentiation is to render ontological the essentialised racial difference that whiteness creates. Given, as such, that the construction and subsequent evaluation of essentialised human differences of all kinds are the irrational, imposed product of a similar kind of mode of thinking, the structural mechanisms serving to legitimise enactments of class-based and gender binaries are also significant in the locating of whiteness as an epistemological standpoint in the looker.

In this light, the gendered binaries attributed by Burke to the kinds of landscape features that Wilson represents in ‘Llyn-y-Cau’ need, in order to

understand their structural power and epistemological parallels with whiteness, to be contextualised within a broader discourse that axiomatically understood masculinity as an active subject and femininity as the passive object. This lineage of binarising sight in gendered terms has been traced by Carolyn Merchant to Francis Bacon (1561-1626), often called 'the father of empiricism' by virtue of his arguments for inductive reasoning and observation of nature being a means to establishing scientific truth (Merchant 1983). Merchant argues that Bacon's knowledge of the 1612 trials of the Lancashire witches of Pendle Forest influenced his subsequent philosophical and literary work: 'Much of the imagery [Bacon] used in delineating his new scientific objectives and methods derives from the courtroom, and, because it treats nature as a female to be tortured through mechanical inventions, strongly suggests the interrogations of the witch trials and the mechanical devices used to torture witches' (1983:168). Here, Merchant makes the case that the wider subsequent acceptance of Bacon's ostensibly empiricist methods is predicated on his subjective epistemological worldview in which he metaphorises nature as a femininity needing to be tamed. Furthermore, O'Donnell notes that Bacon's methodological treatises tended 'to charge women with medical knowledge with witchcraft and celebrate particular constructions of femininity that were not knowledge-based' (O'Donnell 2010:64). As such, the heteromasculine ocularcentrism of Bacon's science might be seen as epistemologically influential in terms of reinforcing an exploitative perception of nature; in its elimination of feared social categories; and in its exclusion from the means of legitimising knowledge of social groups deemed by the dominant to have inherently dangerous characteristics.

Arguing that Bacon's dominant epistemologies of vision were flexible across different axes of human differentiation, Silvia Federici writes, 'The intellectual scaffold that supported the persecution of the witches [...] was a transitional phenomenon, a sort of ideological bricolage that evolved under the pressure of the task it had to accomplish' (2004:203). Attesting to the evolving-of-necessity nature of such epistemologies of differentiation, Bacon's language of description referring to such accordingly feminised nature correlates almost verbatim with the racialising accounts of the Welsh made by a white, affluent, male 1740s traveller on his way

to North Wales, where Wilson himself was from, and where 'Llyn-y-Cau' is situated. Bacon wrote,

> She [nature] is either free and follows her ordinary course of development as in the heavens, in the animal and vegetable creation, and in the general array of the universe; or she is driven out of her ordinary course by the pervasiveness, insolence, and forwardness of matter and violence of impediments, as in the case of monsters; or lastly, she is put in constraint, molded, and made as it were new by art and the hand of man; as in things artificial (in Merchant 1983:165).

Speaking of the Welsh, by contrast, traveller John Torbuck writes,

> They are a rude People, and want much instruction. For, when we consider the Soil from whence they sprang, and the Deserts and Mountains wherein they wander, we cannot but think that greater Pains should be taken in cultivating and manuring, in disciplining and taming them [...]. [...] They are of a boorish Behaviour, of a savage Physiognomy; the Shabbiness of their Bodies [...] will fright a Man as fast from them, as the Oddness of their Persons invites one to behold them. Some of them are such rude and indigested Lumps, so far from being Men, that they can scarce be advanced into living Creatures; nay, they are such unmanageable Materials that they can scarce be hewn into the Shape of Blocks (1740:40-41).

The similarities in language are distinctive: both categories–for Bacon, feminised nature, and for Torbuck, the Welsh–are described as unruly forms ('unmanageable' 'Lumps' to be 'put in constraint, molded'), requiring the intervention of the unspoken, assumed subject in order to improve them. In both texts, an implicit binary is established between looker and looked-at, and it is the looker whose capabilities are objectively superior. For Bacon and Torbuck alike, their perceptions of categorised difference imply an investment in control as a means of enacting ostensible progress. For Torbuck, that the Welsh people he saw had light skin was to no effect in his ability to visually determine their racial status: 'But whether Welshmen are the Aborigines of their Country, as Crab-Lice are the Autochthones of theirs, and proceed only; like them, from the Excrements of their Soil, we shall not here dispute' (Torbuck 1740:40). The physical markers of human difference, thus, shift according to the lookers' need: in terms of the epistemological propensity to impose difference upon subjects and then see this difference as

visually axiomatic, it is of little effect whether difference is enacted in terms of race or in terms of gender. This is not to suggest any relativising of gender versus racial inequalities, or to diminish the real structural impacts, sometimes separate and sometimes intersecting, of racialised and gendered difference. It is, rather, to suggest that for the looker, the kind of difference enacted is of no great consequence in itself other than in its serving as a means of protecting the social and economic interests of dominant groups.

A correlating case is made by Ellen Meiksins-Wood, who argues that it was a similar vision of ostensible improvement of nature and people which aligned the racist logics of British colonial dispossession with domestic expropriation of the British public from common land:

> When we unpack [John Locke's] famous idea that individuals acquire a right to property by mixing their labour with it, we find at its heart the notion of improvement, the idea of productivity for profit, the idea that the natural right of property derives from its productive use. [...] This had vast implications not only for the domestic practice of enclosure but also for the dispossession of indigenous peoples in colonial territories [...]. Unimproved land is waste, and a man who appropriates it to himself in order to improve it has, by increasing its value, given something to humanity, not taken it away (1999:157).

While Locke was not alone in suggesting that land might be claimed without local consent in order to improve its productivity, he was, however, the first to suggest that *occupied* land could be seized to render it fruitful (ibid.). A common epistemological thread can be interwoven between these parallel instances of looking and evaluating: in terms of the dominant constructions of gendered-, raced- and class-based- difference alike, the looker positions both domination and force as a means of objective improvement justified by whatever binarised means of categorising made available to them from broader discourse. The shared behavioural and epistemological identity of whiteness with gender-based and class-based disparities (distinguished, as discussed however, by the differing categories of lived experience they create) might be said to be significant with regards to the viewership of 'Llyn-y-Cau' particularly given that its earliest-known version (C) is owned by one of the largest landowners in North Wales, the Mostyn

family (Roth 2000). Similarly to Wilson himself, the Mostyns (who declined to be interviewed) gained their fortune through strategic inter-family marriage, and also through successive generations of male children being born into the family (Solkin 1983:12). As suggested by the racialising revulsion expressed by Torbuck and the self-justifying logic of expropriation expressed by Locke, North Wales might well have been considered at the time of Wilson's painting to be a wilderness in need of improvement. By Torbuck's measure, it was certainly a place inhabited by people in want of refinement on the grounds of his perceptions of their visible racial inferiority: as such, the Mostyn's history of acquired patrilineal social mobility is significant in terms of surmising what the initial purpose of their acquiring of the work might have been.

These perceptions of wilderness as something to be exploited, and people to be improved contrast dramatically with the readings of those who have suggested that Wilson's representations of Cader Idris and Snowdon are inherently peaceful representations of nature. The latter is evidenced by then- Tate director Alan Bowness in the catalogue to Tate's already discussed 'Landscape of Reaction' (1983), in which it is suggested that the artist's mountain scenes are 'truly Wordsworthian in their feeling for wild nature' (Bowness in Solkin 1983:7). Bowness elaborates, 'Many would agree with Ruskin who wrote in Art in England, "I believe that with the name of Richard Wilson the history of sincere landscape art founded on a meditative love of nature begins in England" ' (Bowness in Solkin 1983:7). Indeed, despite his scholarly contextualisations, Solkin himself offered in the interview a similar such kind of reading: 'It's a very peaceful thing to look at. [It] is quite easy to kind of lose yourself in. I've [...] looked at it in different ways - as just a tranquil [but] at the same time, dramatic scene.' For Bowness, as Tate director, and Solkin, as curator and scholar, the scene invites, on the basis of looking, a reflective response, and it is these understandings that have been widely disseminated to the broader public: while 'Llyn-y-Cau' has frequently been presented as a neutral stand-in for the appreciation of mountain scenery, the broader contexts of viewership discussed in this section point to something much more disturbing.

## Edward Marsh

The continuing acceptance of 'Llyn-y-Cau' as a specific, publicly-perceived manifestation of this British idyll might never have happened without the input of Edward Marsh, who donated the painting to public ownership on V.E. Day in 1945[14]. This was a day of extraordinary significance, indeed, for the painting to be offered to the British nation, and aligns from the outset Marsh's symbolic investments into the work with those of the critics hostile to Solkin's curatorial treatment of Wilson as discussed in the introduction, and the aesthetic theories with which Wilson himself identified. Marsh's input into Wilson's trajectory towards canonisation was significant in scale beyond this painting: he collected the artist's work before he was popular even to specialist members of the public and thus the collectors' financial means and aesthetic preferences can be seen as a factor in Wilson's contemporary recognition (Bowness in Solkin 1983:7). As such, this section of 'Landscape' turns to the beliefs and social positioning of Marsh, in order to evidence this firm epistemological lineage between these respective lookers of the work. From the many texts relating to Marsh, including his autobiography, biographies, obituaries and correspondences, it is very possible to reconstruct what this act of donation would have meant to Marsh, and to understand the spirit in which he gave it to the public. Reference to these sources suggest that Marsh perceived himself to be an individual of little means, and neither his beliefs to be noteworthy, nor, as such, this donation to be politicised. However, they also show a man who was socially and financially influential, and deeply invested into the discourses of aesthetic classicism and national pride; who took racial difference and associated innate racial characteristics to be a fact, and who, as secretary to Winston Churchill, played a strategic role in British colonial endeavours. That these behavioural and ideological characteristics continue to this day to be perceived as not politicised, and that their projection onto landscape painting as a metaphor for ideal Britishness is not recognised are points that are suggestive as to the significance of making these links visible.

[14] 8th May 1945 marked the end of the Second World War in Europe.

Whether he realised it or not, Marsh shared with Wilson from the outset a number of clear affinities in terms of education, intellectual preferences and financial means that are clearly documented for both individuals, which provide a sturdy departure point for an exploration of Marsh's particular aesthetic resonances with 'Llyn-y-Cau'. Both painter and collector inherited significant financial wealth: Wilson gained his from what Solkin describes as his 'lineage of antiquity', the fruit of intergenerationally advantageous marriages, as well as from his relative George Wynne, who discovered a lead mine in 1731 which brought him a 'stupendous' income with which he facilitated Wilson's artistic studies (Solkin 1983:12). Marsh, meanwhile, received some of his upon the death of his uncle in 1903, and the rest a few years later as the remainder of £50,000 compensation (around 8 million in current terms) given by the government to his family for the 1812 assassination of British Prime Minister Spencer Perceval, Marsh's great-grandfather (Marsh 1939). While Wilson gained social connections and intellectual confidence from his father and grandfather's studies at Oxford 'where they had mixed with the scions of the landowning élite' (Solkin 1983:12), Marsh studied at Westminster School and Trinity College, Cambridge, where he studied Classics, and became associated among others with Robert Trevelyan, Bertrand Russell and George Edward Moore (Marsh 1939). Both artist and collector shared a pronounced admiration for classical texts, and have been separately noted for their distinct engagement and learning in this regard. As Solkin notes, Wilson 'was so thoroughly grounded in the classics that in later life […] he could still recite passages from Horace's original Latin ex tempore – a feat of truly remarkable erudition, even for the eighteenth century' (1983:12-13). Meanwhile, Marsh is described remarkably similarly by one of his biographers:

> His was a classical temperament, in that he felt that individual experience should be conveyed in traditional form; he preferred the orderly to the wild. His precise standards, […] while they enabled him to produce his masterly translations of Horace and La Fontaine, rendered him, to his regret, unsympathetic to the individualism of more modern forms of expression (Nicholson 1953:11).

A picture begins to emerge of both artist and collector as financially privileged individuals (even if by chance), whose financial means allowed for an ongoing

pursuit of their intellectual interests, and whose social networks likewise can surely not have hindered their mobility.

Nicholson suggests here that Marsh's classical erudition aligned with an aesthetic conservatism whereby he favoured order, tradition and precision over what the author described as a more modern individualism. Marsh himself attested to the specificity of his preferences, but at the same time afforded the classical codes that he saw in landscape painting an imperative of timeless universalism:

> I shall perhaps be expected to stand in a white sheet because, lagging behind the times, I have never bought an 'abstract' picture; but if I had done so, I should only have to stand in a black sheet for snobbishness and hypocrisy instead. […] What the bulk of the race has hitherto chiefly sought from the art of painting is an ever-varying interpretation, by specially-gifted persons, of the world of Nature and of Man, by which its own perceptions are enhanced, its emotions deepened, its imagination fired… (Marsh 1939:356).

Here, Marsh aligns his own preferences for classical landscape painting with those of 'the bulk of the race': his claim of the tradition's appreciation by others, then, might be seen as an attestation to its importance. This recourse to a broader truth functions as a self-awarded validation of his claims to common-sense: the proponents of abstract painting thus appear as erroneous, perhaps even frivolous, deviations from a rightful order of progress. We might ascertain from this extract that the claims of the aesthetic theorists explored previously rang true for Marsh: in speaking of 'the world of Nature and of Man' and the inevitability that a faithful representation of such might cause 'emotions deepened' and 'imagination fired', it is evident that Marsh was invested in these normative lineages of sight as prescribed by the theorists determining taste two centuries before.

That Marsh could matter-of-factly claim, as he does, that these traditions had 'fundamental appeal' and that they were undertaken by objectively 'specially-gifted persons' (presumably including Wilson in that category) more than suggests his belief that such understandings of artworks' transcendental value constituted a rightful one (ibid.). As such, although his preferences were presented in aesthetic

terms, they were articulated vehemently and objectively enough that they can be seen to represent something greater than pictorial preference alone, as appeared too to be the case in the critics' responses to Solkin's curatorial treatment of Wilson explored earlier. Marsh was defending something, and that something he perceived to be under attack by the guiles of modern individualism. That something, as Marsh's views on nationhood to follow suggest, might be seen as a fragile claim to a rightful sense of British idyll. His mistrust of individualism can be seen as reflected not only in his aesthetic preferences, but also in how he acquired them, as this extract suggests:

> In one way or another I made up my mind which of the painters I knew were good judges of pictures, next I picked their brains to find out which artists they thought well of; and then I waited till I saw a work by one of those artists which aroused in me what I can only call the Lust of Possession […]. Then, if I had enough money at Drummonds, I bought it (Marsh 1939:356).

Marsh sought out the advice of people who he evaluated as having good taste, and followed their guidance in purchasing artworks. As such, a firm link can be made between his subjective aesthetic preferences, his perceptions of their universality, and his abilities both to exert these universalised preferences through drawing upon his inherited wealth.

Marsh was born into a distinguished lineage, and despite his considerable inheritance and longstanding civil service career, did not believe himself to be particularly wealthy. He wrote: '...although I found that on my mother's side I should have done fairly well with the Prime Minister, Charlotte de la Tremoille, Lord Burghley and Henry VII, to say nothing of King Brian Boru, my father's would have been almost a blank…' (Marsh 1939:126). Meanwhile, the 'murder money' his family were given as compensation for his great-grandfather's assassination allowed him 'to add a little jam to the bread-and-butter of a civil servant. […] It never seemed quite large enough to be worth investing in those tedious belongings stocks and shares; and I usually blued it on a picture' (Marsh 1939:9). While his portrayal of modesty might well signify a style of cultural refinement, it also is suggestive as to the networks he circulated in: although he may have perceived

himself to be less wealthy than his peers, his education, career and financial means to purchase artworks suggest nevertheless a significantly elevated standard of living. Meanwhile, the perception that he might have all of these resources and still consider himself not well-off suggests that the networks that he belonged to were relatively homogenous. His humble self-perception, indeed, was deeply-held enough for it to be constitute the final sentiment of his autobiography, in which he says that the moral of his story 'is that a man who never in all his life has anything that could possibly be called Money may in the course of years get together a collection which is a continual joy in the making, and in the end a source of pride and enduring content' (Marsh 1939:365). Thus, it seems that Marsh may not have recognised the privileges that he had in terms of access to resources and influence. Perhaps it was due to the privileges and cultural uniformity of his networks that Marsh was not aware of how society had favoured him: from reading these self-perceptions alongside his aesthetic investments in normative Britishness and the discussion of his racial views as follows, a picture of white privilege as a determinant both of his individual pictorial understanding, and of Wilson's canonical acceptance, begins to develop.

Marsh's self-perceptions as unmoneyed and uninfluential, yet therefore plucky in his pursuit of transcendent cultural value have been pervasively repeated by his biographers, as such constituting a canonical narrative of their own. Here, in the perception of Marsh as an individual, his financial privileges, social resources and subjectivities have been both accepted and spoken about more broadly as unremarkable. One such biographer writes, 'I know of nobody else who from such limited resources formed a collection in any way comparable with his. He must have deprived himself of comforts every day in order to buy pictures' (Mortimer 1953:13). However, the comforts he 'must have deprived himself of' did not preclude him from buying multiple paintings in succession, as Marsh himself said: 'I have just heard of a superb [Augustus] John drawing which I shall buy if I can go and see it before it is snapped up – I have only got one and I must have another' (Putt & Johnson 1976:35).

As such, just as it can be surmised that Marsh lived within culturally homogenous circles, the same might be said to be true with regards to those who felt compelled to write about him. The effect of Marsh having been represented more widely as an arbiter of taste with scant means is considerable with the recognition that such an occurrence is not unusual in the object biographies of canonised works: it is together that the many Edward Marshes and George Raes—the many objectively presented arbiters of objectively good taste, who ostensibly without particularly significant means were 'known' to have collected objectively brilliant artworks—who have come to shape British canonicity with the aesthetic values that continue to be objectively appreciated. It is this at these points at which such objectivities are transferred and accepted between individuals who do not recognise their privilege whereby such epistemological normativities takes structural stronghold.

The texts written about Marsh frequently emphasise his philanthropic attitude in terms of sharing his resources both financial and social. Indeed, he appears to have been a generous man who was supportive of his friends, as many attest: it is written, for example, that 'E.M. effected useful introductions wherever possible' and that he was 'always glad to be of practical service to artists' (Putt & Johnson 1976:43, 50), while the artist Paul Nash similarly described Marsh as

> the first real collector I had met and I remember thinking to myself, if all collectors collect in this way we shall all live happily ever afterwards… Eddie, as I soon found, was the most generous and hospitable person. Later I was to know in how unusual a degree he would use his influence not only on behalf of his friends, but of his friends' friends in distress. Where so many men would promise, Eddie would fulfil (Putt & Johnson 1976:39).

The accounts of Marsh as a markedly generous individual are indeed widespread and can be acknowledged as such. However, it is also relevant that the recipients of his generosity were exclusively white and male. As was the case with regards to Rossetti and Rae, this fact may well not have been a matter of conscious design, but the project of searching for whiteness is not a project in directing blame towards individuals, but rather to recognise the ways in which privileges and social identities—in this case, as white—intersect. Whether by active personal choice or

as the effect of broader social disparities, the cumulative effect on the contemporary acceptance of canonical value is the same: it was only these white individuals Marsh and others like him either sought out or had access to in his networks, and as such the objective national and aesthetic worth ascribed to artists has, too, been allotted to a demographic that remains disproportionately white.

The white uniformity, in terms of bodily markers, privileges and epistemological worldview like, of Marsh's own influences is also clear. One of Marsh's greatest inspirations in terms of the acquiring of 'eighteenth and nineteenth century English pictures' was found in Neville Lytton (Putt & Johnson 1976:9). Later the Right Honourable 3rd Earl of Lytton OBE, Lytton was the son of the British Viceroy of India whose political policies were greatly influenced by an investment in social Darwinism, and whose tenure as Viceroy has been described as particularly ruthless in its handling of the Great Famine of 1876-78 which resulted in, if conservatively estimated, 8.2 million fatalities (Fieldhouse 1996:132). Marsh openly acknowledged Lytton's early influence on him: 'My one regret was that my new orientation [of buying contemporary artworks] led to a certain parting of brass-rags with Neville Lytton. He strongly disapproved of it, and on the purchase of what is now generally held to be one of my best pictures, he was moved to write me an expostulation' (Marsh 1939:356). Lytton's own family story makes stark the intersections between class privilege and racist ideology in their contribution to tragedy: his family wealth and status both facilitated and were bolstered by his family's position of power in British-occupied India, justified by the taking for granted of racial difference. It is the same wealth generated from colonial control that facilitated Lytton's own means to influence in the London art scene. While Lytton's own views on race may conceivably have differed from those of his father, this does not affect that his wealth derived from an intergenerational accumulation of financial and social capital reliant on colonial policies justified by the dehumanisation of people of colour, and which led to their deaths in the millions. Lytton in turn was the objective arbiter of taste to whom Marsh turned for his own inspiration: in Marsh's subscribing to aesthetic theories whose terms could only be legitimised through connoisseurship, Lytton's financial gains from the overt racial dominance of coloniality, thus, transferred, at least at the beginning of

Marsh's collecting practice when he focused on landscape artworks, into the soft power and broader reach of aestheticism.

That Marsh's own views of racial difference were casually-held is clear from his offhand use of the word 'n-----': describing his disbelief at winning the Senior Chancellor's medal at university, he mentions 'A woodpile in which there was no such n-----'[15], and 'the n-----[16] in the ointment' to describe how one of his contemporaries at the Colonial Office spoke (Marsh 1939:63). In these instances, the word is used in an offhand way to describe the existence of something surprising and out of place: while its casual use does not necessarily suggest intent to harm, its recurring presence does determine that Marsh's networks, both real and imagined in his readers, may not have been seen take issue with the word, further pointing towards their racial homogeneity. In other instances, his ascriptions of negative qualities to Blackness is more actively articulated. These do not need repeating, but their thrust is undeniable in their tacit speaking to a white reader whose views Marsh anticipates as similar through his suggestions of humour (1939:131, 158). That Marsh, too, aligned white appearances with British inclusion, while not unusual, is also pronounced, as demonstrated by his account of a work colleague's appearance, which he described 'like a Hebrew Prophet' and a 'palpable old Semite', and joking that the man 'searched the Ancestral Tablets in vain for any possible anthropological explanation of this appearance' (Marsh 1939:127). Like suppositions belied by the still-asked question, 'where are you *really* from?' the implication here is that non-whiteness had to be explained in order to account for its claims to British identity. Meanwhile, Marsh's praise of white individuals can be seen to be frequently profuse irrespective of their colonial intent: one such example can be found in his descriptions of John Anderson, later Governor of Ceylon, whom he suggests was 'a lovable man […] and a most efficacious and encouraging trainer […] [for] a budding clerk.' (1939:124).

Indeed, such praise might be seen to be unsurprising, given Marsh's own role in the Colonial Office, which he started in 1896 (ibid.). Writing about his

[15] Redaction my own
[16] Redaction my own

experience working there, it is evident he believed it to be indicative of an unremarkable, neutral politics: ‘Of my first four years I can think of nothing whatever to relate’ (ibid.). This self-positioning of neutrality takes an even more overtly racialised appearance in the descriptions of those he met on a colonial trip to Uganda: ‘it was impossible not to feel that civilization had taken a forward step. Less than a generation back, these gentle people had been ferocious and predatory savages…’ (Marsh 1939: 159). Here, Marsh’s casual self-allocation of neutrality can be seen to align with an understanding that white colonial control indicated civilisational progress over the characteristics that he and others equated with Blackness. This is of great significance, ultimately, in contextualising his aesthetic interests in historical landscape paintings as a signifier of progress and citizenship: like Wilson’s own followers who were invested in classical narratives of empire, Marsh, too, may well have seen ‘Llyn-y-Cau’ as a representation of order over barbarism.

Marsh’s views on racial difference can be seen as marked through comparison to his inter-class sympathies: he reports that a letter he wrote to the Manchester Guardian about Winston Churchill’s valet George Scrivings upon his death in service was received by workers in the Colonial Office with surprise, a finding which surprised Marsh in turn:

> …one of the Messengers thanked me for what I had written, telling me that he and his colleagues had read it, and had been greatly touched and impressed. “We didn’t know,” he said, “that people like you felt like that about people like us.” This, though I was glad of it in a way, was a rather painful surprise and shock to me, as I had always thought that I was on easy and so to speak human terms with the staff… (Marsh 1939:162).

From this excerpt can be surmised two things: firstly, that Marsh was not aware of how his privilege was perceived by others, and secondly, that he was able to recognise the humanity of people in different social strata. This second point is significant: his sense of self-elevation can therefore be seen to be racialised rather than generalised. That Marsh considered himself to be politically neutral is telling, then, given his casual racism, colonial career and admiration for Winston Churchill, who he recounts having overheard somebody ask Marsh what his politics were,

and remarking, ‘ “I hope Eddie’s a modified Winstonian.” ’ In response, Marsh reflects, ‘I’ve always been thankful for the dispensation by which English Civil Servants are not called upon to have politics of their own.’ (Marsh 1939:134).

That the social positioning that Marsh occupied could be seen more broadly to be apolitical is significant, then, given his own understandings that aesthetic experience has objective qualities that align with landscape painting. Furthermore, that he had the financial means to assert his preferences is widely attested through his wide-reaching influence on artists and art institutions. He played a significant role in the elevation of young, male and white artists, as suggested by an account of his support among others of Richard Eurich, in whose earlier years lived in a basement flat comprising of ‘one table, one chair, one campbed and cobwebs’, and from whom Marsh in 1928 purchased a small oil painting, ‘The Broken Tree for £5.’ (Putt & Johnson 1976:23) It was Marsh’s financial influence that helped to transform this individual from relative poverty and obscurity to a commercially successful figure: ‘He was instrumental in Eurich’s having a one man show at the Goupil Gallery in November 1929…’ […] E.M. introduced Eurich to the Redfern Gallery where he subsequently held sixteen one man shows’ (ibid.:24). Marsh’s social connections benefited other artists, too: in 1927 he successfully brought artist Christopher Wood together with buyer Irene Mountbatten, wife of the grandson of Queen Victoria, and took his works to London dealers to try to garner their interest (Putt & Johnson 1976:50).

Likewise, Marsh’s practice not only as broker of contacts but as collector of art is indeed widely, and accepted to have ‘enriched the public’, with his collecting practice seen as a philanthropic act of conserving great artworks for the benefit of many (Nicholson 1953:11). His influence on the shaping of public interest in an ostensibly British art was significant, particularly considering his positions of governance at the Contemporary Art Society (1937-1952) and at Tate in particular, where he was a Trustee from 1937 to 1944 and Acting Chairman from 1940 to 1941 (Rothenstein 1953). His relationships with both institutions were seen uncritically as fruitful and harmonious, as John Rothenstein writes:

> What made this association particularly delightful for those who had a part in it was Eddie's attitude towards these two institutions. For him the Tate and the Contemporary Art Society were never primarily institutions at all; they were friends to be fought for, to be enriched by his generosity and, from time to time, to be gently chided. And as such they responded to his friendship with gratitude and affection (Rothenstein 1953:12).

Here, his comfortable kinship with these organisations is emphasised, and the positivity of his roles in shaping their policies taken for granted. Given his political positioning and the means by which he was able to negate his positioning as political, the comfort with which he is reported to have engaged with Tate is telling as to the broader epistemological outlook of his institutional colleagues.

For some of Marsh's biographers, his financial means was even evidence of his good taste in public acquisition: 'Nobody could have been better suited for the chairmanship of the C.A.S. […] Another tradition is that a majority of the Committee should be collectors, though it includes also painters, museum officials, and critics. (It is believed that those who habitually back their taste with their own money are especially qualified to spend the money subscribed by other people' (Mortimer 1953:13-14). As such, not only was privilege unrecognised as a factor in shaping aesthetic preference as subjective, but it was in fact even actively recognised as further proving objectivity. Despite this ostensible objectivity, the works that Marsh acquired were, indeed, mostly made by men, and uniformly made by white people. In his autobiography, he speaks of one of his best acquisitions as such:

> My culmination […] was the purchase of the collection made by Robert Horne […]. I became possessed of Horne's wooden cabinet, designed by himself, with its twelve solander cases containing about two hundred drawings of the English School, all interesting, and some of them masterpieces. The summit is perhaps Blake's Har and Heva Bathing, which is accompanied by Catherine Blake's portrait of her husband; and among the other peaks are fine sets of Richard Wilson, Alexander Cozens, Gainsborough, Rowlandson and Romney. It was a proud day for me when on Horne's death the Burlington Fine Arts Club borrowed the collection en masse for a commemorative Exhibition (Marsh 1939:353).

This excerpt suggests that the pool of individuals whose works were deemed to be worthy of collection, either by Marsh or by Robert Horne who collected the works

before him, was not only uniformly white, but was pre-ordained in terms of cultural worth. That these personal preferences were the same as those that shaped public institutions is evidenced in another biographical note: ‘In the C.A.S. report for 1942-3, […] eleven works are listed as being presented by Marsh, including pictures by Julian Trevelyan, Mervyn Peake, Robert Buhler and Lawrence Gowing’ (Shone 1976:15).

As such, his documented patronage and collecting of the artworks of white men, regardless of his generous intentions or the fact that he collected art in a context where there were fewer opportunities available to women or people of colour, contributed to a cultural canonisation of white, male experience in the public eye. His own ability to further reinforce these preferences was determined by his own, and his biographers’ privileged social positioning and financial status. Furthermore, the racially exclusionary nature of these preferences is further determined by his active personal racisms and roles in colonial rule. That he believed himself, and was perceived by others to be politically unremarkable is of the greatest significance in terms of whiteness, and is an understanding that aligns to this day in viewers’ eyes to the meaning production of ‘Llyn-y-Cau.’

# Visual Conclusion

Together, ‘Portrait’ and ‘Landscape’ found that during the lifetimes of ‘The Beloved’ and ‘Llyn-y-Cau’, there have been countless instances where the racialising imaginations ascribed to visible human difference have been transferred between individuals and taken for granted as fact as visually axiomatic in the artworks. As both evidence, these racialising imaginations have assumed, sometimes consciously but most often unconsciously, white people to be more entitled to positions of moral, aesthetic and national worth than their compatriots of colour. The dissemination of these racialising imaginaries has been shown to have been reinforced by white peoples’ racial attitudes being combined with their disproportionate historical (and continuing) access to positions of social influence, as well as economic resources and privileges. Together, as is the case in both case studies, this historic and ongoing intersection has meant that white people have been and continue to be more likely than people of colour to have access to the means of instating and legitimising canons of national culture and aesthetic worth. Furthermore, once these canons have been instated, white people have been more likely than people of colour to retrospectively validate them as universally important, further decreasing the possibilities for people of colour to determine national and aesthetic value. In short, the two chapters together demonstrate how the two pictures were visually constructed and underpinned by worldviews that not only assumed a white male gaze but also established a powerful link between white male gazing, being in a position of exceptionality or superiority, and having a right and capacity to possess.

‘Portrait’ established that there are multiple lineages of this kind of transference relevant to ‘The Beloved’ that have influenced, and continue to influence, its viewers perceptions of its canonical worth. These can be understood as lineages of whiteness, in that they have been reproduced and accepted as truth, but belie unrecognised white epistemological worldviews. ‘Portrait’ is novel in its methodological attention to the tracing of these lineages, and in its evidencing of the points at which epistemological understanding has been tacitly transferred

historically between influential viewers. One such lineage begins with Rae and Rossetti: the case study determines how they collaboratively, but unconsciously, proposed a vision of white superiority which was represented in the formal qualities of ‘The Beloved.’ This ascription of white superiority was correspondingly accepted as evident upon formalist readings of ‘The Beloved’, again largely unconsciously, by Rossetti’s followers. These followers in turn, being both greater in number than the initial duo of Rae and Rossetti and in their own preferential access to influence, expanded the work’s interpretative sphere: they were able both to disseminate their own whitened understandings of ‘The Beloved’, and bolster the broader public recognition of Rossetti’s artworks. Their interpretations of ‘The Beloved’, as ‘Portrait’ details, have influenced Tate’s mediation of the artwork to this day, while Tate in turn has the potential to continue this teleology through its contemporary claims (at least, as understood by audiences) of shaping its visitors’ understanding of artworks.

‘Portrait’ traces another such lineage of whiteness which is sometimes distinct from, and sometimes intersects with this lineage that determined the success of ‘The Beloved’: also important in establishing the canonical positioning of ‘The Beloved’ have been the perceptions of Rossetti as a person, and individuals’ wishes for inclusion in aesthetic and national discourse. ‘Portrait’ has shown that the literature surrounding Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelites has come to constitute a cultural canon in its own right. The case study makes this claim through its having traced motivations and blind spots, also often unconscious, that influence how writers have discussed Rossetti and his artworks. One such example was found in the phenomenon of connoisseurship: in order for others to perceive them as educated, particularly in a broader social context which suggests that artworks can be visually appraised according to pre-ordained criteria, writers have overlooked their subjective visual encounters with Rossetti’s artworks in order to buy into universalist schemes of looking. In prioritising a shared discourse over their own experiences, these writers have contributed to the lineages of whiteness in the sense that their wishes for social distinction eclipsed the possibility that they might have seen the racial hierarchies present within ‘The Beloved.’ While these authors may not necessarily have shared Rossetti’s views, they nevertheless

participated in the discourses that allowed for the elevation of his work: these discourses, as ‘Portrait’ demonstrated, were given shape through authors’ universalist presentations of Rossetti as both archetypically British and meritocratically deserving of the status he attained. While the whiteness of ‘The Beloved’ is in some ways mutually dependent upon and inextricable from the equally-quietly-accepted patriarchal and heteronormative constructions within it, the whiteness is nevertheless made all the more apparent because while its patriarchal intentions are both explicit and well-documented, its whiteness is never written about, at least not explicitly. The absence of whiteness as a category of critique attests to its continuing hold.

In locating the points at which white epistemologies have been reproduced throughout the lifetime of ‘The Beloved’, ‘Portrait’ largely attests to the validity of Nicholas Mirzoeff’s notion of ‘White Sight’ as a methodological tool. The case study finds, in context-specific terms, that there exists a directionality of racialising sight understood as axiomatic, that began with Rae, Rossetti and their immediate networks, and which has been reproduced by subsequent commentators up until this day. However, ‘Portrait’ finds also that the transmission and reception of these teleologies is not inevitable: in the project of tracing the genealogies of whiteness in relation to one specific artwork whose viewership, through Tate, could be in the millions each year, it cannot necessarily be said that every viewer is receptive to the white propositions offered by Rae and Rossetti. Indeed, Janine Francois’ reading of ‘The Beloved’ attests to this in its differences to my own. As such, ‘Portrait’ finds that while there is an overwhelming unidirectionality of sight in the way that Mirzoeff suggests, Martin Berger’s analysis, too is pertinent: the white propositions embedded within ‘The Beloved’ require a similarly white receptivity in order for whiteness to be present. Consequently, the methodological findings of the section are reinforced: an exploration of the artwork without reference to its relationality with the viewer would be insufficient, as the very meaning and power of the artwork relies upon the viewers’ ability to accept as unconscious truth the constructions of identity within it as intended by Rae and Rossetti.

In other words, as Berger suggests, the reservoirs of racial understanding that viewers draw from in their interpretation of ‘The Beloved’ depend not only upon what they see and do not see within the work, but also upon their experiences of race that remain entirely external to the practice of art viewing. In this vein, ‘Portrait’ found that existing analyses of racial constructs based on formal readings of ‘The Beloved’ cannot methodologically account for the continuing canonical status of the artwork, and the role of whitened understandings of self and other in upholding it. The social mechanisms that created the conditions for these lineages of whiteness to proliferate were, thus, also a point of focus. In establishing, as ‘Exploring Whiteness’ does, that whiteness exists by definition as a structure, so too is important the ways in which Rossetti was elevated and validated, first as an artist of promise and later as an idealised archetype of Britishness. Without appreciation and validation of artworks by people other than the artist, artworks cannot achieve canonical status: ‘Portrait’ evidences that the continuing position of ‘The Beloved’ in Tate’s collection stems from the dissemination of whitened readings, upheld by disproportionate resource distribution, over its lifetime to date. It is through the canonisation of his work, and the ‘not seeing’ of the racism within it that whiteness comes to function: the racialised hierarchies of difference proposed within it have, as the case study demonstrates, come to be casually accepted and disseminated even more broadly. Given that there exists clear evidence of Rossetti’s racism, Tate’s continuing descriptions of him as ‘radical’ and ‘revolutionary’ (2024x) suggests that to acknowledge the whiteness in and around his work may be perceived as coming at a greater cost to the institution than to reinforce his position in the art historical canon. Regardless of the undeniably substantial, perhaps even existential, challenges that would arise as a result of challenging whiteness, which are evaluated in ‘Institutional Whiteness’, the overlooking of racism in the histories of artworks allows whiteness to continue to be reproduced under the guise of ostensibly objective institutional knowledge communicated to Tate’s viewers.

The directionality of influence with regards to the constructions of meaning in ‘Llyn-y-Cau’ is somewhat less distinct. This case study deliberately focused on a painting in whereby understanding the constructions of race relating to it are less

readily apparent. This posed challenges which required the case study to take a contrasting methodological route for a number of reasons. Firstly, there are significantly fewer primary sources relating to Richard Wilson than there are Rossetti: as such, there is no primary evidence attesting to what the artist's views on race might have been. Secondly, in its depiction of a landscape, its primary theme cannot, at least from a formal reading, be seen as immediately relating to the human body. As such, this case study necessarily began with the artwork as the key source of primary data. From formal readings of 'Llyn-y-Cau', both my own and that of David Solkin, it can be seen that Wilson was very likely to have been influenced by broader aesthetic discourses on beauty and the sublime. The case study examined in turn the ways in which these aesthetic discourses shared an epistemological basis with the logics of differentiation that characterised the period. With particular reference to the work of Simon Gikandi, who evidences in his scholarship the links in logic between the institution of transatlantic slavery and the culture of taste, 'Landscape' made a case for Wilson's work reflecting, despite its ostensible formal distance from the topic of race, these broader social drives. Excerpts from the aesthetic treatises of Burke, Baillie, Addison and Cooper in particular demonstrated that paintings were understood by viewers of Wilson's period to allow for an affective experience of mastery and dominance which were significant given their temporal situation in a period of rapid British colonial expansion.

Furthermore, it was found that Wilson, like Rossetti, was required to be sensitive to his clients' tastes in order to make a living as an artist. Wilson gained his patronage largely from Grand Tourists, whose travels took them to learn about ancient civilisation in continental Europe. These people had disproportionate access to the social resources, means and capital that facilitated their participation in these discourses of aesthetic distinction. While an analysis of Wilson's pictorial decisions in his three iterations of 'Llyn-y-Cau' does suggest an investment into these aesthetic constructions of the sublime, and as such an engagement with the broader social contexts of categorisation that would have been intelligible to his audiences at the time, nevertheless, as in 'Portrait', an investigation of Wilson's intentions as an individual are not methodologically sufficient for locating whiteness

as social structure. As such, the aesthetic conventions that his viewers would have drawn from are important in their own right. The widespread perception of connoisseurship as a set of rules which determined how artworks should be understood is key, here: the many instances in which Wilson, like Rossetti, has been taken for granted as a figure of canonical British importance can be seen to demonstrate a broader trend towards a prioritisation of convention over sight. Thus, ‘Landscape’ and ‘Portrait’ together made the case ultimately that connoisseurship, or a wish for viewers to be seen as educated, served as a significant motivation for them to participate in the canonisation of Wilson and Rossetti.

As in ‘Portrait’, ‘Landscape’ considered the role of a primary figure besides the artist, responsible in great part for the validation of the artworks in question. While in ‘Portrait’, this exploration pertained to the patron George Rae, ‘Landscape’ attended to Edward Marsh, who donated ‘Llyn-y-Cau’ to the public in 1945. Given particularly the wealth of primary data relating to Marsh, the tacitly articulated linkages between viewer positionality, epistemological positioning with regards to race, and investments into the discourses of aesthetic distinction all taken to be implied in the case study were given more concrete form in the viewership of Marsh. As evidenced through a discussion of Marsh’s aesthetic preferences and wide reaching influence, ‘Landscape’ found that he played a significant role in the canonisation of Wilson’s works, which he understood to have formalist properties of objective cultural and national worth. Ultimately, with reference to his governance positions at Tate in particular, it was found that Marsh’s taste and positions of intersecting social and economic privilege interacted in order to award him the power to influence the validation of hegemonic culture. The fact that authors writing about Marsh either did not recognise or did not consider it necessary to point out his known racisms points both to their own participation in the logics underpinning whiteness, and also to the continued transfer between people of an agreed tacit code by which racist ideas are not disrupted. The latter of these points is what constitutes whiteness as epistemology in this context, as it is through the absence of disruption of cultural norms of racist thinking that they are able to proliferate. It is through these mechanisms that Marsh’s altruistic intentions

can be seen through a parallel lens by which the fruits of his privilege—in this case the artworks he chose to collect—were accepted by public institutions as a universal representation of British lived experience.

# Institutional Whiteness

## Introduction

‘Institutional Whiteness’ seeks to broaden the parameters of context established in the ‘Visual’ sections of the thesis: it investigates the various forms of authority and influence exerted by and upon Tate that affect the ways in which race is configured through its mediation of the collections and in its institutional practices. It looks to determine how whiteness relates to Tate’s functioning as a British art gallery whose funding derives from a mixture of public and private sources, through an analysis of its internal and externally-facing obligations through a close, comparative analysis of the definitions, perceptions and experiences of whiteness and its associated broader contexts given by a sample of Tate staff in interviews. ‘Institutional Whiteness’ finds that staff definitions of whiteness can be broadly distinguished into four categories, each of which are addressed in succession: political, economic, social and epistemological. These categories are not discrete: the qualities of each inevitably overlap and interrelate, and as such the parameters of categorisation are imperfect. However, staff often offered and prioritised one category of whiteness the exclusion of the others. In this regard, ‘Institutional Whiteness’ finds that organisational understanding of whiteness is at present incomplete or inconsistent.

‘Institutional Whiteness’ is divided into two main sections: ‘Whiteness as Political and Economic’, and ‘Whiteness as Social and Epistemological’. This introduction, which precedes these sections, concerns some of the methodological and ethical considerations specific to this part of the thesis. The two main sections focus on the shared characteristics of whiteness as it is perceived, experienced and defined by staff. Each category as it is defined, this thesis finds, elicits a distinct policy response across Tate, some at management level, and some at personal and department level. As such, just as the definitions themselves are organisationally inconsistent, so too are the responses.

## Staff Definitions

I asked each respondent an initial question designed both to gauge the extent of their awareness of whiteness as a concept, and to learn about how they believed it to function organisationally: 'Whiteness is a complex subject, and I'm trying to understand how different people understand it at Tate. Please could you tell me what whiteness means to you, and whether/how that might apply to the context of Tate?' As the interviews progressed, a third function became apparent: the content and affective delivery of the respondents' answers varied significantly in ways that could be seen to correlate with their stated racial identity, in ways that brought to mind Maurice Berger's reflection on the interviews he conducted to inform his exhibition discussed in 'Exploring Whiteness'. He writes, 'The black people I talked to were usually willing to discuss their own experiences with racism and even their attitudes about white people. By contrast, my interviews with white people were rarely as honest or self-aware' (2004:28). The answers of all respondents occupied a spectrum between one participant's description of it as 'visceral' through to vague references eliding a clear definition. The respondents of colour indeed tended to be much more forthcoming about their own racial positioning, while the majority of white respondents gave answers that largely – though not entirely– suggested an engaged position but simultaneous difficulty clearly articulating the subject.

The white respondents often described the concept using frequently corresponding themes, phrases and words, while all of the respondents of colour offered exploratory, wide-reaching definitions drawing from their personal experiences. While six of the nine white respondents did name themselves as white, they tended to do so much later in the interviews, and with the exception of one white individual, their comments were comparatively brief and conceptual. While the white respondents were quick to name whiteness as a structural power differential, the respondents of colour more readily unpacked nuanced specificities of these ideas in their economic, political and social forms without being prompted. The table below groups in different colours the key themes that arose from five white respondents' initial description. The purple highlights individuals' shared

characterisations of whiteness as a benchmark of normality. Red refers to their pointing towards it as a socio-cultural construct: out of these five respondents, four distinguished whiteness as a social formation, using words such as ‘discursive construct’, ‘construction’, ‘culture’, ‘society’ and ‘not real’. All of these five understood whiteness to be relational: some position this dialectic as positively awarding something to white people, as evidenced by the green text mentioning white peoples’ ‘privilege’, ‘power’, and positioning in a ‘white dominant world’; others refer to it as something that detracts from people of colour, causing them to be ‘measured and othered and [made] inferior’; that speaks of ‘exploitation’; in which ‘you’re erasing all the other’, and which actively functions ‘to subjugate other races’.

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| whiteness […] is the **normalisation** of white identity as a **discursive construct** […] whereby **being white, dressing as a white person** […] **white people is the norm** against which other ethnicities are **measured and othered and inferior.** […] I think of the way non-white people **find themselves in** a **society** where they have clear **disadvantages**.’ | ‘…it is where **we happen to live** the **predominant culture** and which is riddled with lots and lots and lots of **privilege.** […] I think whiteness has quite a negative connotation, because **you're erasing all the other**. | ‘…whiteness is almost like a **culture** in a way - small 'c' culture that is **experienced by** people who are white, predominantly in the Western world, but maybe in **previously colonised countries**, where there is some kind of **privilege** associated with white... […] I just think whiteness is something that through living as a white person in a **white dominant world**… a world which **privileges** white people. There might be a whole set of **values or beliefs** that are subconscious with where you experience the world or the way the world is structured. […] Yeah, **thought structures**, as well as **belief and value systems** that are emerging from **white culture**.’ | ‘I have an understanding of race as a **social concept**. […] It's obviously **not real**. It's something that **has been constructed to subjugate other races** that **have been created** by white people.’ | ‘I think about **power**. And I think about **privilege**. And I think a lot about **history**. […] there is a connection with **exploitation**.’ |

These white respondents’ positioning of whiteness as a structure is further articulated through their frequent, shared references to it being something that individuals, including themselves as white people, do not have agency over, as

indicated by the writing in yellow: whiteness is something 'we happen to live' in; that we 'find themselves in'; something that is 'experienced', as opposed to created, maintained and actively reproduced. Furthermore, that whiteness 'has been created'; that it makes one respondent think about 'history'; that it may be linked to 'previously colonised countries', emphasises its existence elsewhere, and/or at an earlier point in time. This is a significant contrast to their also-held perceptions of it being present *here* in current day-to-day life: this tension in understanding, as 'Institutional Whiteness' explores, is a consistent theme throughout the white respondents' answers in particular.

Two white participants illustrated this discrepancy through their corresponding use of metaphorical analogy. One said, 'the sea that we swim in [is] a useful kind of metaphor. […] or the air that we breathe…'. The other similarly commented, 'Tate is a… oh my god. [...] it's swimming in whiteness […]. [In] the meeting I was coming out of [...] we were talking about the historic collection at Tate and what on earth we can do with all the white men of the past.' Here, whiteness is emphasised as being to some extent beyond their control. '*The air that we breathe'* implies a unified 'we', but it is not distinguished at this point what 'we' means in terms of different lived experiences of race. That it is Tate that is swimming in whiteness, similarly points to it being elsewhere: both speakers thus emphasise that whiteness feels uncontrollable and much larger than them as individuals. Metaphorically, their beings are separate to a physical materiality of whiteness which both poisons in the sense that it infiltrates the air, and which acts as a dangerous current to swim against to avoid drowning. That the second (female) respondent aligns whiteness with a historic, patriarchal canonisation of artworks points towards it being both inevitably inherited and distinctly male in character: while both respondents offer broader conceptualisations of it subsequently, their immediate answers nevertheless emphasise its uncontrollable and imposed nature, pointing largely to its presence elsewhere. Whiteness being defined as structurally endemic and simultaneously 'elsewhere' rather than 'here' was a frequently recurring theme throughout the interviews, and might be seen to corroborate Thandeka's observation that there lie feelings 'behind the word *white* that [are] too potent to be faced' (1999:4): in these terms, this recurring linguistic

paradox could be understood as a core characteristic of whiteness in its concealing of deeper anxieties.

Continuing in this vein, of the nine white respondents, three, despite demonstrating in some instances an in-depth engagement with whiteness as a topic, did not refer to their racial positioning at all. Of the others, one mentioned '*us* as white people' [my italics], while the remaining five did state that they were white as individuals. Of these five, two indirectly alluded to their individual white racial identity, while three stated it explicitly. By contrast, all of the four respondents of colour explicitly offered their individual racial identity, three of whom doing so within the first two minutes of the roughly hour-long interviews. This contrast suggests a reticence on the part of white staff in naming their white identity: whether this might have reflected anxiety or absence of racial awareness was at this stage unclear, but in either case in remaining unspoken, accords with Mirzoeff's observation that 'whiteness is only defined by implication' (2017:25). Whether, besides this being a characteristic phenomenon more broadly, there are reasons for this which are specific to Tate, is examined in this section. As found throughout, white staff might simultaneously perceive themselves to be invested in the discourses of anti-racism at Tate, but nevertheless (and sometimes admittedly) not be able to see or articulate whiteness, particularly in relation to them individually. As such, the evidenced tensions between white intent and white self-understanding also constitute a frequent theme.

The white respondents' initial definitions tended towards a self-conscious tentativity, as in this participant's response:

> I think a lot to do with… it is teams making decisions that are diverse but also probably a case of ways that things have been biased or colonial, or different kind of aspects that have just been a certain way in the past and then they just kind of continued, and then they had to be actively questioned to not just continue in that style or that norm or something.

While this response suggests an already considered grappling with the mechanisms by which whiteness might be institutionally upheld, it is nevertheless

ambiguous: while most of the respondents, of colour and white alike, seemed to acknowledge the purposefully broad scope of this first question, their confidence in answering differed significantly, with white respondents tending to qualify their answers before settling on a definition. This whitened hesitance is illustrated in the table following:

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| 'I have the official definitions in mind but I would say…' | 'I would say I don't… I don't know the - quote unquote - correct answer, but my gut says that…' | 'I try not to make... try and give you a textbook definition' | 'So, I mean, I suppose I do kind of, I also studied art history, actually. And I do I kind of have like a bit of an understanding of obviously race as like a social concept, and all that sort of background…' | 'I think the first thing I think of like, just kind of from the top of my head…' | 'I'm only worried about my mind going blank or being like, very vague or something. Do you know what I mean?... just, I wouldn't want to lack detail for your research or anything.' |

This frequent provisionality indicated that the white respondents' discomfort was shared. This could be explained in a number of ways: it is possible that they were conscious and nervous of appearing dismissive or reductive; that they considered themselves to be engaged but not qualified to give a definition; that they did not wish to centre their white perspective; indeed, possibly, that they were in fact disengaged and perhaps did not wish to appear so. While the reasons for their hesitance is unclear, there appears to be some wish to be perceived in a positive light. That this might be a whitened behaviour is suggested by Shona Hunter, who argues that there has been a 'shift from whiteness as constituted through saving the colonized other to whiteness as constituted through saving the white racist self. [...] Expressions of shame then become the marker of legitimate forms of whiteness' (2010:470). The respondents appear to be concerned with appearing badly, to which, indeed, as a white researcher I find myself feeling sympathetic. Their caveats, similar to many I have made, might be seen as a motivation to avoid offending, but in doing so sidesteps a specificity more readily offered by their colleagues of colour. In these instances, the white participants appear to perceive an absence or lack in themselves, but they differ in the extent to which this is consciously or unconsciously articulated. This is a phenomenon,

indeed, that constitutes the premise of Thandeka's important study of whiteness, in which she begins by suggesting that white individuals have 'the disconcerting feeling that something about one's own white identity is not quite right. This sense of misalignment with one's own identity could serve as a definition of shame' (1999:1). This provides an important repositioning of the definitions in 'Exploring Whiteness' that frame whiteness as an epistemology of ignorance: while these locate that there exists a motivation for white people not engaging with racism, they do not in themselves necessarily offer an explanation of exactly how or why their discomfort arises. As such, the location of shame as an obscuring mechanism is significant.

Not all of the white respondents' answers were so abstract, however: one white individual in particular, associated with the Research department, was forthcoming in their initial response, in which they positioned themselves as an individual within whiteness as a broader construct. This was an exception, however. They were quick to say that despite their own understanding of it, whiteness is

> manifested in very, very real terms. […] as a white person myself […] I'm often completely blind to it and to its particularities, its specificities. I'd like to think I'm quite sensitive to its dominance... because I benefit from that dominance myself as a white person. I'm less sensitive to inequities of that even if I can understand that rationally, logically.

Here, they acknowledge that white peoples' recognition of whiteness might be limited by function of their white identities, and therefore occupies a distanced, conceptual category in which it is 'rationally, logically' known, rather than having an intensely affective quality. For this respondent, their understanding that they 'benefit from that dominance' is what causes them to be 'sensitive' to it: this is a perspective that appears to contrast with CWS theorists' frequent observations to the contrary, as reflected in the words of Charles Mills: '...the only people who can find it psychologically possible to deny the centrality of race are those who are racially privileged, for whom race is invisible' (1997:43). For Mills, privilege creates an absence of racial understanding, while for this white respondent, it is this same

privilege that attunes them to their racial positioning. If Mills is correct, then this respondent's claims may be misguided; if this respondent is correct, then privilege itself is not the obstacle to understanding. Again, shame as an unconsciously-enacted affective defensive mechanism might elucidate this contrast: it could be, for reasons unknown, that this individual is attuned to their own racial shame.

One other white individual in particular was forthright about acknowledging their affective distance from whiteness, acknowledging that their understanding (which I understood to be now considerable) was acquired 'belatedly', and elicited only through prolonged academic engagement with 'gender and masculinity', for which they found 'a different framework for it in relation to racialized identities, through Richard Dyer. […] So my thinking about, or awareness of whiteness certainly stemmed from specifically academic contexts.' As such, this respondent spoke frankly about their past disengagement: their subsequent engagement had arisen only incidentally through their curatorial focus on masculinity as a theme. That this respondent and the previous work at Tate in roles that require considerable research is, perhaps, noteworthy in terms of their necessitated professional scrutiny of scholarly texts, though such a speculation would suggest that white academics are racially self-aware, which is not the case. Neither is an academic approach in itself evidence of conceptual distancing, as indicated by one similarly research-oriented respondent of colour. This individual reported having had a 'light bulb moment' in which they experienced 'the visceral and intellectual come together', becoming 'conscious of the history of writing, understanding, debates [...] of people discussing these questions around whiteness.' As such, while scholars of colour and white alike might both deeply engage with whiteness, one might find literature to corroborate an already 'visceral' understanding of race, while the other might experience as a means towards first engagement.

Indeed, the same respondent of colour mentioned above was quick to elaborate on such 'visceral' experience, offering a stark contrast to the comparatively abstracted definitions of the white participants: '…as a Black person - as a person of colour, and I've spoken about this with many people of colour, […] whiteness has always been present in various forms. You're made aware that

you're living in a white world. You're living in structures which are beyond your control, and which are racialised. And which feel all encompassing.' This respondent aligns Black identity with the experiences of other people of colour: here, whiteness not only known but is deeply felt, and in its having 'always been present' may always have been experienced as such. They report the writings of Black authors Malcolm X and W.E.B. Du Bois as particularly influencing their understandings of race as a 'structural issue', citing Du Bois' motif of the veil[17] which these authors allowed the respondent to 'peek beyond', facilitating an 'understanding the hostility and the history of hostility towards Black people' and a contextualisation of 'the brutality of racism.' Du Bois' analogy of the veil suggests that whiteness is a lens that can be seen through but which itself may not be easy to see: as such, this participant alludes to the discrepancies between the lived experiences of white people and people of colour. Contrary to the white respondents' reports of their experience, this participant's engagement with whiteness was an unavoidable matter of 'safety' and 'survival': they speak of their necessary fear experienced in earlier years on holiday abroad that their family 'could be attacked just because we're Black', on account of 'whiteness as this oppressive, [...] dangerous force.' That this force existed at home, too, was all too clear: 'I started to realise that Britain is a really white country.' These discrepancies between lived experiences of race between white people and people of colour will be returned to in the section 'Whiteness as Social', where their particular significance at Tate will be outlined: white peoples' conceptually predictable inability to personally experience whiteness as dangerous informs the ways in which whiteness is institutionally defined and prioritised.

The white participants' hesitance in some instances suggested a wariness of disclosing information that might appear 'damning' to their colleagues: one white respondent suggested that 'thinking about race equality or whiteness or discrimination' could 'be critical of your own someone in your own team.' This

[17] Du Bois' motif describes something that both prevents white people from considering Black people as American or human, and prevents Black people from seeing themselves as distinct from the prescribed normative codes of whiteness. See Du Bois, W.E.B., 2015, 'The Souls of Black Folk', ed. Holloway, J.C., Newhaven CT: Yale University Press

emphasis suggests that the respondent may (consciously or unconsciously) perceive the damage caused to their (presumably white) colleagues' reputations to be significant, and perhaps furthermore outweighing the benefits of speaking openly. This behaviour might be explained in terms of what CWS scholars have termed 'white solidarity', whereby white people choose not to challenge their white colleagues' interpretations of race, even if these interpretations might be negative (DiAngelo 2011; Sleeter 1996). Framed within the discussed acknowledgement that white people are less likely to experience whiteness in affective, 'visceral' terms, the relative prioritisation of white comfort, whether intended or not, suggests both that there might exist an understood, shared affective affinity between white colleagues, and also that understandings of how race functions on a broader social scale is influenced by individuals' own racial lens.

Indeed, the interview process demonstrated my own white lens at points, as well as a desire to conceal my own participation in whiteness when it became apparent to me. Two of the four participants of colour brought up the topic of emotional labour, asking me why I did not remunerate the interviewees. I responded to one of them as follows: 'This really is something that I have tried to do. This is something that I'm going to write about. You know, that it's […] expected of a research project on whiteness, that I could approach people without paying… I mean, that's enough data in itself.' While I did indeed put in what I perceived at the time to be considerable legwork in finding a way to remunerate participants, I nevertheless chose to go ahead without doing so. Instead of admitting as such, I suggested that this was the fault of a vague someone or something else. Here, too, I drew upon my own whitened, universalising calibration, in this instance drawing upon my own experience of race to gauge how others might perceive the interview process. Originally coining the concept in gendered terms, Arlie Hochschild argued that 'emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value' (1983:93). In estimating the exchange value of these interviews in accordance with my own white experience, I demonstrated in action the very findings of the sections that follow: that the social characteristics of whiteness can have economic consequences. I believed, in a way that accords with those I point towards in this study, that my good intentions would lead to equitable protocol. However, as Zeus

Leonardo and Michalinos Zemblyas affirm: ‘Affectively, within a white subject’s self-understanding, he cannot be racist and anti-racist at the same time’ (2013:156). That anti-racist intent and racist practice are easily compatible is, perhaps, at the core of whiteness as it is unconsciously enacted. The next section explores how white individuals’ tendencies to overlook their own participation in whiteness comes to influence policy at Tate.

## Whiteness as Political; Whiteness as Economic

This section tracks the ways in which the staff sample defined whiteness in relation to Tate’s policies as opposed to as a standalone concept. The first part focuses primarily on an interview with the most hierarchically senior respondent of the sample, a member of Tate’s Executive Group. The ways in which they define whiteness, the section finds, intersect with their senior responsibilities to Tate, reflecting respectively their partaking in executive decisions; heightened concerns for governance; relationship with the broader political sphere; proximity to trustees, and responsibilities in mediating funding and public image. Of all the interviews, this respondent’s definitions and answers can be seen to illustrate the fraughtness of whiteness as it is understood by the public and the current government, upon whom and to whom Tate, as a public-facing institution, is both reliant and responsible. Accordingly, other staff perceptions of Tate’s responsibilities to both public and government are also key in this section: in order to understand what might be at stake in Tate taking a particular stance on defining whiteness, this section explores staff perceptions regarding what it means to serve the public, and whether or not Tate has the political freedom to determine its own objectives. There are considerable variations with respect to these points, which are found to align to some degree with individuals’ investments into their institutional responsibilities at Tate, and Tate’s institutional responsibilities to its public. Tate’s uncomfortable positioning within a fraught political discourse on race manifests throughout the responses in a question that might be framed as such: ‘Does

reflecting public interest mean showing the public what they want to see, or what we think they should see?'

## Whiteness as Political

The white senior member of staff was the only respondent who did not offer a definition of whiteness, despite, in this instance, my framing the question in multiple ways. Their answers were non-committal in terms of stating how whiteness might surface within Tate: instead, they focused primarily on their perception of differing public stances towards the topic and positioned Tate as needing to take these into account. For this respondent, 'whiteness can mean many different things to many different people', and could be 'a critique, both constructive but also antagonistic of the institution.' They remarked that they had a 'necessary ambivalence to it' but emphatically that this was not 'laissez faire;' instead prompted by a need to 'recognise the different viewpoints' and 'different values being brought to this.' They positioned their not taking a stance as 'necessary;' something that they 'have' to do, but do not elaborate why this might be the case. Here, a clear definition is not given, but instead an institutional position–at least a public facing one–is suggested: whiteness is a matter of opinion. While their definition, or rather their tacit refusal to offer one, could indicate a personal dismissal of whiteness as a legitimate concern, there might indeed be many ramifications were Tate as an institution to take a more proactive stance, and these will be the subject of this section. As such, whether this answer reflects the respondent's personal views; whether it reflects an institutional position; indeed, whether this respondent's personal views are that which facilitates their elevated position of influence cannot be definitively known.

The senior respondent's perception that whiteness could be 'antagonistic of the institution' is a significant one, and they maintained an accordingly defensive institutional stance throughout:

> …the museum […] is always a work in progress and you have to have to see it like that, but that's the value it has in society'; 'being a space in which all of those ideas can come together, and without necessarily going towards a defined goal. […] That's what Tate is about. That's what the museum is about. That's what national museums should be. And it's why we fund national museums.

Here, the respondent follows their stated positioning of whiteness as a matter of opinion with a suggestion that Tate is deserving of public funding due to its ostensible focus on contrasting beliefs, thus introducing the ideological, political and economic dimensions of this issue. The respondent repeatedly offered similarly positive reframings of Tate in response to my questions, suggesting that they might have seen the questions themselves as evidence of the kind of antagonistic critique they understood whiteness to potentially signify more broadly: 'Now, you shouldn't look back and say we were really bad. You should say, 'Okay, we've moved on.' In one instance, the respondent is more explicit in their positioning of whiteness as having the potential to harm: 'there is such a fraught discussion that flows from [whiteness]. That we maintain that integrity and fairness and that discussion is really important. […] …pushing that discussion on people as opposed to raising and discussing those issues is a problem.' From this it could be taken that the public should not have to think about whiteness if they do not want to, or that Tate's duty is to raise whiteness as a topic in a way that is not perceived as confrontational. The respondent did also indicate a belief that whiteness is an important concern, likening Tate's responsibilities towards race as a 'question of equity' similar to its 'conversations around gender': this too, was framed positively to emphasise the progress that Tate has made in this other respect. As such, there is some instability in how they openly define whiteness: if whiteness is, as formulated here, an equity issue, and Tate has reason to be proud of its historical progress towards gender equality, this sits uncomfortably with whiteness as also being defined as a matter of variable values, which Tate cannot take sides with.

That whiteness could be an antagonistic critique imposed upon Tate, and also that Tate's mediation of whiteness could pose its own threat to institutional 'integrity and fairness' speaks to Sara Ahmed's observation that 'Racism becomes something bad that we can't even speak of, as if to describe x as racist is to

damage or even hurt x. The organization becomes the subject of feeling, as the one who must be protected, as the one who is easily bruised or hurt' (2012:147). Here, the defensive stance with which the respondent represents Tate suggests that the organisation could sustain an injury, and that this injury is necessitated by accusation. In order to cause injury, then, the respondent's understanding of whiteness would indeed have to be accusatory. This is an institutional self-representation further elucidated by Ahmed, who writes,

> …the normative subject is often secured through narratives of injury: the white male subject, for example, has become an injured party in national discourses [...], as the one who has been 'hurt' by the opening up of the nation to others. [...] …the more access subjects have to public resources, the more access they may have to the capacity to mobilise narratives of injury within the public domain (2004:32-3).

There is a parallel here with the previously noted discussions of white solidarity on an individual scale, which position the act of suggesting a white person to be racist as that which is harmful. In both the institutional and individual expressions of such self-protection, there is a recourse to influence: for the white individual respondent, they could risk offending somebody able to exert influence upon them. In the institutional instance, it is the public who might be offended. In light of Ahmed's analysis, this parallel both positions the institution as characteristically white, and introduces an economic dimension to the concept of 'white solidarity', which tends to be explained in uniquely racial terms.

The senior respondent is more suggestive at one point about why their definitions might be vague. Although they do not explicitly link their own non-committal stance on whiteness to this point, their acknowledgement of the political context in which Tate is situated may nevertheless be seen as instructive. The respondent speaks of whiteness carrying 'for many [...] an obligation that we have to address', while simultaneously also that 'in Westminster, we might well have people who say the moment we use the word 'whiteness', we are being woke.' In sum, they point to a 'need to balance that with a government that might think otherwise.' These reflections might be seen to contextualise the respondent's reticence, and introduce the primary theme of this section. In an immediate sense,

these government views are of significance given its oversight of Tate's governance: its directors are confirmed by the Prime Minister, who is also responsible for appointing thirteen of the fourteen of its Board of Trustees (Tate 2024i). This Board is responsible, in collaboration with senior staff, for setting 'the strategic direction for Tate. It oversees the management of the gallery, with the Trustees acting as guardians of the public interest. The Board decides on major acquisitions and resource allocations. It represents Tate externally, monitors the organisation's performance against its agreed objectives and targets and ensures the stewardship of public funds' (ibid.). As such, the government-appointed Board might be seen as influential in all aspects of Tate's operations with their oversight of human resource, finance and collections mediation policies alike. It is the Board, too, who are seen to have the ability to act 'as guardians of the public interest.' Each of these respective governance responsibilities have significant ramifications on how whiteness is treated within the institution, and, loosely, align with the ensuing sections of this section which attend to the ways in which this political influence intersects with the economic, social and epistemological dimensions of the issue.

The senior respondent speaks frequently, indeed, of such a need to mediate public interest, and their representation of what this signifies in terms of Tate's responsibilities in surfacing whiteness is ultimately one that positions the issue's relevance as an unproblematised matter of opinion. For this respondent, it is a requirement for Tate to reflect public interest by remaining non-partisan in political terms that requires the institution not to take a proactive stance on whiteness. This understanding of whiteness in these specific politicised terms is of fundamental relevance and as such their words are worth attending to at length:

> I think it's really important that the institution remains a public institution. By that I mean it's for the benefit of the public and reflects the public. […] The integrity and honesty is maintaining true to our mission, which is to promote the public enjoyment of […] British, modern and international art […]. Then when we go beyond that, and start using the institution to campaign for different things - that are driven more by the origin or more by our own individual beliefs - we lose integrity. And if you take the most banal example of that, the day after the Brexit vote, [we] had people asking if we can run

> the European flag up the flagpole. Irrespective of what you or I voted yesterday. What you want to do is today, after a majority of a referendum have voted one direction, you want to stick two fingers up to the people who voted in a way that you think you disagree. That's not a very public thing to do. And it's fundamentally what we shouldn't be doing with public money.

Here, 'integrity' and 'honesty' are positioned in opposition to 'campaigning' for 'our own individual beliefs', thereby suggesting that for Tate to take on a fixed definition of whiteness would be dishonest, partisan, lacking in integrity, and ultimately not serving the public's best interests. Whether whiteness is or is not a legitimate concern is likened to the political divide concerning Brexit: thus, to take an institutionally proactive stance on representing whiteness as a real structuring mechanism for social inequality would by implication likewise be to 'stick two fingers up' to the people who disagree. Importantly, such a politicised characterisation of whiteness suggests that to believe in or to oppose it is a matter of political ideology, and as such that all perspectives are equally valid.

Defining whiteness thus, as a matter of opinion akin to a political position, underpins an artwork mediation policy of crucial significance, and one that furthermore suggests that the institution is believed by its governance to be successful in its arbitration of public interest: whiteness can be considered to be a representational issue that can be contained within the artworks themselves. In this vein, proportional representation is positioned by the senior respondent as the means to solve whiteness as a problem:

> Numerically, if you look at the collection, we were going to be pretty white. You can't have 35000 works by Turner and change that overnight. […] …the critical thing is that it's becoming more representative. And we are collecting works that do tell different stories, and bringing those stories out on the wall. […] I know it's not the same question as a level playing field but it's certainly a neutral playing field.

Here, the response is, again, positively framed: given that whiteness is configured as a matter of representation, Tate's efforts to redress its acquired legacy of a collection that disproportionately features the representation of white bodies is positioned as a marker of success. Framed in this way, Tate's increasing

acquisition of artworks showing ‘different stories’, despite the white canonical normativity implied, is given as evidence of the institution being a ‘neutral playing field.’ That whiteness is, here, an inherited legacy of white artwork acquisition means both that the issue can be solved in the arena of artwork representation, and that Tate can position itself as fair: the problem is in the past, and Tate’s contemporary responsibilities concern its redressing of this unfortunate imbalance. Furthermore, as the senior respondent’s positive framing emphasises, Tate’s deserves merit for its work in this respect and does not deserve further institutional injury.

Other staff members were emphatic in their understanding, conversely, that whiteness is a contemporary issue. Furthermore, these configurations pointed towards the leadership itself, centering the issue not only as a matter of artwork representation but instead a function of differential power through Tate’s hierarchical staff configuration. One white senior curator commented, ‘[In] the leadership at Tate Britain, there is still the sense that representation is about just allowing others to have a little space in the institution. And offer that space to them. But that doesn't necessarily mean to invite them into a conversation of how you rethink the institution.’ These words offer what could be seen as a direct critique of the senior respondent’s formulation of whiteness as an issue confined to artwork representation. This curator suggests that the leaderships’ ‘lack of willingness to bring people into that conversation’ is a function of their seniority together with their unifying qualities in terms of identity, made clear through their ‘having quite small conversations with a limited number of people that you trust and you feel close to and aligned to, who generally happen to be really similar to you.’ For this respondent, the very notion that whiteness can be solved through proportional representation is symptomatic of whiteness itself: that the leadership is racially homogeneous is implied by the respondent given both the context of the interview and the leaderships’ known white identities (Tate 2024b). The curator thus suggests that whiteness exists in the present in large part because the leadership is both exclusively white and has considerable autonomy in terms of decision-making, relative to the rest of the staff body. Another white respondent had similar views: ‘you need honesty, you need vulnerability, and you need to acknowledge

historical mistakes, personal mistakes, personal bias, collective institutional mistakes, collective institutional bias and this takes a huge degree of courage and takes the capacity to be vulnerable. I think in terms of leadership at Tate, this is not the case.' In contrast with these words, the senior respondent's formulation of whiteness takes a different appearance: in these terms, their refusal to directly acknowledge that Tate might be enacting whiteness in the present is, as the curator also suggests, in fact distinctive of whiteness itself. One white respondent at directorial level was even more explicit: '… if the people in our leadership weren't all white, would we be doing anything differently? […] I think yes.'

Indeed, that whiteness might be firmly held as a matter of opinion and an unfortunate inheritance of the past, both of which can be (and are being) redressed through racially proportionate representation of artworks in Tate's collection, are positions that stand, albeit to varying degrees, in contrast to all of the other respondents. One white participant drew particular attention to the mechanisms upholding these historic representational imbalances, commenting that '…the professional world which Tate is a part of is one that historically has been entirely dominated by white people and governed by white people.' For this respondent, white people have historically been responsible for Tate's setting of 'conventions', 'tastes', 'canons' and 'ideas.' They too, however, consider proportionate racial representation to be a necessary goal, but indicate that such redressing should be facilitated by a diversified staff force: 'If you have a greater representation on a whole variety of different levels, particularly as it pertains to identity, you are far more likely to diversify the collections that you are looking at expanding.' As such, the instalment of a racially proportionate staff-force at decision-making levels is seen by this participant as a necessary redressing mechanism for whiteness, and this implies an understanding, too, that Tate's goal of fairly represent the British public can be achieved in terms of its collections mediation. One respondent of colour, however, was particularly wary of aligning whiteness as a matter necessarily aligning with artwork display: '…questions of race or racism or whiteness often seem to be an issue that's only dealt with in the arena of […] talking about the artworks […]. No one is talking about how these very same structures of exclusion and relations of power and white supremacy etc play out in

the financial structures of Tate and how resources are distributed…' While these two participants' responses are in some ways similar in that they both acknowledge racialised exclusion to the means of decision-making as relevant, for the first respondent, this is significant because of how it impacts display policy, while for the second, it is significant because of how it leads to continuing, racialised inequalities in economic resource distribution. For this second respondent, that whiteness might be a function of Tate's financial structures is a point 'seen as unthinkable': they observe that 'finances seem to be somehow objective.'

Even considering whiteness as an issue that can be entirely confined to artworks is received by some of the public–whose interest Tate is mandated to protect–as contentious. Such can be determined through critical responses to Tate Britain's 2023 permanent collections rehang which, in its current director's diplomatic words, strategically prioritised 'exploring the connections between artists and the times they live in' (Farquharson 2023). One such reaction in Art Review laments that Tate

> seems more bothered about making sure we get that the art 'reflects' moments in British social history, while sermonising about its various injustices and calamities, than with whether the paintings […] are worth looking at for any other reason. […] British art ends up being whatever contemporary curators say it is. The dead make history, but it's the living who (re)write it (Charlesworth 2023).

Here, history is claim, pre-determined and known, as is the accordingly 'right' way to display historic artworks. Tate's efforts to foreground its artworks' social contexts are perceived as an attack upon common-sense, and constituting harm upon viewers' rightful enjoyment of them. The Guardian agrees: 'Maybe [Tate] doesn't want to promote British art, for it seems to disapprove of much of it' (Jones 2023). The Financial Times is particularly on the nose, as its very title claims that the rehang 'puts politics before art'; here, it is suggested that Tate's 'problematic selections prioritis[e] subject over quality and a self-righteousness regarding the past, [and are] infuriating in the commentaries [which] disastrously infiltrat[e] some of the contemporary works' (Wullschläger 2023). The problem with the social

contextualisation of artworks, as positioned by these critics, is that it is contrary to both the 'known' narrative truths of British history and art history alike.

Here, it is worth revisiting Gramsci's observation of how tacitly-held common-sense is enacted as a shared, narrativising of hegemonic discourse, as discussed in the thesis introduction. Gramsci writes how common-sense takes the form of an

> iron conviction that there exist objective laws of historical development similar in kind to natural laws, together with a belief in a predetermined teleology like that of a religion: since favourable conditions are inevitably going to appear [...] it is evident that any deliberate initiative tending to predispose [...] these conditions is not only useless but even harmful (1971:168).

The critics' responses might be expounded in this light: for them, Tate's interpretative introduction of the sometimes uncomfortable social contexts of artworks ruins an objectively 'known' and 'predetermined' understanding both of what British history is, and how Tate's artworks should reflect this history. In Gramsci's words, Tate's contextualist mediation of the artworks is 'harmful' to this historical 'teleology'. That an 'iron conviction' might be said to be present is attested by the critics' language, which positions themselves as objective and Tate as contrastingly emotive: while the critics' claim a self-neutralising ability to determine that such a contextualist approach is overly-politicised and ahistorical, Tate is oppositely 'self-righteous', 'infuriating' and 'sermonising' as it 'disastrously' 'disapproves' of 'British art.' As with the government report's emotive characterisations of Black Lives Matter protestors (see p.36 of this thesis), an ostensibly commonsensical middle ground of objective, historically-informed and apolitical objectivity is claimed through a binarising language. Again, Ahmed's observations of how narratives of hurt function to secure a normative subject are brought to light (2004).

Tate's inclusion of work by the queer, Black British contemporary artist Rene Matic is, notably, named by Wullschläger as 'thoroughly banal' and 'quota-ticking',

while works by the Black YBA[18] Chris Ofili are evidence of Tate's past 'insight to purchase the monumental paintings which became the icons of that decade' (2023). As such, it seems that works by British artists of colour might be evaluated in terms of whether they stand the test of time: this is, thus a distinct burden placed upon non-whiteness. Meanwhile, 'Captions admonishing Gainsborough's and Reynolds' white subjects, enriched by colonial trade, become relentlessly hectoring, and Tate has not learnt from its misjudged Hogarth show' (ibid.). While the value of the work of contemporary artists of colour is required to be proven, the value of historic white artists, conversely, cannot (and should not) be unproven. That any attempts made by Tate even to begin contextualising Gainsborough, Reynolds and Hogarth beyond existing canonical narratives strikes a deep and affectively-intense sense of unfairness. This sense of unfairness, instead of being acknowledged, is projected outwards and obscured by objective claims to common reason: in this instance, by the critics towards Tate, and in the context of the government report, by the writers towards the Black Lives Matter protestors. Both the accused in these instances are positioned as at fault.

Here, Tate's dual vision aims of 'enjoyment' and 'understanding' can be seen as being held, for some, in direct opposition. While for those who are investment into the historicised teleologies of normative display, 'enjoyment' means to be able to take artworks on their own terms and not be subjected to 'relentless hectoring', for those conversely invested into whiteness as a legitimate discourse, 'enjoyment' might only be obtained through 'understanding' existing collections, and perhaps not even then. Why such narrative reclaimings of canonised history might be so contentious is elucidated by Ahmed, who comments on the United Kingdom's refusal to apologise for its role in the transatlantic slave trade at a United Nations conference on racism in 2001: 'History is assumed to be 'long ago'; it is cut off from injustice in the present. [...] Such a delimitation of responsibility assumes the responsibility only takes the form of a direct relation of causality. It works precisely through forgetting that what happened 'long ago' affects the injustices of international politics in the present…' (2004:118). In this light, it might

[18] Young British Artist

be surmised that the white appearance of Tate's collections are also an ostensibly past problem unrelated to present conditions. As such, Tate's claims of being able to influence visitors' critical understanding are called into question: here, critics express their discomfort through undermining Tate's scholarly authority, and this undermining is justified by ideological opposition to its contextualist approach. Given the avowedly white representational qualities of Tate's historic collection, the critics' enactment of this common-sense versus overly-emotive binary aligns together–in objective terms–Britishness with light skin. As such, in the instances that Tate makes efforts to extricate these two themes (in other words, when it contextualises historic white artists' claims to British canonical status), the result is that contextualist approaches are deemed ahistorical and politicised. Resultingly, these conflicts between 'enjoyment' and 'understanding' result in interpretative approaches on the part of Tate that also come to be seen by the public as ideological, irrespective of any scholarly justification by its staff. In this way, it can be seen that critics' understandings of contextualist approaches regarding race as being overly politicised are themselves representative of a particular ideological stance which correspond closely with characterisations of whiteness as an 'epistemology of ignorance.'

## Whiteness as Economic

This section argues that the variability of staff definitions of whiteness discussed so far can be largely, though not entirely, explained through analysis of the economic influences exerted upon Tate through its dependence on funding, in public and private terms alike. Not all of the variability can be explained by this means, however: later sections will strive to account for what an economic dimension cannot explain. Positioning whiteness as a matter of opinion, as explored, relies upon the premise that all people, regardless of their racial positioning, have equally valid claims to racial understanding, and furthermore that such claims are valid irrespective of peoples' engagement with the topics of whiteness or racism. Given this logic, that white peoples' understandings of race are implied by the senior

respondent to signify equal value to their counterparts of colour, it cannot definitively be stated that whiteness exists in the present, because some people cannot see it. If whiteness is not believed to definitively exist in the present or 'here', it can be quarantined to the past, or 'elsewhere'. This is a formulation of whiteness on Tate's part that undermines its own institutional claims of being able to influence the public in terms of their critical understanding of artworks: as this section explores, when it comes to whiteness, the opposite is true. Tate's public-facing stance on whiteness (irrespective of the significant internal inconsistencies of defining it as indicated by staff) is directly determined by the public via the government's mediation of public funding and the according ideological limitations required by the government itself, whose own epistemological position regarding whiteness was outlined in the section 'Tate in Context.' It is to these economic influences, in public and private form alike, that the thesis now turns.

Staff perceptions regarding the extent to which Tate has the sufficient political freedom to take responsibility for its own whiteness varied significantly. One white staff member at director level perceived Tate to have 'curatorial freedom of expression', elaborating, 'we never limit ourselves and the type of art that we show addresses these things. [...] I know for a fact that our policy isn't to censor ourselves, or the artwork that Tate foregrounds. There's […] an educational wish that Tate wants to foreground these discussions to educate audiences rather than cater to their pre-existing prejudices.' They acknowledge that 'there are certain issues where Tate disagrees with the government stance', giving Tate's choice to publicly declare climate emergency as one such example of Tate's freedom to act 'at odds with the rhetoric of the government.' At the same time, however, they perceive both that Tate 'has the power to work against' Conservative framings of racism and whiteness, but are not doing so. They mention 'Tate's status as a publicly funded body' but do not consider public funding to be an absolute obstacle to Tate's freedom to foreground whiteness, concluding, 'I think Tate could.' In a similar vein, the senior respondent positioned Tate's institutional policies as completely independent of its financial ties to the government: '…if we were told to do something by a government of whatever stripe, we have an issue because we're not political in that way. […] We will always have freedom to determine our

own objectives. The critical thing is that public money keeps you honest.' Some significant implications arise here: if Tate's policies are not influenced by its reliance on public funding, then Tate would be able to take complete ethical responsibility for its enactments of whiteness. Conversely, if Tate's policies *are* influenced by such, there is something not being said.

While the senior respondent considered museological neutrality to be assured by its reliance on public funding, other staff members considered oppositely that public funding threatens neutrality. One respondent of colour proposed accordingly that whiteness could be addressed at Tate 'if we change our status as a non-profit arm's length…' [...]. It would have to be completely re-envisioned and independent of the government […]. Unless we have a complete culture shift in what the government see national public organisations doing.' For this respondent, such a marked shift is not realistic, however, but they do believe that 'the realistic thing could be how we shift the culture of the organisation through its workforce.' Here, a tension is presented between the perceived approaches that Tate could make, from radical to reformist. As one white senior curator suggests, these tensions are particularly acute given Tate's public status: '…the level of scrutiny for everything we do and the way that is internalised is much greater than in regional institutions. Everyone - from the director to the chair of the trustees to the person who writes the caption or the press release - thinks about who's going to read and comment on it.' These words are, in a sense, similar to those of the senior respondent in saying that 'public money keeps you honest': both these individuals and the senior respondent align Tate's reliance on public spending with its need to reflect public interest, but while the senior respondent frames Tate's mediation of such in a positive light, this curator suggests that the same happens through a practice of self-censorship due to fear. However, the crucial differences signified within these respective accounts regard whether public interest itself is honest in terms of whiteness, and whether Tate does indeed have freedom.

One white respondent from Tate Research was very explicit about their understanding that Tate's reliance upon DCMS does both directly and intimately influence Tate's display policies:

> In the time that I've been at Tate, we've had a Conservative government with a capital C that has become [...] more and more right wing as we know. […] the most obvious evidence of that pressure, which was extraordinary to me and lots of other people, was the letter that Oliver Dowden, who was culture secretary at the time, wrote to all museum directors […] …that was the first time […] certainly in my career that the government has ever interfered in museum policy around display and storytelling.

This respondent speaks of their perception that Tate's director, Maria Balshaw, has had, accordingly, to 'navigate [Tate] a certain way', and with the knowledge that 'in other right wing countries in Europe, museum directors have been sacked because they have addressed matters of inequality in society and felt that that's the museum's responsibility to do.' For this respondent, there is a belief that if Balshaw were to steer Tate in this way, she might 'be replaced by someone who is less progressive': as such, it is suggested that she has 'had to' 'be more cautious than she and the rest of us at Tate might like.' The tension between potential radical and reformist approaches is balanced with different emphasis: here, there is fear that things could be even worse, with the suggestion that power lies elsewhere.

The respondent refers to an open letter from Oliver Dowden, the Secretary of State for the government department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, written to colleagues in 'Arm's Length Bodies' (ie DCMS-funded organisations, including Tate), which set out the 'HM Government position on contested heritage'. The full letter is in the Appendix to this thesis, but its key points are:

> History is ridden with moral complexity. Statues and other historical objects were created by generations with different perspectives and understandings of right and wrong. Some represent figures who have said and done things which we may find deeply offensive and would not defend today. [...] the Government <u>does not support the removal of statues or other similar objects</u> [their emphasis] [...]. It is imperative that you continue to act impartially, in line with your publicly funded status, and not in a way that brings this into question. This is especially important as we enter a challenging Comprehensive Spending Review, in which all government spending will rightly be scrutinised (Dowden 2020).

Here, there is little doubt left with regards to a very clear link enforced between museum policy and funding security. What the letter means in giving such an imperative to 'act impartially', however, is not clear without an understanding of the government's position on whiteness and racism, which was set out in the section 'Tate in Context.'

Indeed, the government position on whiteness and racism can be summarised in the similarly vigorous and clear terms of Equalities Minister Kemi Badenoch's House of Commons speech less than one month later, which made teaching Critical Race Theory in British schools illegal:

> 'What we are against is the teaching of contested political ideas as if they are accepted facts. [...] I want to be absolutely clear that the Government stand unequivocally against critical race theory. […] We do not want teachers to teach their white pupils about white privilege and inherited racial guilt. Let me be clear that any school that teaches those elements of critical race theory as fact, or that promotes partisan political views […] without offering a balanced treatment of opposing views, is breaking the law' (Badenoch 2020).

Given the clear link established between public funding and Tate's gallery policies, the senior respondent's refusal to define whiteness can be contextualised in light of Badenoch's position. If Badenoch's words can be taken as a marker for what impartiality means, and if Dowden's threats are to be believed, for Tate to avoid financial losses—potentially of an existential kind given the £54 million it received from DCMS in the financial year of 2022-3[19]—it would have to heed these warnings (Tate 2023).

For Tate to foreground whiteness under these terms, it would have to offer 'a balanced treatment of opposing views'; for it to do otherwise would be for it to risk being seen as politically partisan, as the senior respondent suggested. A guiding view of perfect British multiculturalism is offered by the writers of the government report of the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, who comment that

[19] This figure comprises roughly 37% of Tate's overall income of £146 million received the same year.

> an ideal for a modern UK [is] best encapsulated by what we saw in the opening ceremony of the London 2012 Olympics. We saw an array of people and cultures from the sleepy English countryside to the frenetic music of the inner city. It not only featured British icons like James Bond and the monarchy, there was also a joyful expression of the contribution made by the Windrush generation as well as the working class contribution to the country's history and industrial might. One highlight was Dizzee Rascal belting out his hit Bonkers. Danny Boyle managed to create a vision of the UK which united all communities. He gave us an ideal of an open, optimistic UK, refreshed with new communities. On that day the whole nation was proud to be British (2021:28).

As such, the government's understanding of racial equality is one that prioritises a multiracial optics of cohesion and a stern optimism: for Tate to adhere to the government's vision, then, it would have to overlook the very processes by which inequality is made manifest in the first place. As 'Tate in Context' determined, the government position is one that fundamentally overlooks and dismisses the ways in which racial and class-based inequalities intersect, and as such through its own epistemological starting point comes to understand whiteness as a form of critique that ascribes fixed, essential qualities to race. To do so would indeed be ideological, but whiteness as a rigorous discipline does not do this. As such, Tate's educative role in influencing critical understanding of artworks is severely undermined by the economic influence exerted upon it by a government that does not understand what the need to understand whiteness means. This can be summarised by one white member of staff, who comment on the government's 'smothering' 'control', 'where the politics butts up against human rights': 'I have no doubt in my mind. […] they have their thumb on us.'

Private funding bodies were also deemed by staff as influential on Tate's treatment of whiteness both in its artworks and institutionally. A recent grant awarded to Tate to fund its studies into Turner was positioned by one white member of staff as an example of how economic resources are preferentially allocated to artists already deemed of particular British canonical relevance. The respondent comments, 'An astronomical amount of money has been spent cataloguing all the works of J.M.W. Turner, the vast majority of which are

sketchbook sketches, watercolours... […] and actually the difference that you could make with an artist who has no text, or has been severely under researched, but is arguably just as important a figure in the history of art, but just maybe a different tradition or a different practice.' This respondent continues, commenting that half of Tate's collection is comprised of Turner works, and the other half 'is still majority white.' For this respondent, then, to further focus on Turner as a white British canonical figure who has already been the subject of sustained scholarship, comes necessarily at further expense to artists of colour, whose claims to Britishness and aesthetic canonicity have already been significantly invalidated historically. This continued directing of funds towards already-celebrated white artists, this respondent thus suggests, has the circular effect of even further legitimising canonical artists' claims to normative Britishness: there is a correlation between financial resources allocated to the research of artists and the extent to which they are visible and celebrated within the public eye. The respondent suggests that this isn't necessarily what Tate would want, however: 'If a major, major, major funding body devoted to say, Black British art, said, We want to give you 400,000 pounds to catalogue Black British art, Tate would […] have also said yes, absolutely. So, you know, there's, there's decision makers beyond the walls of Tate that are also determining what we can do. Because we're always part of a network of power.' Here, the respondent points towards Tate being intricately linked with the broader epistemological positions of donors and funding bodies external to Tate. In other words, given that Tate does not generate all of its own funds, it is answerable to the research interests reflected by broader understandings of aesthetic and national value.

That white people are more structurally likely to have recourse to economic resources than people of colour is a key factor, reported by staff, determining the racialised distribution of Tate's workforce as well: a number of respondents believed whiteness in its epistemological form (meaning, between individuals working there and with regards to their approach to mediating the collection alike) to surface institutionally on account of salaries that they consider to be prohibitively low for those without the added financial security of unearned, inherited wealth. One commented as such,

> …if we got a new, more progressive government that pumps more money into the arts, [that] would allow for pay to increase. […] …if you were to make it more economically advantageous to be working within the arts, I think you'd see a lot more ethnic minorities apply […]. It sounds counterintuitive, but having low pay benefits the more wealthy within the institution because they're the only ones that can afford that.

The lack of financial incentives that this participant reports for people of colour to feel secure in the workplace might well be exacerbated by the social disincentives associated with whiteness discussed later in this section. As such, it could be said that whiteness both creates and results from the intersection of these economic and social conditions, in that both of these dimensions affect the ability and willingness of people of colour to work at Tate, thus further increasing the possibility that white staff might consider their experiences to be universally normative. The increased likelihood that white people might benefit from unearned wealth, thereby being able to accept the lower salaries associated with the arts and the public sector was a theme mentioned by five of the participants.

Tate's hiring policies were also mentioned as significant in determining the racial composition of the staff force in ways that were unintended side effects of prioritising other institutional needs. These were, namely, retaining institutional knowledge and navigating financial losses resulting from the covid-19 pandemic, as one white participant at director level comments:

> ...before the pandemic, things were advertised externally as much as internally. And the new focus is for promotion within Tate. […] Only five or 10% of people within Tate get promoted to the next level, which is quite low. […] There is a new initiative […] for institutional knowledge retention […] because we had a big loss of brains when people took voluntary redundancy. […] But the thing is, if we do that, we're just gonna get more white people in leadership positions.

Diversifying the workforce at the highest levels of seniority was a frequent theme, and positioned by staff as important not only for its potential effects on artwork display policies, but also in its own right: the participant suggests both that the senior workforce 'should' 'look more like London', and that without considering how

policies of internal progression might affect Tate's racial composition, there is a risk that 'we have to wait 30 years until we can see real change.' As such, this participant positions affirmative action in terms of staff upward progression as potentially detrimental to affirmative action in terms of race, at least in an immediate sense. This is a factor more broadly acknowledged in a Runnymede Trust report titled, 'How racial inequalities obstruct a fair and resilient economy', in which it is recommended that 'In the labour market, policies could include: targets (from hiring, to progression to senior management and board level), the 'Rooney rule', interview panels and incentivising existing senior managers by tying their own progression/wage rises to their performance on progressing ethnic minority staff' (Khan 2020:4).

Specifically to Tate as an institution working with living artists as well as historic, it was noted, too, how already-existing inequalities regarding racialised groups' differential access to social and financial resources outside of Tate also differentially affect artists' ease of progression within Tate. One white staff member commented thus on artists' differential access to infrastructure and the effect of this on the longevity of their professional relationships with the gallery: '…a lot of white artists with studios and galleries behind [them] are facilitated in the acquisition process, because there is an implied code and structure and communication that makes it easier.' Here, corroborating the analyses made by Runnymede Trust discussed previously, the participant points to how intergenerational white economic privileges can transfer into an, albeit unintended, white cultural normativity in terms of Tate's display policies. As with a previous participant's observation that research funds directed towards historic white artists might serve to displace British artists of colour from being acknowledged, the same can be said to be true in the present. These observations of how existing economic disparities along racial divides point towards a consistent mechanism whereby white cultural narratives continue to be prioritised: in each case, such prioritisation cannot be said to be actively intentional, but are a passively constructed reinforcement of racial difference. That these mechanisms are both unintentional but nevertheless profound further point to the inadequacies of considering whiteness to be consciously-upheld, as suggested in the government reports.

That said, the resources available to white staff, too, are widely perceived by staff to affect the extent to which whiteness can be addressed at Tate. As white staff frequently acknowledge, they do not necessarily understand whiteness intuitively, and as such, to engage with it requires resources for them as well. One white staff member explains: '…the resources are so few that the staff is slowly decreased - so everything that we do is geared towards delivering, but we don't necessarily have enough time to have space, which is just about opening up, having the conversations, meeting colleagues, and having these discussions…' Here, Tate's focus on project delivery is seen to come at another cost for staff of colour, and constitute another means by which the redundancies resulting from the covid-19 pandemic have continuing effects on the institutional prioritisation of whiteness as a current concern. One respondent of colour made clear how such an absence of allocated time and pay for their white colleagues results in an increased burden in terms of unpaid emotional labour: '…as an ethnic minority […] you don't want to become the go-to person that has to deal with every query of being an ethnic minority.' This respondent believes that their white colleagues 'are genuinely grappling with it' and that 'you can't blame people for not thinking about these things [...] because they've already got so much to think about.' Like the previous respondent, this individual sees the pressures of project delivery as a significant barrier towards addressing whiteness institutionally suggesting that 'people higher up' should not 'assume that people can add it onto their workload.' Finally, they reflect, 'if I was in that position, I would maybe hold back on programming and […] do more workshops, or recommend books for people and […] having a weekly check in to see if people have been reading.' Here, too, the intricate link between white racial understanding and the structural mechanisms that uphold whiteness are made clear, suggesting that even the best of individuals' white anti-racist intent has limited effects without broader economic means.

That white individuals' understandings of, or means to establish anti-racist practice might be impaired without an institutional direction of funds introduces another recurring theme within participants' responses: white staff in particular indicated significant discrepancies regarding the extent to which they understood whiteness to be an individual versus a structural issue, despite their conceptual

acknowledgement of it as both. This manifested in a spectrum of perceptions regarding what anti-racist action means. On the one hand, some (all white) staff members considered conversations about race to be important actions in themselves, while on the other, some suggested that actions had to tangibly benefit people of colour. Somewhere in between, some staff believed that conversations were important so long as they led to further action. The first position is suggested by one white respondent, who considered their departmental meetings about race to be 'really productive. It's just really interesting to hear from other people, their perceptions or observations. It just helps you see your own lens on things... To be honest, I think the last one we had was not a race one but we had a really good conversation about gender and trans identity and that was really useful.' Here, their meeting can be seen as a means to helping them 'to see your own lens on things', thereby alluding to the ways in which white subjectivity is learnt through the experiences of what they call 'other people'. In this instance, it is suggested that their departmental discussions regarding race were not exclusively focused on whiteness, but rather upon non-normative identities in a generalised sense. Whether or not those who shared their experiences perceived the conversations to be beneficial is not clear.

Another white participant positioned language as an important distinguishing factor between action and non-action, commenting how in their department they 'use the term anti-racism a lot because that shows action rather than just saying I'm not racist. […] I think that you need to be anti-racist to show action and things that you're going to do to make things better at Tate.' For this white participant, consciously-applied language is important in its own right as a means of signalling towards change. This view can be put into perspective through the words of another white participant, who suggested that white peoples' discomfort in speaking about race is something that needs time and repeated exposure in order to process, and that this practice has already 'become a lot more open and less fraught', thus being beneficial. Other participants, however, were concerned that a focus on conversations could in fact risk obscuring the need for further action, as evidenced by another white respondent who suggested that 'talking about it negates the responsibility or accountability to act upon it.' This sentiment was

echoed by a participant of colour, who spoke of their majority white, female and middle-class team's participation in a training about race, in which, the participant reports, they were given the feedback that

> …you're all saying the right things, but actually, it doesn't mean that much. [...] …what are you actually doing? What are you doing within your power to disrupt, or enable people of colour to have space and a sense of autonomy? What are you doing to change the broader organisational culture as well as taking it back to the individual? Rather than, "Hey, Tate needs to change"?

Here, it is suggested that white staff confuse what might be a significant fluency in the language of diversity with tangible equity for people of colour within the organisation: in this framing, conversations have the potential not only to make no significant change, but even to cause damage with respect to understanding the problem. This inconsistent and discomfited white understanding of individual responsibility within a structural issue, and of the structural effects of individual behaviour is illustrated by this participant's observation of their white colleagues' suggestion that 'Tate needs to change.' Here, while it might be articulated with dexterity that whiteness exists 'everywhere', the participants' white colleagues' actions simultaneously position it as 'somewhere else.'

Beyond the question of conversations, too, participants had significantly differing perceptions of what constitutes success in terms of anti-racist action. One white participant's description of the Digital team's departmental anti-racist action plan indicated a focus on language, which, as discussed, others have considered to be of relatively limited benefit. This respondent speaks of the team's choice to rename the terms 'whitelisting' and 'Master' in the language of coding with the intention of 'making sure it feels safer for everybody to work here.' Such an approach is viewed with scepticism by another white participant, who comments, 'There's definitely a bit more awareness, but […] it doesn't crack the power structure at all. […] It needs to be a much more radical change, if we really want to see change. […] We've got this task force and we're really trying to change things […] but then you realise that there is no money allocated to whatever we propose. So what's the point?' Here, this participant puts conscious language into a category

whose anti-racist effect is limited, given that it does not require economic input to enact. From this perspective, too, conscious language may have the potential to deflect from action rather than to address it. Race scholar Justin Grinage notes the differences in perception that white people and their colleagues of colour might experience respectively regarding anti-racist successes:

> ...the deeper we dive into learning about race, the more we unlock previously repressed racial trauma and thus the more difficult learning becomes [...]. …often during surface-level race conversations, whites feel as though they have made progress and that learning has occurred, while people of color often become frustrated with the lack of racial literacy that whites exhibit. The end result is only the illusion of equality—the affective environment simply became a reproduction of whiteness. [...] …white students often become resistant to learning by using a plethora of affective techniques to avoid facing their traumas (2019:134).

As such, while there may be benefit to white people understanding the affective techniques they employ to avoid their own racial discomfort, it may also be true that their own perceptions cannot constitute an effective indicator of success in determining the actual reparative value of anti-racist actions for their colleagues of colour.

One recent event can be seen as a succinct illustration of the ways in which the economic and social dimensions of white experience intersect, and together serve to bolster whiteness as an affective norm that leads to tangible emotional, social and economic losses for people of colour. Amy Sharrocks, a white artist, had been agreed to act as lead artist in the 2020-1 programme at Tate Exchange, and had brought in fellow artist Jade Montserrat, who identifies as Black, to work on a project called ‘A Rumour of Waves’ (Industria 2020). In July 2020, Sharrocks received a call from a senior member of Tate staff, telling her that Montserrat could not be involved. This communication followed Montserrat’s allegations against the Tate donor Anthony d’Offay of racial discrimination and sexual harassment. Sharrocks spoke of her conversation with the Tate staff member thus:

> She begins with a whole conversation about Anthony, about how there is nothing further that they can do. She said she has no doubt about Jade’s

> experience and that people aren't doing nothing, but people are legally forced to be silent on this because they would be sued. She said that when [Tate] announced they were going to suspend any contact [with d'Offay], there were immediate actions taken by his lawyers that meant that they couldn't really operate as an institution (Jayanetti 2021).

That power, in the form of access to and protection of economic and social resources, is integrally bound in whiteness can be seen clearly here: d'Offay's wealth and influence allowed him initially to sidestep allegations of racism by hiring the best lawyers, and by exerting what was positioned here as an existential threat towards Tate. Tate, meanwhile, are reported to have overlooked their ethical alignment with Montserrat in favour of institutional self-protection in senses financial, legal, and perhaps in some spheres, reputational. Montserrat's experiences of racism and loss of income, and Tate's loss of her participation, were directly evaluated by Tate as of less financial[20], social, even ostensibly ethical value than standing against d'Offay's influence. In other words, to be anti-racist is costly in terms of finance and status, and in this case the costs were deemed by Tate to be prohibitive: Tate conscious prioritisation of a financial relationship at cost to an artist of colour, with the knowledge of d'Offay's racism, demonstrated an alignment with power at odds to an alignment with racial solidarity, and thus constitutive of whiteness.

## Whiteness as Social; Whiteness as Epistemological

Throughout the thesis so far, various behaviours said to be associated with whiteness have recurred as pervasive themes. It is these behaviours, social and affective, that are discussed in this section, which explores in greater detail how deflection, fear, guilt, politeness and self-perceptions of victimhood operate within Tate, articulated by staff, as a means by which white comfort is prioritised—consciously or otherwise—over racial equity or transparency. While 'Whiteness as Social' focuses on how these behaviours are enacted, 'Whiteness as

[20] In August 2022, Tate paid a six-figure settlement to the artists, so the costs of Tate aligning against power in that instance carried greater stakes than this tangible financial sum.

Epistemological' explores what these enacted behaviours might be seen to indicate about whitened ways of understanding the world. While the first part attends mostly to staff behaviours, the second explores how these relate to and sometimes mutually reinforce the behaviours and understandings of Tate's public. In sum, these parts together find that white individuals' avoidance of race as a topic serves to uphold whiteness within Tate as an affective norm that both runs contrary to these individuals' self-perceptions as anti-racist, and allows them to continue perceiving themselves as such. Furthermore, whiteness is evidenced through the perceptions of white staff and audiences alike that to speak about race means to speak about non-whiteness: this can be understood as a structurally enacted white deflection from racial self-understanding.

That whiteness as a subject is deeply uncomfortable for white people was detailed by one participant of colour, who speaks of how their white colleagues

> did not want to talk about it; would take it very defensively and would take it as a personal attack. Much more comfortable talking about Blackness, because Blackness is distant, more distant from them. […] But whiteness? It was absolutely that which shall not be mentioned, which is underlying the surface in all of these discussions […]. I think it was not considered to be permissible, not considered to be polite, not considered to be intellectually coherent…

Similarly, another participant of colour spoke of their perception that whiteness is enacted through white peoples' 'lack of knowledge and a presumption of knowledge and a presumption of experience as well', commenting further, 'I think you can be white without a culture of whiteness.' Together, these participants' observations of white behaviour form the departure point for 'Whiteness as Social', which explores how white deflection manifests as an often unconscious affective strategy to avoid discomfort, and also how such behaviours become more deeply entrenched as organisational norms, at times being taken for granted as ostensibly objective markers of professionalism against which staff of colour are evaluated.

## Whiteness as Social

As was noted previously, a number of less hierarchically senior individuals perceive whiteness to be concentrated in Tate's leadership. The leadership, meanwhile, allude to the difficulties of negotiating governmental and public influence exerted on Tate. The official government position states that whiteness is divisive; the public have been seen to criticise Tate for its stance on race. On an individual level, staff have frequently suggested that whiteness is 'everywhere' but simultaneously that it is 'elsewhere': what these perceptions all have in common is that someone or something else is perceived to have greater power than the subject in question. One white participant speaks as such of their perceptions of senior white staff reticence in speaking about whiteness in conversations that were catalysed by 'the Black Lives Matter movement and the killing of George Floyd. […] At first, it was quite awkward, because it almost proved my point that those people in those positions hadn't had those conversations and never had to think of their whiteness...' That shifting of responsibility might be in itself one of the affective strategies associated with whiteness is explored by Shona Hunter in her analysis of whiteness in British Primary Care Trusts:

> ...the emotions of loss, fear and frustration coalesce [...] to generate blaming dynamics [...]. It represents the symbolic processes of transference and counter transference, the projective communications which work to circulate these blaming dynamics between material subject-objects, in this case person to person between group members, which enacts blame symbolically moving from one set of practitioners to another (2015:80).

Hunter's observations might be seen as pertinent to Tate, as suggested by the observations of one respondent of colour, who speaks of how Tate's Race Equality Taskforce tried to encourage the institution's leadership to take part in a race awareness training:

> [A request was put out] to the Race Equality Task Force […] which has a trustee, and then the trustee brings it to the other trustees. And […] my colleagues met with Maria [Balshaw], to ask if the directors can do it and she said, "Well, I can't make that decision. You bring it to the Task Force" and [they were] like, "Okay, we'll bring it to the Task Force. Fine". When it

> comes to responsibility and accountability relating to anti-racism work, it's like a lot of cat and mouse incidents in the institution. It doesn't sit with just one person. It doesn't sit with anyone. There isn't a process.

Here, this respondent suggests that decisions and responsibilities regarding race are passed around the institution, and that this signifies, ultimately, an absence of formal process and accountability.

This shifting of responsibility can be contextualised in the observation that white staff members, as discussed, have an often strongly-held wish to understand themselves and be perceived as anti-racist. That this wish is consciously-held might nevertheless unconsciously incentivise them to overlook, or not recognise, their own participation in whiteness. The perceived challenge of recognising one's own unconsciously-held, white individual bias was reflected on by one white curator:

> I think institutionally and as individuals, certainly as curators, we have become much more aware of the position in which we stand. I think we have become much more aware of the ingrained assumptions that guide the way in which art has been selected, acquired and displayed, and that sort of unpicking and understanding of unconscious bias and assumptions has led to a fundamental–beginning at least of a–shift. […] And that for me doesn't mean that everything has changed. But that unconscious, just being white as the dominant way, is now constantly subject to scrutiny and self scrutiny.

Here, this respondent refers both to self-reflection and guidance from others: as such, they seem to acknowledge that white racial self-understanding might be limited without the input of colleagues of colour. While this respondent is not commenting on how remuneration might play a role in this input, a perspective offered by a staff member of colour suggests that this interplay between white self scrutiny and external guidance is also, in itself, a means by which unpaid emotional labour might be unwittingly extracted from staff of colour: 'What is not fine is when other people at Tate in their own job capacities come to the [BAME] Network, and then ask, "Oh, I have this programme - is this okay?" And then, like… "That's not my job". If somebody else doesn't have enough experience to do this, maybe the institution should really evaluate the kind of skill sets and experiences it has.' In

other words, the eliciting of input from colleagues of colour by white staff on matters of race is also something that requires the very racial self-awareness that white people appear, at present, to lack.

This respondent's comment illustrates a ready possibility for white people to believe that in asking for feedback, they might have succeeded in challenging their own white assumptions, but in so doing in fact place a greater burden on their colleagues. This, somewhat ironically, suggests that white staff may not be able to determine the extent to which their quest for racial self-understanding is successful. Some white staff were particularly forthright about the limitations of their self-knowledge, and understood that their good intentions did not in themselves constitute success: '…my lens is also very privileged being white and […] being a head of department or director: I don't know what people aren't going to tell me and […] from what I hear it feels safe. […] But I don't know what I don't know. And there may be a lot of instances when people […] feel uncomfortable sharing any of that information with me.' Here is the suggestion that a willingness on the part of white people in positions of authority is not necessarily a sufficient indicator of whether whiteness will be surfaced. Furthermore, there remains a possibility that even despite their willingness, they may nevertheless make assumptions or enact behaviours consistent with whiteness which contribute to rather than challenge an institutionalised sense of unease in speaking about race.

One such unconsciously-enacted assumption could be that whiteness among other signifiers of social identity is normative, as one participant of colour suggests. As such, the previous participant's understanding that they 'don't know what they don't know' can be contextualised with reference to how unconscious enactments of whitened behaviour might be perceived as alienating by staff of colour, despite no ill-intention. The participant of colour explains how they never had reason to think about their racial positioning until they

> came here and then it started to matter. And then I was made aware that I'm not white. […] I see whiteness here as a culture but specifically a British culture. And I know Britishness doesn't equate to white. But somehow here, it feels that way. […] I work in a predominantly white, cis-het, middle-class

> environment, right? […] …everyone has a specific shared background […] - people talk about British references that I wouldn't really understand and I don't really care to understand.

Here, whiteness is characterised as being an assumption of particular cultural reference points, employed in a way that feels both exclusionary and irrelevant, and serving to construct a divide between a sense of group belonging and unbelonging.

Another staff member of colour also pointed towards the economic dimensions of whitened social behaviour, manifested in their white colleagues' inaccurate assumptions of parity in terms of access to resources: '…there's an assumption that everyone around them has a similar sort of life that is quite privileged.' They continue, pointing towards the similarities between this behaviour and the broader investments into meritocracy of white people more generally, who they characterise as saying, ' "Why can't people work harder and make it in the same way I did?" It's like, "but you've had a head start, maybe, and you've been afforded opportunities because of where you're from or because of the way you look, that other people may not have". ' Here, white peoples' assumption that everybody has access to the resources that they do is linked to a more broadly apparent epistemological position whereby those who do not achieve are articulated to be incapable, rather than not having themselves benefited from privilege. Here, that the perceived negative qualities associated with failure, justified in the first place by whitened perceptions of racial equity, might themselves become to be associated as inherent racial failings is all too possible. This respondent's observation of how white individuals might unconsciously articulate meritocratic belief echoes, too, the government report that disqualifies economic analysis as a measure of racial disparity: both on an individual and structural level, this belief has the effect that failure and achievement are seen as racially-determined, rather than a product of existing disparities in social mobility.

While white staff were said to incorrectly assume similarities with their colleagues of colour, staff of colour also perceived an expectation to affectively conform with their white colleagues. One such white normative behaviour

particularly aligned with Britishness was observed by one respondent of colour, not from the United Kingdom originally, as a shared investment in politeness. For this respondent, politeness is enacted as a shared means by which a superficial niceness aligns with the avoidance of speaking about important issues in depth: it is this niceness that functions to maintain an appearance of peace and decorum, as they explain: ‘me understanding British culture is - don't really say anything that you mean. And that's equally uncomfortable for me than just saying it outright.’ Here, there is social pressure to not mention discomfort, an observation that elucidates how a perception that whiteness is ‘everywhere’ but ‘not here’ can be maintained through a tacit social code of silence, whereby the act itself of breaking silence is perceived as damaging and worthy of punishment. That white people are not necessarily able to detect their own participation in whiteness, and, too, that whiteness creates discomfort, even visceral danger, for people of colour, this means that attempts to point out racial disparity might run contrary to the social code of politeness and thus be socially taboo, despite what could be at stake in not addressing it. The net result is that white comfort is prioritised even over the potential for people of colour to articulate danger. Within a broader cultural context that discerns talking about discomfort to be inappropriate or impolite, race-based discomfort, too, is considered inappropriate to mention. When coupled with the notion that the majority in positions of racial dominance may not be sensitised to expressions of racial discomfort and inequity, it can be seen that speaking out against whiteness and experiences of racism is doubly disincentivised.

That politeness could be a distinctly white British flavour of whitened behaviour was suggested by one white respondent, also not from the UK:

> …there is something about British culture that now after 10 years, I'm kind of grasping […]. This concept of politeness, and reputation […]. For me, reputation here is very connected with this idea of being polite. Of not disturbing very much, or making the widest range of people happier […]. Yeah, not upsetting people. And I do think that the institution really, really, really tries their best to do this. Which is not necessarily something that I agree with. Especially if we talk exactly about a topic like whiteness, which is something that needs to be challenged in a way that is also not very polite.

Here, Tate's reputation is linked with an appeasement of its white audiences through politeness: just as speaking about race might transgress a code of politeness internally to Tate, the same is observed here to be relevant in terms of how Tate mediates the topic of whiteness to its public. As such, while superficial benevolence might operate as an affective norm, it also upholds inequality through its differential recognition or prioritisation of comfort along a racial divide. While Tate's outward enactment of politeness at Tate might be intended as a means by which offending the general public can be kept to a minimum, it thereby positions this general public as white.

That there are financial incentives at play in keeping white audiences happy is also significant: it is ultimately the stakeholders whose negative perceptions of Tate carry punitive power in financial and social terms that are, if Tate's mediation of d'Offay's racism is to be taken as a precedent, of tangible consequence. Given that white people are both disproportionately wealthy relative to their peers of colour, and constitute the demographic majority in the United Kingdom, these powerful stakeholders are most likely to be white. The considerable stake in, and influence Tate that these whitened stakeholders have can be evidenced, too, through one white curator's articulation of an institutional fear of causing offence: '…content goes through many different gatekeepers who judge it, at least, you know, in good part, based on fear. […] …if in doubt, it could offend people: better not say.' Here, the similarly unconscious corollary of politeness is fear: both of these can be seen as affective strategies enacted to anticipate and avoid white discomfort. While politeness is a tacitly-agreed norm, fear is generated in response to the possibility that politeness might be transgressed, and to the ramifications that such a transgression might elicit. These fear-inducing ramifications could indeed be significant: perhaps, a potential loss of reputation and influence for Tate in the eyes of its white audiences, who accordingly could withdraw their backing. Likewise, that a transgression of the sternly polite and commonsensical codes of government could result in similar such losses on an even broader scale suggests that there are indeed tangible reasons that fear might arise.

Staff allusions to white peoples' perceived discomfort talking about race were revealing as to why politeness might serve as an avoidance strategy internally to Tate, but their responses varied in the extent to which the accordingly associated fear was linked to these external ramifications. One white respondent suggested the institution's tendency towards polite interaction might be characterised in terms of silence with regards to instances in which the discomfort of staff of colour is reported: 'it was very noticeable that there was a silence if someone raised something […] …it seems like a bureaucratic managerial role of knowing what your managerial line is and therefore "managing" the situation, rather than being a person that [says], "I can see that is a problem" '. In this extract, silence seems to be seen as a means by which the institution comes to enact a distinct top-down authority which is positioned antagonistically towards individual staff: here, silence is reported to protect the institution through its implication that the complainant is the source of harm. Contrastingly, another white respondent suggested that the sensitive acknowledgement of white discomfort internally would be pragmatic in determining a robust public stance:

> I genuinely believe in people coming together and talking, and doing so initially in closed doors without an audience, and then having the confidence to bring that to the public […] it can be done but it needs to be done in a non-judgmental way, and in a way that has nuance, because I think otherwise I believe in this cultural climate, you just risk to close doors and close minds. And in a way, that response where people don't engage in and are just critical, I think that will happen anyway. […] I don't think it's about being necessarily just nice, but I think it is about being honest without being confrontational.

Here, the respondent appears to suggest a perceived need for Tate to have a proactive, shared institutional position on whiteness, but also that to arrive at this would take time. They also acknowledge Tate's stakes in public opinion, furthermore suggesting that Tate might have potential influence in shaping broader discourse on race. In these terms, politeness enacted through public-facing silence is seen as strategic in its anticipation of whitened public avoidance as the respondent links 'nuance' and a 'non-judgmental' approach to a wish not 'to close doors and close minds.'

One white respondent's comments were particularly elucidating in their signifying of polite language as a means by which white comfort might be maintained: 'That's really hard… […] that's the resistance area - is when you do something that is racist. It's really horrible when you're called out on it. It is just really uncomfortable. But we are all quite racist. And that's really, really hard to come to terms with and be sensitive about that.' Here, through their acknowledgement that 'we are all quite racist', the respondent appears to suggest that their discomfort might be of less significance than racism as a broader structural concern. Nevertheless, they speak about their participation in a 'Let's Talk About Race' training which they perceived to be successful as a result of it being facilitated 'in an incredibly reassuring way, which made people unpack their racism in a way that didn't make them think they were about to get stuck on White Pube.' For this respondent, there has been a 'fear culture' caused by such 'hostile activism' and 'naming and shaming white people.' As such, it might be seen that this white participant's fear concerns particularly the possibility that they might be singled out, and also, perhaps, that such singling out would be both undeserved and damaging. Indeed, given that racial discrimination is illegal, such an accusation might be feared for its legal as well as reputational consequences. However, given the increasing proportion of white staff identities higher up at Tate, it can also be understood that what is experienced individually by white people as a wish to avoid confronting racial shame also disproportionately aligns with authority, kinship and influence. There is, therefore, a cumulative effect of individual avoidance, whereby silence and politeness as affective strategies are rendered institutionally normative. The effect of this is that the prioritisation of white comfort over the confrontation of racism is also normativised.

As such, whether politeness could be seen as strategic or not appears to relate to the extent to which it is consciously enacted, and where it is enacted from. Just as Tate was characterised by the senior white respondent in 'Whiteness as Political' as normative through its institutional claims to injury, so too politeness can function to position allegations of racism themselves as an attack. Anne Cheng suggests that the psychoanalytic concept of melancholia might be seen to explain these affective tensions aligning power and white identity. According to Cheng,

melancholia can be understood as ‘a powerful critical tool precisely because it theoretically accounts for the guilt and the denial of guilt, the blending of shame and omnipotence in the racist imaginary’ (2000:12). As such, the concept of melancholia has heuristic significance in its ability to explain how these seeming paradoxes of good intent and racist behaviour coexist. For Timothy Lensmire, such whitened behaviour can be seen as a melancholic process characterised by white individuals' inner conflict whereby ‘vile stereotypes and assumptions of white supremacy inside us as white people’ coexist with ‘sincere desires to act ethically and to be a part of a just society’ (2010:169). Meanwhile, Justin Grinage, in his study of racialised affect in school contexts, posits that whitened melancholia comes to be enacted institutionally as ‘racial silence’, whereby ‘the institution perpetuates a melancholic narrative of equal access for all, despite the ingrained nationwide and local racial disparities related to the educational opportunity gap’ (2019:201-2). Here, Grinage identifies an important link between the authoritative enactment of whitened affect and ensuing policy ramifications that obscure the acknowledgement of unequal access and resource distribution on racial terms. As such, it might be seen how white avoidance both internally and externally to Tate comes to gain a similar public-facing appearance of denial.

During the course of my research, I encountered a specific instance in which white staff members appeared to be actively insulated from a direct discussion about their curatorial mediation of race as a topic presented for public view. I tried to gain permission to speak with the curators of Tate’s exhibition, *British Baroque: Power and Illusion* (2020) to understand in particular the intent behind the inclusion and interpretation of the artwork ‘Portrait of Hortense Mancini, Duchess of Mazarin, as Diana’ (1688). Both the curatorial explanation of the artwork and its very inclusion in the exhibition (and indeed, the premise of the exhibition itself) were highly contested by some staff and public alike on account of its imagery: the painting depicts a white woman, mistress of Charles II, as Diana goddess of the hunt, surrounded by four enslaved Black children in metal collars. Tate’s acknowledgement of staff and public concerns can be seen through reference to its

alterations of the painting's interpretation label[21] during the exhibition, with latter versions placing far greater emphasis upon the racialised brutality of the artwork, as well as the content warning[22] which was introduced after the exhibition had begun.

My request to speak with the curators was escalated through the organisation, and I was instead granted a meeting with a senior member of the Tate directorial group (different to the senior respondent in the interviews on whiteness), who spoke on their behalf:

> Well, it can be very painful to make mistakes, particularly of this kind, I have to say, and painful for a lot of people. Maybe most of all those seen to have made the mistake. So, you know – yes, it offers crucial learning, […] very, very important learning. But I think people can feel… you know, both those upset by, let's say, the mistakes made, but <sighs> maybe most of all those seen to be responsible. It's very painful for them. Very, very painful for them. It's painful for all of us. These are very painful learnings, I have to say. […] …people can feel very exposed, it can be very febrile […].

[21] The first version of the label reads, 'As well as Diana's hounds, in the painting are young Black boys shown wearing metal collars. A shocking image today, their presence was intended to emphasise Hortense's role-play as leader of the hunt. The picture reflects the later 17th-century growth in the slave trade. Growing trade with Africa increasingly included enslaved people. Documents reveal the presence of Black servants in households. It is known, for example, that the Duchess of Mazarin had a servant called Mustafa. While some received a wage, others did not. Their inclusion in portraits was intended to indicate the wealth and status of the sitter. Although not named, some may represent particular individuals. The growth of the slave trade let to debate in society as to whether the trade in fellow human beings was legal or illegal. The slave trade was not abolished for over 100 years.'
The second version of the label reads, ''In this shocking and dehumanising image a woman is shown accompanied by young Black servants, or enslaved children, in metal collars like those constraining her hunting dogs. The Black figures are unnamed. […] Until very recently museums, including Tate, would have displayed paintings such as this one with little or no acknowledgement of the demeaning way Black figures are represented. In displaying this work we hope we can begin to explore these difficult histories. This important but deeply troubling picture is included in the exhibition because it challenges us to reflect upon the presence of Black people in Britain and their mistreatment. It and other paintings on display reveal the later 17th-century growth of the slave trade. The Black figures are not named, and were never the main subject of the paintings. Rather, they were used to emphasise the power, wealth and prestige of the white sitters. […] By the mid-18th century Britain had become the most prolific slave-trading nation. The exploitation and enslavement of Black people may have produced great wealth for white individuals and institutions, but it was built on the suffering, degradation and displacement of their fellow human beings. […] Even if the historical institutions of the transatlantic slave trade were ended in the 19th century, slavery has left profound legacies within British culture and society. Understanding and acknowledging these legacies is an ongoing process.'

[22] The content warning reads, 'There are artworks representing slavery on display in this room. As a museum, we want to show works from the past that don't shy away from the brutal histories they reflect. We want to do this in a way that feels safe for all visitors and therefore are highlighting the works so that visitors do not encounter them without warning.'

These words suggest that in this instance the curators are positioned as ultimately responsible, despite the collaborative nature of exhibitions preparation and the need for artworks to be signed off by those in positions of hierarchical seniority: here, 'they' refers to the curators, while 'us' is positioned as those not accountable but nevertheless who have also learnt from the emphatically 'painful' situation. This is ambiguous in terms of where the liability is seen to be placed: on the one hand, the responsibility placed upon the curators allows for a disavowal of institutional culpability and a claiming of institutional injury. Simultaneously, the institution positions them as the injured party and protects them with silence. That ambiguity can serve as a whitened institutional protective mechanism is suggested by Hunter, who explores Ahmed's observation that

> by showing shame for involvement in racism, the white subject can demonstrate themselves to be the "ideal (well meaning) subjects," where the very expression of white shame becomes a form of pride. [...] This conversion of shame to pride can then constitute the very means by which expressions of shame can become a means of shifting responsibility for racism (Hunter 2010:468).

As such, this articulation of institutional shame and the silence of the curators in this instance could be said to indicate both an ambiguous institutional understanding of how individual and structural responsibilities interrelate, and an enactment of whiteness through the ensuing abdication of responsibility.

While polite avoidance might be seen to act at Tate as a tacitly validated social norm that protects the anonymity, comfort and claims to rightness of white people, impoliteness, conversely, is understood by staff to have been given negative, non-white connotations. One respondent of colour commented on their discomfort during an instance in which they were working on a project with a white woman who they reported to have perceived another contributor to the project, who was 'a dark skinned Black woman', as being 'angry' and 'unreasonable' due to what the participant in question perceived as her 'straightforward' communication style. The participant commented, 'This is one example of people positioning other people as attacking them or being aggressive: […] "We'll keep that in mind next time they try to work with somebody" - it would be like "Oh this person is quite

difficult to work with" or something like that. Or their name will never come up again. Which impacts peoples' income and opportunities.' Here, it is suggested that the ostensible subversion of a normative code of polite communication was equated by the white staff member as an attack. That the code of politeness was both deemed significant in its being subverted, and that it was ostensibly subverted by a Black woman suggests that race might well have been a determining factor in the white colleague's perception of antagonism. The respondent continues, 'Anything that is emotional or confrontational is down to an individual issue rather than a systemic issue. […] not everyone is afforded that privilege to be a certain type of acceptably emotional in a white coded space, I suppose.' As such, the respondent equates the enactment of politeness with an institutional power to punish perceived transgressions through the removal of resources: as in the government report, politeness here signals a whitened centre of gravity whereby the legitimacy of dissenters' claims is undermined through their transgression of normatively-sanctioned social codes.

Here, it can be seen how anger is 'experienced through the dynamics of social difference, and those 'already constructed as the locus for emotionality' are categorised as 'too emotional', while the behaviours of the normatively positioned are, by contrast, validated (Hunter 2015:33). The same participant of colour speaks of their observations of 'white tears being weaponised', whereby, they explain, 'certain types of emotions are deemed valid while others are not.' They explain that if 'hurt translates to anger, that is not valid'; while simultaneously if white women cry they are automatically perceived as justified. This observation provides a potential contrast to the perception of one white female staff member who suggested that whiteness is 'absolutely aligned with the patriarchy': while it could certainly be argued that the broader recognition of tears as an acceptable emotion is a gendered behaviour, an absolute alignment of whiteness with the patriarchy could also be seen to suggest that womens' enactment of whiteness is less harmful. Such is not the case: this labelling of non-white emotionality as a transgression from an objectively claimed norm is a position that can be claimed by women, with great effect. Returning to the previously discussed Tate Exchange incident, it is quoted that a senior female white member of Tate's directorial staff

named Montserrat to be ‘hostile’ to Tate; that it would not be ‘safe’ for her to go ahead with working, and that if the collaboration were to go ahead then the senior member of directorial staff in question would be sacked by Tate’s trustees (Quinn 2022). Here, it might be seen that the naming of Montserrat as ‘hostile’ served to position her as the source of injury despite the racism she had been subject to, and was justified through recourse to the existing whitened equation of Blackness with over-emotionality. The stakes for the white member of staff in doing so can be clearly seen in their wish to maintain their position despite the ethical issue presented.

Here, whiteness might be said to be present in the very fact that this affective mechanism works: while Tate did pay the artist duo a six-figure settlement, they nevertheless did not accept responsibility, nor were they ultimately required by a broader public to accept responsibility (ibid.). In this vein, Montserrat suggested that the gallery had remained silent, writing on X (then Twitter), ‘You’ve a platform, a voice and have been silent about complicity around Anthony d’Offay. There has been no accountability – my own experience asking @tate continually met with silence, still after two agonising years. I can’t fathom the hypocrisy’ (Montserrat 2020). Montserrat’s statement was deliberate in its language, which drew upon Tate’s own public Twitter message promising support to its Black stakeholders: ‘We have a platform, a voice, and a duty to our Black members, employees, artists, visitors and followers to speak up and stand for human rights and anti-racism. Nobody should have to live in fear because of the colour of their skin. #BlackLivesMatter’ (Tate 2020). Here, as in the observations by staff members previously discussed, the language of diversity might be seen to be at odds with anti-racist actions: while Tate’s message indeed signalled anti-racist intent, given Montserrat’s experiences of being faced with silence, these publicly broadcast intentions function to position the institution as benevolent. That discussions of racism are co-opted as such for white self-gratification has been noted by scholars to be a commonplace characteristic of whiteness (Ahmed 2004; Bell & Hartmann 2007). This was a point mentioned, too, by one white participant in particular: ‘I think one barrier [towards addressing whiteness] may be a tendency to be too pleased with any change at all. […] …if anyone who's in a fairly powerful

position is like, “Oh, we're doing so well already” - there's a bit of a lack of urgency.’ Given that the affective strategies to protect the whitened self are operated in order to elude perceived injury, self-congratulation and defensiveness can be understood as two sides of the same coin: both can be employed institutionally in order to invalidate perceived criticism and undermine the perceived criticiser.

Guilt was positioned by another white participant as another such mode of deflection serving to justify the institution’s self-perception as racially benevolent: guilt, they suggested, was a motivating force behind Steve McQueen’s 2019-2021 commission at Tate Britain, ‘Year 3’, in which the artist invited every child in year 3 in London schools to have their class portrait taken and displayed in the gallery:

> …the amount of money we spent for Steve, for that exhibition - I've never witnessed anything like that. Which is great - I was really happy about it. But at the same time, I could sense that it was triggered by a bit of, “Ooh, see, we can't really say no, because otherwise we will slip in something kind of uncomfortable”.

Here, the participant suggests that policy strategies that prioritise diversity in representational terms, as this exhibition explicitly did, can have the effect of further signalling success in terms of public and institutional self-perception of Tate as anti-racist. They continue, ‘if there is no openness I think it can turn into something bad because it can just trigger things that are just for reputation and doesn't allow people in the institution to actually work on the roots of that guilt’. Through this formulation, a tension can be seen to arise between diversity strategies on the one hand and an institutional reckoning with whiteness on the other: while policies that focus on the promotion and elevation of artists of colour might indeed foreground the lives and experiences of people of colour and even do so to internal and external acclaim, nevertheless the disproportionately white access to the means by which cultural and institutional policies are legitimised remain intact. This was noted, too, by one respondent of colour commenting that the acquisition of works by artists of colour can have a similarly cynical motivation:

> I think you can always tell […] if someone's being genuine. If someone has genuinely brought an artist proposal, and they happen to be an ethnic

> minority and you can see that they're passionate about it, that's genuine - but if you can see in the back of their mind, they're like, “Oh they're a Black artist from a certain part of the UK, that has a certain sexual orientation or disability” or something - if you're bringing that up first - that's not the way the artist wants to be seen.

In this way, strategies of representational diversification have the potential even to reinforce the self-perception of successful benevolence in positions of white authority.

One final modality of deflection might be located in the white participants’ claiming of provisionality in their understandings of whiteness, as in the candid words of one participant in particular:

> I'm very doubtful about the things I say, because this is a journey for me. […] I'm forming different opinions every day, depending on who I encounter, what I read, and what kind of information comes to me, or I look for. So yeah, I feel very ignorant. Also, I know that I'm not personally touched by racism, so it's difficult to make statements and have opinions that are... I'm conscious that they're shaped by my own whiteness.

Here, the participant speaks openly about their difficulties in forming a position, and in their words can be seen a fear: ‘it’s difficult to make statements and have opinions that are…’. I wondered what the missing word might have been: was it ‘correct’? Such an omission might suggest that the participant fears causing offence, and signifies a well-intentioned openness to understanding. Nevertheless, this might also be seen as another example of what Leonardo and Zemblyas term a ‘white intellectual alibi’, whereby white people ‘attempt to project a non-racist alibi rather than aligning themselves with anti-racism’ (2013:150). There may be clear benefits to the taking of a provisional subject position, especially given the alignment of whiteness with objective assertions of a unified worldview, as the participant suggests: ‘I do think that we live in a society [where] it's difficult to just say, “I don't know this” or “I don't feel comfortable”; “I have an opinion that I am also doubtful of” ’. This constitutes a difficult conceptual bind, and one that I myself experience: while whiteness is characterised through its structurally-recurring enactments of a blinkered epistemological understanding, it is also characterised

through a lack of anti-racist action. On the one hand, provisionality can mitigate against a claiming of objectivity, but on the other, it creates a barrier to progress. The answer, then, must be somewhere in the middle: the next section looks to explore how the epistemological worldviews associated with whiteness surface at Tate in order to try to account for its behavioural enactments.

## Whiteness as Epistemological

The evidence for whiteness as an epistemological construct that this section attends to derives from staff perceptions of it operating as a hidden and assumed norm, in ways specific to Tate's particular institutional functions as an art gallery. Collectively, the epistemological concerns that set Tate apart from other organisations of work relate to its core purposes of the acquisition, scholarship, legitimisation and display of some categories of knowledge—in the form of artworks—over others, in ways deemed worthy of representing British public interest. 'Whiteness as epistemological' looks at the ways in which a culture of whiteness intersecting with all of these factors become embedded within the institution and its modes of artwork collections display, both according to the staff perceptions and at points also with reference to what these answers themselves might signify in terms of their own worldviews. Here, the unconscious nature of whiteness is the focus: this section looks for evidence of how whitened worldviews might become normatively entrenched; at once tacitly validated and nevertheless unrecognised by staff and public alike. Tate's responsibilities as an institution whose purpose is to shape and maintain a collection of artworks in the public interest, and its need within its current funding model to defer to government positions on whiteness and race, makes it a particularly complex site of whiteness. In epistemological terms, this tension derives from Tate's public appearance of autonomy with regards to its treatment of the collections; an autonomy which is at odds to the substantial influence, as discussed, of the government and public. As the previous sections have explored, there may be much at stake—for reasons individual and structural—for Tate in keeping these influences submerged: this has

the effect that Tate is subject to particular scrutinies from its audiences, and has a need to sensitively mediate race and whiteness in accordance with majority opinion. Given this tricky negotiation of competing stances in its various stakeholders and staff alike, Tate's display practices themselves say much about public opinion, and public opinion says much in turn about the broader discourses relating to whiteness. However, given the economic and political stakes in these lines of influence remaining unacknowledged, and Tate's public appearance of intellectual autonomy, the worldviews that are signified within these multidirectional networks of influence are themselves reinforced as normative.

That Tate's position on whiteness and matters of race is deeply influenced by broader public and political discourse, as well as having the potential itself to influence it as it claims, is suggested through frequent staff perceptions that Tate's stance has been more reactive than proactive concerning the global resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement following the murder of George Floyd in May 2020. That, more broadly, the concerns of white people and institutions alike for racial equity appeared to rapidly shift in response to the Black Lives Matter movement has been noted by many: as Ian Sergeant asks,

> Why did this momentum form after George Floyd's murder and the pandemic? What was it about that period, that time, that made institutions think that they had to do something? Why did it not happen before? This happens after all the things that had been done, all the work, all the work of artists, all the imploring of communities subsumed to racism. However, it then required somebody to die. Joy Gardner died. Clinton McCurbin died. Colin Roach died. Stephen Lawrence died. All these others died but there were not these protests or institutional responses (in Rito & Goodwin 2023:38-39).

In a similar vein, a number of participants suggested that Tate only even began to be receptive to pre-existing staff concerns about the organisation's approach to race after Black Lives Matter was well under way. One hierarchically senior respondent associated with the curatorial department commented,

> …one of my mentors at Tate told me once that museums are always reactive. They're always behind the curve, reacting to what happens when

> society changes, and never at the forefront of it. Even though Tate often presents itself as being at the forefront and the cutting edge of changes, it never is […]. They're reacting to something which was there all along, in plain sight.

Here, the participant suggests that there is a discrepancy between Tate's claims to progressive influence and its actual institutional practices. This was a thought echoed by a white participant at director level, too: '…it's terrible to learn that there were a few folks internal to Tate that were flagging the same things, but nothing was acted upon until it became external. […] That's a big effing shame […] for nothing to happen until it ends up in the New York Times.' This respondent thus explains that there has been a consistent internal staff momentum which has been dismissed: furthermore, in mentioning the New York Times, they also suggest that Tate's stance shifted only when there existed broader political momentum on a global scale. By these accounts, staff efforts were not recognised in their validity. The motivations for Tate's eventual response, then, are rendered ambiguous.

Indeed, Tate's public stance with regards to its identity as an institution co-exists at times uncomfortably with its claims to anti-racist intent as the previous respondent continues, speaking of their friends who refuse to go to Tate by virtue of a perception that the organisation has not sufficiently recognised its roots in money derived from slavery. The respondent reports their friends saying, ' "it is obviously racist because your name is freaking Tate". ' For this individual, Tate's according response

> has been distilled down to this academic report of the history of slavery and Henry Tate, which is an article we have published on our website that is too academic […]. …it talks around the whole problem that he did not own enslaved people. Great. Where did his money come from? It came from tons and tons of sugar refinery - it is still […] 100% rooted in slavery. We can't say that openly […] even though internally we all recognise that as the truth.

What is particularly noteworthy is the participant's perspective that 'we can't say that openly': by this measure, it appears that there exists a staff recognition of the ways in which racial dominance and finance have intersected in Tate's history, but

also that there are prohibitive ramifications somewhere that discourage these recognitions being robustly communicated to the public. As such, there is more evidence both of inconsistencies in Tate's policy recognition of its responsibilities with regards to racialised structural inequalities, and a disconnect between Tate's internal identities and its public image. There is something remaining unspoken with regards to race, and which has consequences in unearthing: it is this unspeaking, incentivised in some way, that whiteness can be said to exist in epistemological terms. These, in turn, are the terms through which knowledge is claimed and disseminated to a public who remain unaware of what is not said. As such, bolstered by Tate's claims to intellectual authority and a broader political discourse hostile to discussions of structural racism, this public may well be encouraged to perceive such worldviews as objective.

The gallery's self-positioning and perception by others as an institution of national importance are significant, therefore. As one of the 15 DCMS-sponsored galleries and museums, it has been chosen above other organisations as worthy of receiving allocated public funds, while its claims to global reach and intellectual influence were detailed in the section 'Tate in Context.' As such, there are significant ramifications with regards to Tate's public communication of its epistemological positioning on race: in other words, while the previous sections detailed how Tate is embedded within broader political, economic and social concerns that influence its mediation of whiteness, its intellectually autonomous appearance nevertheless gives an impression of authority. That there exists a perception and self-perception of Tate as universally relevant was a point brought up by a number of participants as being a determining factor in its institutional acknowledgement of racialised difference. One respondent at director level accordingly remarked, 'How do you disrupt the idea that you're in an important space? How do you disrupt the idea that this space is good for everyone? And how do you do give voice and platform to those who aren't necessarily represented within the organisation? Here, the consequences of being perceived as authoritative are made more clear: even by implication of what Tate omits from its collections display, Tate is seen as having the authority to legitimise what is and what is not culturally important, and what is and what is not British. As such, as this

respondent suggests, despite what Tate's efforts might be, its very appearance of cultural importance can be seen as a factor that validates its own institutional practices of inclusion and exclusion.

For another respondent at director level, Tate's success in aligning its positioning of cultural importance with racially equitable practices can be measured in diverse public engagement. Speaking of Steve McQueen's 'Year 3' project (2019-21) mentioned previously by another participant, they comment, '…there's tens of thousands of London school kids who came to Tate Britain for the first time to see their photo on the wall... cheers to Steve McQueen because that was brilliant.' Here, the fact that 'tens of thousands' of children 'came to Tate Britain for the first time' is 'brilliant': the suggestion is, perhaps, that now they have seen themselves represented in a literal sense within the gallery walls, these children might keep coming back. Determining whether or not this is a worthy aim is not the primary point here, but rather an observation that it is an aim that exists in potential contradiction to the previous participant's comments. The wish of bringing audiences into Tate, especially ones not already familiar with the gallery, either presupposes that there is something relevant for them to see in terms that they are already conversant with, or that in visiting they could be enriched by something they did not already know about. Either of these might, indeed, be true. However, given especially that whiteness is something often unseen by white people, and that white people disproportionately occupy positions of authority at Tate, the possibility that they might be not be true is significant. There is, as such, a tension of ethics between different approaches that the gallery could take towards addressing its role in racialised disparities: while the engagement of racially diverse artists to bring in wider audiences may result in public intellectual and artistic enrichment, such an approach cannot measure this with certainty, and cannot challenge the epistemological terms by which aesthetic and national culture are legitimised and disseminated.

The underpinning tension between these approaches can be explained to a large degree by the inconsistencies in understanding what racism means, both internally on the part of the staff force and externally in broader discourse.

Together, the sections ‘Exploring Whiteness’ and ‘Tate in Context’ discussed the relevance of a broader, persisting dissociation of racial disparities from economic disparities in broader discourse, and how this can cause racism to be understood solely as an individualised, social issue. It is this kind of understanding of racism, as discussed in ‘Whiteness as Political’ in particular, that comes to align with policy responses centred around racially proportionate representation. Meanwhile, an understanding of racism as a necessarily structural concept, whereby racial prejudices intersect with differential resource allocation on a broader social scale, is more likely to result in policy responses that acknowledge the possibility that bias and resource distribution continue to be interlinked unless they are challenged. In response to one of my interview questions, one white participant seemed to demonstrate an understanding of racism as defined in the first sense given here, and their response is illustrative of how such an understanding leads to a policy response focused on representational diversification.

I asked this participant to respond to the idea that

> …whiteness is a way of experiencing and interacting with the world that is unaware of itself and which positions white people as superior, and these beliefs result in privileges and tangible capital, which might be social, economic, or emotional, for example, being directed away from people of colour.

They replied,

> I'm not sure the word superior sat well in there. Sometimes maybe there is superior but I think it's sometimes what is familiar. […] I suppose I just sometimes think you often do privilege your own culture. […] I used to have a very lovely Caribbean neighbour I was very close to, and I was always fascinated to go and spend time with her and I did happen to spend quite a lot of time with her. She had another whole world. […] I'm not sure Winnie thought [her preferences] were necessarily better, but they just were relevant and familiar for her.

Here, the respondent positions whiteness as a function of familiarity in which people inevitably make cultural choices according to what they know. They seem to dislike the word ‘superior’, and accordingly compare the enactment of white

cultural preferences to that of their assumedly Black neighbour. One respondent of colour, by contrast, drew attention to the intersection of economic opportunities with white racial identities, suggesting that this intersection contributes towards a gatekeeping of knowledge legitimisation: ‘There's a presumption that if people say the right things then they understand the nuance of non-white experience, and then some of that is hidden by the idea of knowledge and rigour.[…] …often they will be white and they will have come from a certain background, and gone to certain schools, etc.’ Although both participants appear to agree that identity affects preferences, the first participant seems to position this as an inevitability whose repercussions might be similar regardless of the racial identity of the person in question making decisions regarding the value of art. The second participant, by contrast, positions racialised preference within a context whereby white people are more likely to ‘have come from a certain background’, linking this observation together with ‘the idea of knowledge and rigour.’ Here, it is suggested that white staff both inaccurately believe themselves to be able to understand ‘the nuance of non-white experience’, and have greater recourse to opportunities. By this measure, while strategies of diversification might make racism look like less of a problem, they may only address the symptoms rather than the underlying cause of whitened thinking: even were proportional representation achieved, the mechanisms by which racial disparities are produced and maintained through their connection to broader social and financial structures may still remain unaddressed.

The idea that whiteness is ‘everywhere’ yet simultaneously ‘over there’ was found in ‘Whiteness as social’ to be a recurring theme, especially from participants racialised as white, and further elucidates the limitations of proportional diversification as a response to whiteness, namely because this indicates an understanding of whiteness that does not take into account its intersections with racially disproportionate resource distribution. The idea that racial disparity might be a problem chiefly, depending on one’s standpoint respectively of the collections, or the curatorial department, or the leadership or the government alone might be said to be a position itself indicative of whiteness in that personal accountability, and unconscious investment and positioning within a broader structure of systemic inequality remains unacknowledged. That even perhaps well-meaning approaches

of diversification can thus in fact risk reinforcing epistemological imbalance was commented on by one participant of colour speaking about Tate Britain's Manton Studio, which serves as a space for families

> to read, imagine, play and create, featuring of a library of books by Black authors, indigenous authors, and authors of colour from around the world. Story Space celebrates books that centre children of colour, and aims for everyone to see themselves inflected in the books they read… (Tate 2024j).

Offering a reflection on this space and its significance, the participant says,

> I was just struck by the language that was used. Black, indigenous, queer, etc. The space where a person of colour will be centred. That implies that there are other spaces where people of colour are not centred, right? But you can be centred in this little tiny play space. What about in the galleries upstairs?! You know, are you going to be centred there?! […] So does that feel like a gesture? Yeah it does. Does that feel like a commitment to change the structures of the institution? No, it doesn't. […] I was like, "Oh here we go..." You know? "Is this for real?!"

Here, the participant expresses incredulity: the existence of a 'little tiny play space' devoted to the experiences of people of colour only emphasises that the galleries themselves and the modes of acquisition, display and leadership decisions relating to them are aligned with the very logic that renders the experience of people of colour non-normative in the first place. In this participant's eyes, rather than contributing towards epistemological parity in addressing the mechanisms by which racial difference is reinforced at Tate, this approach instead offers a public image of diversification which in turn further masks the presence of whiteness.

The potential for diversification to address the visible symptoms of racial inequality within the collection, rather than addressing the mechanisms by which it continues to be reproduced in present terms, links too with the institution's methodological investments into contextualist and representational strategies of mediating the collections. In this vein, one white respondent associated with the curatorial department suggested that an obvious contextualisation not only of the artworks but of their situation within the organisation itself is one necessary means

of addressing whiteness. They spoke of portraits as ‘the obvious place to talk about this’ due to their historic purpose

> as primarily signifiers of identity, which is what they were, rather than as objects of contemplation and enjoyment in the current moment. And then funnily enough, weirdly, you think of historic interiors, and how portraits are shown into dynastic settings and country houses. They're ahead of the game with this, in that they've got a setting.

Given, as previously discussed, that the contextualisation of artworks is a contentious issue in the public eyes, this is not necessarily an easy matter. Here, this participant observes that there are ethical consequences of presenting portrait works as artworks devoid of context with a primary function of ‘contemplation and enjoyment’, especially given that this was not their intended function: given that the vast majority of Tate’s portraits represent individuals with light skin, for audiences to ‘enjoy’ these artworks without understanding their purpose could be not only historically inaccurate but serve to reinforce white identities as normative and not requiring explanation for their continued existence.

Here, another tension comes into view: all participants agreed that Tate’s foremost duty is to serve the British public, but there were widespread disagreements as to what this means in terms of Tate’s mediation of the collection. The previous respondent reflects,

> Do you want people to come to museum to enjoy themselves? And that is the majority view across a whole range of political perspectives. […] I think you could recast museums like the Tate as more like a child labour museum <laughs>, where you go to be stimulated - in a real sense stimulated - not as a codeword for a state of contemplation or anything else.

Here, the respondent seems to acknowledge that an experiential preference for enjoyment might in itself be neutral in their observation that ‘that is the majority view across a whole range of political perspectives.’ Given, however, the disproportionate legitimisation of British and aesthetic canons historically and in the present by white people whose racial understanding is known to be limited, this otherwise neutral experiential preference comes to have the potential align with

white normativity. While some audiences might well perceive artworks as having the potential both to be enjoyed and to elucidate broader social understandings and for these different qualities to coexist, this participant highlights how Tate's curatorial strategies can be perceived as at odds with eachother. The same participant continues, suggesting that to serve the public

> does not mean giving them what they want. Actually it can mean the complete opposite. […] There are a lot of critics or commentators, who get most exercised about interpretations or literal pieces of commentary on the wall, which disrupt or disturb them or challenge them, [who] like to claim that they are speaking in the name of the great public or general common-sense or what most people expect. […] 55 words next to [an artwork], and somehow people's experiences are completely ruined. I think well, you're a kind of ultra conservative snowflake then, aren't you.

Here, the respondent redirects the derogatory popular term, 'snowflake', normally used to invalidate people with a dissenting position towards normative culture as overly-sensitive, to instead suggest that it is those who hold universalist, 'common-sense' views of culture and its presentation through artworks who are fragile.

That there exists public resistance towards the naming and contextualising of white identities is further illustrated through one white participant's account of white visitors' surprise and discomfort during a tour of Tate's collections in which white identities in artworks were presented through the perspective of race. The respondent speak of art historian Janet Couloute's 'African Heritage Tours' at Tate, in which Couloute presented the artwork 'The Cholmondeley Ladies' (c.1600-10) to visitors:

> …it's very white. In white clothing with white linen babies. And the opulence of power and jewels and the family line, the bloodline… […]. I think people are more uncomfortable talking about racism. And race when it's pointed out that something is racialised. Not least unusually, that probably hardly ever happens certainly for white people. Whereas you can see this is racialised, because it's a figure of colour.

This group of white audience members, thus, might be seen to believe that to speak about race is analogous with speaking about non-whiteness: to speak of

white people as being raced is reported as having been surprising, suggesting that this tour might have been their first encounter with such an idea. Furthermore, the participant's mentioning of 'racism' in relation to this audience's engagement with these identities as white suggests that the very idea of white people being raced immediately brings to mind whiteness as a dominant relational construct. By implication, Blackness, meanwhile, is already experienced as fact: it is known and accepted by white people that people of colour have racial identities, and an acceptance of Blackness as raced is a position that does not situate them as white individuals personally in an uncomfortable social structure. That white identities being labelled as such stirs discomfort suggests, too, that the idea is not entirely abstract, and that they were on some level aware of their racial positioning. This instance illustrates how the seemingly experientially neutral dichotomy between enjoyment and contextualisation of artworks (and Tate's investment in either method) might be seen to have a significantly racialised angle: for white people to engage comfortably with artworks in a way that they can enjoy, this means not naming them as raced and therefore reinforcing white normativity.

That white audiences might be more comfortable recognising the racial identities of people of colour than their own is a phenomenon further suggested in another participant's observation of audience responses to three recent exhibitions at Tate. One white staff member spoke of their perception of the successes of the exhibitions *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power* (2017) and *Life Between Islands* (2022), which prompted the highest known engagement of audiences of colour at Tate. For them, these exhibitions of their belief that Tate 'can change perceptions - can have a massive impact, actually', and that 'to just stand in the space was a privilege.' Their significant emotional investment in these exhibitions was visibly apparent as they continued,

> It always makes me tearful when I talk about [*Soul of a Nation*]. […] …if you're in those spaces, you feel it. You feel it's changing. The same with *Life Between Islands* - it was really beautiful. […] Because the show addressed racism a lot - talked about the New Cross fire, it celebrated Caribbean British artists. […] …we've got written comments that tell us about people feeling seen and heard for the first time in an art gallery. But also, what I really observed was the traditional Tate audience, the white member

> audience. I felt it was […] an education in a good way as well for them and actually, there was more mutual respect and it changed the dynamic between those audiences - I felt society was changing in that space.

Here, this participant's markers of these exhibitions' success relate to the feedback received from audiences of colour: that many are reported to have felt 'seen and heard for the first time in an art gallery' attests, despite its limitations, to the importance of representation in reinforcing the importance of Black people in British history. Significant, too, is the participant's report that 'traditional' white audiences, too, perceived them favourably: 'They're great shows […] *everyone* loves them - everyone.'

These white audiences' positive reception is especially noteworthy in contrast to the participant's description of responses to the more recent *Hogarth and Europe* exhibition (2021-2), which by their account received 'pushback.' They comment that 'even the traditional art historical audience of colour – and there were some too – did not like the approach in Hogarth as it did not deliver what was wanted necessarily from a traditional historical show, and was too focused on race issues.' The participant notes that the 'traditional' audiences in question were not uniquely white, but nevertheless suggests that a 'traditional historical show' may only have a certain amount of 'race issues' before it is 'too focused' on such. Here, while 'traditional' audiences (of whom 'some' are said here to be of colour) are happy to enjoy artworks representing British people of colour and are open to understanding how Black British lives have been structured by racism, they are not so amenable to the canonical histories that they know of being challenged. This disparity suggests that approaches of diversifying the collection are experienced as far more widely palatable than approaches that position white figures in their racial contexts. These excerpts suggest that the 'traditional' might be open to receiving what this participant calls 'an education' regarding race, but, perhaps, only when such an education does not run contrary to their investments in normative British historical narratives. This epistemological phenomenon is summarised in the American context by Kathleen Cleaver: 'White Americans, as a rule, cannot see race in relation to themselves, and are therefore convinced that racism only poses problems for "others" ' (in Roediger 2007:xix).

As such, while diversifying the collections is fundamentally important in terms of fulfilling Tate's responsibilities to the British public of all racial positions, this cannot constitute a sufficient acknowledgement of whiteness. This is an argument made, too, by Eddie Chambers in relation specifically to *Life Between Islands*. Chambers writes how

> Certain institutions do, it seems, have a particular proclivity for the occasional blow-out Black exhibition because, cynically put, such exhibitions do little or nothing to disturb the inherent or presumed whiteness or Eurocentrism of the institution. For an institution to gain the trust, support, and engagement of ever-increasing numbers of people from different backgrounds, said institution must reflect diversity in its staffing structures, its programming, and its audience development. […] If several decades of piecemeal institutional tinkering have not brought about meaningful change in these three areas (as seems to be the case for certain museums and galleries), then we can draw our own conclusions as to the strategy behind inserting the occasional Black mega-exhibition into an otherwise near-monocultural program, put in place by a largely monocultural curatorial staff (2022:6).

Diversifying policies, then, do not in themselves challenge the reasons for which audiences are invested in particular historical and art historical narratives. They have the potential to reduce race and whiteness to what is visible in terms of racialised bodies and their lived experiences, thereby overlooking the structural differentiations of power that create ideas of racial difference and which continue to be upheld. One white respondent commented accordingly,

> If you allow [whiteness] to pass as simply a matter of optics then you're also doing its work. Then it means that if you have Black cabinet minister[23], then you're undoing whiteness. Well - you're not undoing whiteness. You're undoing the optics of whiteness. […] …whiteness can be identified with Western industrial capitalism as well, or commerce. That actually is the kind of whiteness which is not to do with optics - that whiteness is to do with a social system.

The respondent here differentiates between race as it is visible and race as it is upheld as an idea: as in the previous respondent's acknowledgement that 'traditional' audiences include 'some' people of colour, so too it is possible for a Black Conservative minister to exist, but this does not necessitate their policies

[23] The respondent is referring to Kwasi Kwarteng

being progressive with regards to race. Such a focus on the optics of race, as has been noted throughout, can even serve to boost Tate's appearance of racial equity thereby further submerging the problem. This problem is whiteness: an assumed epistemological norm whose true recognition has political and economic losses at stake. Further observing how Tate's publicly broadcast policies of diversification might uphold whiteness, the same white respondent comments ironically,

> If you think of the marketing for museums and how often you see the back of a person looking at a painting - these days, obviously make sure it's […] a young person of colour, "because we're very engaged and inclusive". "So here's this kid from a Caribbean heritage..." […] and "Look! They're enjoying that Pre-Raphaelite painting!" Hmm?! So that's inclusion, isn't it? Because they're joining in...?!

As another white participant puts it, 'I think sometimes people will use an EDI[24] policy just to slap a bandaid on something that really is a structural issue.' However, that such policies have the potential to recentre whiteness does not mean they are not important, as visitor recognition of the importance of Tate's exhibitions pertaining to the lives of people of colour attest. Rather, that there exists this potential means that the motivations for diversification need to be fully acknowledged, including the benefits to Tate in terms of its public image.

Indeed, as one white respondent suggests, even to concentrate efforts on surfacing whiteness might have the unintended effect again of taking opportunities away from people of colour. They perceive

> …the sense that a white-led institution, a predominantly white institution, focusing on whiteness, looks very indulgent and possibly condescending. It makes race into a problem about white people or for white people rather than the more progressive or engaged or inviting or inclusive work that could be done […] …and would potentially take resources away from more progressive projects.

As such, it might be seen that any efforts towards establishing policies of racial equity in terms of representation in the collections might not necessarily have the

[24] Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

desired effect of benefiting Tate's stakeholders of colour. A similar observation was noted by one staff member of colour in relation to the racial diversity of Tate's anti-racist efforts: 'I am raising my opinions about how [the task force] is currently run because it is at least half white. Yeah, white people can be invested in the process of anti-racism but […] if it's half white as a group and it's deciding what anti-racism should look like a Tate, it's also a little weird.' Indeed, in this vein, my own analysis as a white researcher may only account for so much, as my Tate doctoral research colleague Janine Francois succinctly suggests:

> Did you think we would be shocked about something we already knew? We have told you this for decades. We have done our own reports and research; but it took that white researcher and public funds to inform you 40% of London was missing in your department? It was the first thing I noticed! (Francois 2020).

In some ways, now, a full circle has been made whereby this observation returns us to the discussion of race as it is understood ontologically and epistemologically: it might be said that Tate's approaches of addressing racial equity through policies of diversification have more in common with ontological understandings of racial difference, whereas its sometimes contrasting strategies of deconstructing white centres of power take a more epistemological view. As these staff observations suggest, each have their benefits but also have their limitations.

# Conclusion

In many ways, while this thesis draws to a close, the project of surfacing whiteness at Tate remains a messy and unresolved project. As Gargi Bhattacharyya quips in her study of racial capitalism, 'The main point to remember is: none of us really know whodunnit. If we did, the story would not be worth telling' (2018:xi). Surfacing whiteness is not a straightforward endeavour, and its appearances, as the thesis has detailed, are often obscured and full of complexities, inconsistencies and paradox. Remembering the words of Tate's former Director of Research, Emily Pringle, at the beginning of this thesis (p.9), similarly messy is the project of defining what constitutes valid museological research: this is a point that has, from the very outset, defined the parameters of how whiteness has been understood in relation to Tate. It can only make sense, then, that there is much yet to do in terms of understanding how whiteness arises in the context of Tate and its collections. Nevertheless, despite the provisionality that necessarily accompanies a relatively preliminary effort to map out whiteness at Tate, this thesis has contributed novel and important insights both into its multifaceted appearances and functioning within the organisation. The thesis has also offered a Tate-specific application and significant modification of methodological approaches to whiteness in visual arts contexts.

This thesis has found that, when referring to Tate's collections as the methodological starting point, whiteness can be understood as a quality of imagined projection by individuals onto artworks. Existing studies of whiteness in visual arts disciplines have emphasised contrasting directionalities of sight in this regard: as discussed in the section 'Exploring Whiteness', it has been previously proposed that whiteness arises when viewers project racialised meaning onto artworks as a result of their own raced experiences, entirely unrelated to artworks. It has also been proposed that whiteness surfaces when viewers come to unconsciously learn raced meaning from the artworks themselves. While these propositions differ in emphasis, they do not exist, and indeed were never intended to exist, as binaries: the contribution of the thesis in this regard is its application of

both methodological emphases together, and its finding that both directional emphases of sight are compatible, mutually reinforcing, and pertinent in the context of Tate's disciplinary mediation of its collection. However, the main methodological argument that this thesis sought to make was its finding that artwork-centred theories of whiteness are limited in explaining how whiteness arises in artworks *in specific contexts*, in this instance, Tate.

The 'Visual' section of this thesis explored, with close reference to two artworks in Tate's collection, the mechanisms by which whiteness arises through such projection onto them of racialised understanding, historic and ongoing. The two sub-sections, 'Portrait' and 'Landscape', showed that racialised readings of artworks, either explicitly obvious through their formal representation (as in Rossetti's 'The Beloved') or implicit through their contextual situation in broader systems of thought reliant upon epistemologies of differentiation (as in Wilson's 'Llyn-y-Cau'), are transferred between individuals who have access to the means of cultural legitimation and who hold understanding of their subjective preferences as holding objective worth. As these sections detailed together, viewers' pronunciations of objectivity were seen to take the appearance of uncritical assertions of the artists' meritocratic status and participation in the language of connoisseurship, similar in character to Gramsci's notion of common sense. 'Portrait' and 'Landscape' traced the lineages of this intersection between viewers' social mobility and their normative beliefs in terms of artworks' aesthetic and national value. They made the case that the correlation demonstrated in the respective histories of these two paintings—between their appreciators' light skin, access to social and economic capital and investments into canonised culture—are likely to constitute a norm in terms of Tate's collection.

This point leads to one of the shortcomings of this research: I have identified that this trifold correlation certainly exists in relation to 'The Beloved' and 'Llyn-y-Cau'. Although, as discussed in the introduction, evidence certainly suggests that the broader social correlations between white racialisation and preferential access to opportunities exists, I have nevertheless not demonstrated that this is indeed so with regards to any other artworks in Tate's custodianship. As such, I believe that

the methodology presented within this thesis could offer a rich resource for further contextual analyses of artworks, both at Tate and in other collections as well. As argued throughout, the resources accumulated historically and to this day by white people are not only economic, but relate also to social opportunities and the ability to exert affective normativities. That said, the economic dimension of whiteness in particular would merit further attention, given the prominent role of finance in Tate's acquisition of artworks. To borrow a term offered by this project's co-supervisor Martin Myrone, the role of capital accumulation might be seen in 'Picturing Whiteness' as a spectre that haunts the thesis. The actual mechanics of capital accumulation and its effects on epistemological reproduction remain relatively unknown and provisional. That said, to make the spectre visible is an important first step.

In their pursual of the points of knowledge transference between individuals, the sub-sections 'Portrait' and 'Landscape' also argued, building upon 'Exploring Whiteness', that an attention to singular instances of racialised projection alone cannot account for the entrenched and widespread nature of whiteness as a structural mode of unconscious thinking. These sections offered a conceptual scaffolding by which the points at which artworks' projected racialised meaning were reproduced between individuals, in order to make the lineages of tacitly racialising thought in the artworks' object biographies visible. This, too, is a novel methodological contribution in the domain of whiteness studies. In this light, of further methodological importance in the 'Visual' section was its attention to the role of individuals other than the artists in the production of the acceptance and reinforcement of racialised meaning that the artworks continue to signify. Together, 'Portrait' and 'Landscape' made the argument that artists' intentions do not account to much, if anything, without the financial and social support of the many others responsible for their artworks' trajectory towards canonisation. Such a focus on the various agents responsible for the production, acceptance and reinforcement of racialised meaning is necessary in order to account for whiteness as a structural phenomenon, as opposed to its being signified through single instances of racism. Furthermore, this kind of methodological approach allows for a consideration of the intersecting political, economic, social and epistemological causes and

characteristics of whiteness: as the thesis discussed throughout, an exclusive prioritisation of any one such characteristic over the others, or undue focus on individualised expressions of racism, results in tautological analyses of whiteness that are insufficient by definition. The finding that whiteness is in part enacted through looking is a difficult question for Tate to confront, given that looking provides the basis of visitor interactions with artworks, for the purposes both of enjoyment and for understanding. To look is to afford objects power, but to not look is, perhaps, to disengage. As such, it might be said that the contradictions in addressing whiteness are as inevitable as the contradictions inherent within it.

The discussed methodological focus on the political, economic, social and epistemological causes and characteristics of whiteness provided the structure for the institutionally-facing section of the thesis, 'Institutional Whiteness'. As in the 'Visual' section, the thesis demonstrated that whiteness is often understood in ways that do not account for its structurally entrenched nature. 'Institutional Whiteness' found that a recurring theme arising from the interviews with a sample of Tate staff was an emphasis on one of these characteristics to the exclusion of others. This was expressed through a frequently implied, though rarely explicitly-stated insistence that 'whiteness is everywhere', yet simultaneously 'not here' but 'over there', whereby individuals, especially those racialised as white, tended to be more able to locate whiteness outside of themselves. This conceptual inconsistency manifests through numerous paradoxes presented within the thesis. Firstly, that whiteness is frequently understood by staff to be a matter of greatest concern within Tate's curatorial and collections display practices suggests that, despite understandings that 'whiteness is everywhere', whiteness is not seen to be as relevant in the institutional practices less directly related to artworks: here, whiteness is seen as a representational issue, rather than a social or economic one. 'Institutional Whiteness' found that another such paradox can be found through comparison between Tate's institutional claims to influence critical thinking about artworks, and its necessary deference to stakeholder (ie. public, governmental and funding) influence: in this instance, whiteness is seen as a social and epistemological issue, but not one affected by Tate's situation in a broader political and economic context.

Such compartmentalisation of whiteness has, 'Institutional Whiteness' found, marked policy ramifications. As the case study detailed, the response of one participant in particular characterised whiteness as a matter of political opinion, wherein Tate's responsibilities to the British public were said to be honoured through its non-partisanship on the topic. As the case study detailed, such an understanding of whiteness has the effect that diversification of the collections is seen as a suitable strategy for mitigating against it, thereby positioning by implication (and indeed at some points explicitly, as discussed) Tate as neutral in terms of its collections mediation practices. This politicised understanding, thus, is one that has the potential to quarantine whiteness to a representational issue, rather than a systemic one with social, economic and epistemological factors besides. By contrast, a number of staff focused on the social aspects of whiteness, manifested at Tate in behavioural terms discussed throughout as the emotional strategies of silence, deflection, denial, positive reframing, self-congratulation, politeness, and more. While the thesis found that these were indeed potent and relevant expressions of whiteness in Tate's institutional context, it also argued that a sole focus on the social behaviours of whiteness may overlook the ways in which ongoing structural inequalities allow for ongoing reinforcement and normative acceptance of these behaviours. That Tate's policy outcomes differ as a result of inconsistent definitions of whiteness, race and racism was also made manifest in 'Institutional Whiteness' through its observation that Tate staff have markedly differing understandings of what constitutes anti-racist action. While some believed that policies of diversification present a sufficient treatment of whiteness as an institutional concern, others thought that such cannot pose a challenge to the epistemological underpinnings of Tate's existing museological paradigms. Meanwhile, it was also noted that policies which attempt to foreground whitened people's understanding of their own subjectivity, such as the holding of conversation spaces, while ostensibly having the potential to draw attention to the centres of power, do not necessarily accord with all staff expectations of satisfactory anti-racist action.

On an institutional scale, Tate's claims to epistemological independence in terms of its mediation of whiteness as a topic is, as the case study demonstrated,

in fact intricately interwoven with the institution's broader social, political and economic situation: as such, an institutional policy of diversifying the collections has the potential to be seen by the public as an autonomous decision, an observation that sits in contrast to staff perceptions of DCMS influence. As such, collections diversification is navigated as a policy response to the topic of whiteness, but in doing so, as the case study suggested, centres race at times as an issue of greater relevance to people of colour. As 'Institutional Whiteness' showed, some of the instances in which whiteness as a racialised category *has* been centred as a topic of focus by Tate, some viewers, critics and staff alike have perceived such an approach to be commonsensically anathema to a sense of, or even right to, freedom to 'enjoy' artworks. One instance of such a common sense entitlement to enjoyment was discussed in detail in 'Portrait', which outlined critics' incredulous responses to a curatorial treatment of Richard Wilson's works which were deemed to be unnecessarily contextual, thereby ostensibly presenting an affront to canonical normativity.

As this thesis strove to elucidate throughout, sole focus on the affective expressions of whiteness do not in themselves wholly account for their structural prevalence. That said, in practical terms, these affective expressions were found to provide a relatively sturdy departure point for a holistic exploration of their political, economic and epistemological underpinnings. Whiteness, as numerous scholars have demonstrated, and as this thesis corroborates, is both difficult for whitened people to recognise, but predictable in the behaviours they enact. This was shown to be of relevance in both the 'Visual' and 'Institutional' sections of the thesis. 'Visual' suggested that the unconscious nature of whiteness means that whitened viewers cannot know that they know if and how they might construct racialised meaning in the artworks they view. 'Institutional Whiteness' showed similarly that whitened staff at Tate, irrespective of their anti-racist intent, cannot know that they know if and how they might be enacting whiteness as an epistemological starting point. As such, the behavioural mechanisms of whiteness provide an important clue, because they constitute a point at which social ruptures are made visible. These mechanisms have frequently been spoken about by whiteness scholars in terms that suggest that they have a pathologically white basis. However, as

‘Landscape’ sought to argue in particular, the behavioural qualities evidenced and discussed by staff in ‘Institutional Whiteness’ share much in common with those found in other axes of social differentiation. An understanding of these behavioural linkages would, I believe, constitute a crucial next step in whiteness research.

As ‘Exploring Whiteness’ discussed, whiteness is not a fixed ontological category. It is an epistemological position that produces race as an ontological understanding, and one that is upheld as normative by other social, political and economic factors, such as unequal resource distribution along the ontological lines it creates. As such, to pathologise the affective behaviours of whiteness is in some ways to reinforce its ontological stronghold. As discussed, the affective qualities of whiteness share much with those of patriarchal, cisheteronormative and individualist thinking, but they differ insofar as the respective ontological categories they create take different human qualities as axiomatically indicative of essential characteristics. In other words, whiteness can only be defined as whiteness because the ontological categories created are those of racialised difference. Such an observation does not negate the damage that whiteness creates along the racial lines it constructs. It does, however, mean that in attempt to address it, insights might be drawn from studies of affect in disciplinary arenas beyond Critical Race Theory. The same behaviours identified as pertaining to whiteness within this thesis are also widely manifest in analyses of conflict avoidance. As such, I believe that, alongside a recognition of whiteness as a construct whose causes and effects combine the epistemological, social, economic and political, also necessary is an understanding that its structurally-enacted behaviours are made manifest at the most intimate of individual levels. Such is the premise of Sarah Schulman’s work, *Conflict Is Not Abuse*, which argues that ‘distorted thinking’ causes ‘justifiable behaviour [to be] understood as aggression’ (2018:17). She continues,

> …at many levels of human interaction there is the opportunity to conflate discomfort with threat, to mistake internal anxiety for exterior danger, and in turn to escalate rather than resolve. […] this dynamic, whether between two individuals, between groups of people, between governments and civilians, or between nations is a fundamental opportunity for either tragedy or peace.

> Conscious awareness of these political and emotional mechanisms gives us all a chance to face ourselves, to achieve recognition and understanding in order to avoid escalation towards unnecessary pain. (Schulman 2018:17)

Some inroads have been made towards this specific linkage of whiteness with conflict avoidance, such as by Shona Hunter, whose words already discussed in 'Institutional Whiteness' are worth repeating here: she writes how there has been a 'shift from whiteness as constituted through saving the colonized other to whiteness as constituted through saving the white racist self. [...] Expressions of shame then become the marker of legitimate forms of whiteness' (2010:470). In this way, it can be seen that it might well be conflict avoidance that constitutes the heart of whiteness. This thesis has found that this is a domain that requires continued scholarly focus. As one Tate staff member of colour suggested, there is a need for white people to *lose* something in order for whiteness to be addressed, bringing back into focus the potential limitations of policies that do not recalibrate resources unevenly distributed along the lines of racial categorisation within the institution. They comment, 'How much do you understand other experiences outside of a white lived experience? How much are you willing to give up? Share?' From a lens of conflict avoidance, it might be seen that one such recalibration of resources refers to staff members' respective abilities to avoid emotional discomfort: the whitened affective strategies outlined within this thesis are those, ultimately, that disable open conversation about the recalibration of other, more tangible assets. As such, while these affective strategies may not provide the full picture of whiteness, they constitute a means by which a starting point can be found. It is the presence of these conflicts and irreconcilabilities themselves that articulate both the spectre and ghostbusters of whiteness as an epistemological norm.

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## Introduction


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## Institutional Whiteness

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## Conclusion

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# Appendices

## A. Breakdown of staff interviews for ‘Institutional Whiteness’

I conducted 14 one-to-one interviews in person and online, all of which were between 45 minutes and one hour in duration. The departmental breakdown of the interviewees were as follows: 1 Collection Care, 2 Curatorial, 2 Learning, 1 Visitor Communications, 1 Digital, 1 Research, 1 Development, 1 Audiences, 1 Senior Executive, 1 Interpretation, 2 external (both individuals formerly worked at Tate Britain in the Curatorial department). All respondents were based in London, with all staff working across Tate Modern and Tate Britain sites, apart from the curators who were based at Tate Britain. As such, there were no responses that pertained specifically to the contexts of St Ives or Liverpool. There were no respondents from Membership & Ticketing Services or Tate Commerce, and as such the results are limited in this sense. The hierarchical positioning (including the positions of those no longer working at Tate) can be roughly defined as follows: 2 assistant level, 3 mid-level, 6 senior, 2 directors, 1 executive. I did not ask people to define their racial positioning as I wanted this to arise unprompted, but 4 specified that they were people of colour, and the others appeared in their responses either explicitly or implicitly to be white in the epistemological sense, and had light skin. I did not request any other identities of the individuals.

## B. Letter from Culture Secretary on HM Government position on contested heritage

'History is ridden with moral complexity. Statues and other historical objects were created by generations with different perspectives and understandings of right and wrong. Some represent figures who have said and done things which we may find deeply offensive and would not defend today. But though we may now disagree with those who created them or who they represent, they play an important role in teaching us about our past, with all its faults. It is for this reason that the Government does not support the removal of statues or other similar objects [their emphasis]. Historic England, as the Government's adviser on the historic environment, have said that removing difficult and contentious parts of it risks harming our understanding of our collective past. Rather than erasing these objects, we should seek to contextualise or reinterpret them in a way that enables the public to learn about them in their entirety, however challenging this may be. […]

As set out in your Management Agreements, I would expect Arm's Length Bodies' approach to issues of contested heritage to be consistent with the Government's position. Further, as publicly funded bodies, you should not be taking actions motivated by activism or politics. The significant support that you receive from the taxpayer is an acknowledgement of the important cultural role you play for the entire country. It is imperative that you continue to act impartially, in line with your publicly funded status, and not in a way that brings this into question. This is especially important as we enter a challenging Comprehensive Spending Review, in which all government spending will rightly be scrutinised.'[25]

[25] Dowden, O., (2020). *Letter from Culture Secretary on HM Government position on contested heritage*, Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport. 22nd September. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/letter-from-culture-secretary-on-hm-government-position-on-contested-heritage (Accessed 7th March 2024)

## C. Questionnaire and Rationale

The questions I asked staff were designed to track some of the conversations surrounding race that may otherwise be obscured from public, and my own, view of the organisation, and to analyse the ways in which staff members speak about race. The questions I asked were as below. I also asked unscripted clarifying questions when I felt that more could be drawn out of the discussion. Some questions are relatively self-explanatory. In addition, some of the questions were intended to be rephrased versions of others, with the intention that alternative framings might elicit detailed responses.

> 1. Whiteness is a complex subject, and I'm trying to understand how different people understand it at Tate. Please could you tell me what whiteness means to you, and whether/how that might apply to the context of Tate?

This was designed to be a broad opening question that was as neutral as possible, anticipating that some participants might be worried about the topic, and to invite participants to reflect on what whiteness meant to them subjectively, as opposed to prompting a specific definition.

> 2. Have you noticed changes in the ways in which race is addressed at Tate since Black Lives Matter? Are you aware of whiteness being part of such discussions?

There has been considerable anti-racist work documented since Black Lives Matter, such as the instatement of Tate's Race Taskforce, and public-facing institutional support for the Black Lives Matter movement. This question was designed to find out whether or not staff perceived Tate's efforts to have been affected by broader social and political discourse.

> 3. Do you find yourself discussing whiteness within your work, and within/outside of your department?
>
> 4. Over the course of this research, a working definition of whiteness that I've come to think is useful is 'a way of experiencing and interacting with the world that is unaware of itself, which positions white people as superior.

These beliefs result in privileges and capital (social, economic and emotional) being directed away from people of colour.' Do you think this might still apply at Tate?

This question was intended to redirect the conversation if I felt that respondents were focusing on particular characteristics of whiteness to the exclusion of others, in order to give them an opportunity to speak about characteristics they may not yet have mentioned. I did not always ask this question, and never asked it at the beginning of the interviews, because I wanted people to first offer their own interpretations of what whiteness meant and how they positioned themselves within the concept.

5. [If the answer is positive] In your opinion, might such a definition be useful in understanding any of Tate's departments, processes or operations in particular?

6. Are you aware of particular efforts at Tate to address whiteness now?

I deliberated about the extent to which I should try to put the interviewees at ease: in asking 'are you aware…?' I intended to signify support should interviewees not have known what to say, but this also had the anticipated effect of allowing space for negative answers to be captured as data.

7. Do you understand there to be any barriers or resistance to addressing whiteness at Tate?

8. Are there any ways in which you think whiteness might be more thoroughly addressed at Tate?

9. What do you think a Tate where whiteness is thoroughly addressed would look like? How might it be different to Tate now?

10. I'm interested to explore how much responsibility Tate as an organisation needs to, or is able to take in addressing whiteness. To what extent do you think Tate shapes viewers' understandings of social issues, and to what extent do you think Tate is shaped by external forces (such as government policy, funding structures and audience expectations)?

Here, I was trying to find out the extent to which participants considered Tate to be in control of its mediation of whiteness. This had a dual purpose of signifying their

understandings of how whiteness functions (for example, if they were to demonstrate an understanding that Tate was in control of whiteness then this might have thereby suggested a belief that whiteness is an issue unrelated to finance or politics. Any such formulation would have been significant in terms of the interviewees' own positioning within the topic). The question also opened the way for a discussion of aesthetic treatment of artworks and the extent to which interviewees considered whiteness to be a representational issue (ie confined to the artworks) or not.

> 11. Are you aware of the debate around the Rex Whistler mural? To what extent do the conversations and decisions surrounding the debate align with your expectations?

Tate's treatment of the Rex Whistler mural was a relatively high-profile and current issue at the time of interviewing, and as such I expected that the participants would have a perspective on it, even if they weren't sure about the topic of whiteness in a broader sense. I felt that asking this question would allow people to talk about whiteness at Tate in a less abstract sense. In the end, I omitted this question from the analysis because the answers did not provide any further elucidation.

> 12. Is there anything else you would like to add which you think might be relevant?
>
> 13. Are there any areas you think this questionnaire might have missed?
>
> 14. Do you have any questions for me?

I wanted to invite observations and feedback about the way I conducted the interview, in order to acknowledge my own subjective positioning within the conversation. However, this question was not a guarantee that interviewees would have felt comfortable answering the question. Two participants did give feedback which I have discussed on p.190.